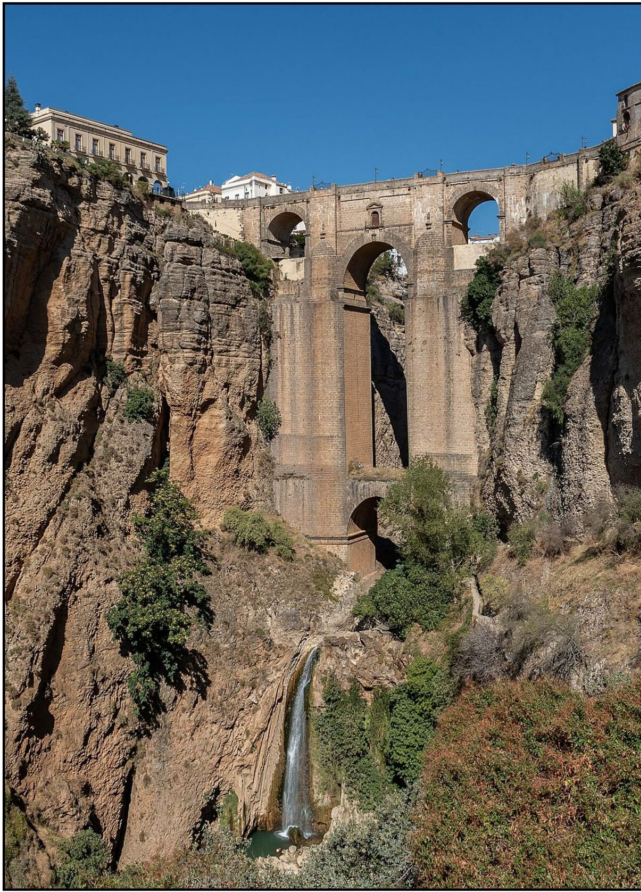


# History, Myth and Fiction

This post describes some of the events that occurred in Ronda, a town in southern Spain, during the summer of 1936. After the Spanish Civil War broke out, Anarchists quickly took control of the town, and murdered many supporters of the Nationalist cause. Two months later, advancing Nationalist forces captured Ronda, and drove most of its people from their homes. Those that refused to leave suffered bloody reprisals. These events quickly became mythic rather than historic. In one story, the Anarchists had murdered the town's Falangists by having them beaten to death in the town's plaza and then thrown into the canyon that cuts through the center of the town. Ernest Hemingway recounted this version in his 1940 novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. However, most historians now agree that this never happened.

## Ronda

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



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





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



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

Langsamen Schrittes, nicht leicht, nachdenklichen  
Körpers,  
aber im Stehn ist er herrlich. Noch immer dürfte ein  
Gott  
heimlich in diese Gestalt und würde nicht minder.  
Abwechselnd weilt er und zieht, wie selber der Tag,  
und Schatten der Wolken  
durchgehn ihn, als dächte der Raum  
langsam Gedanken für ihn.

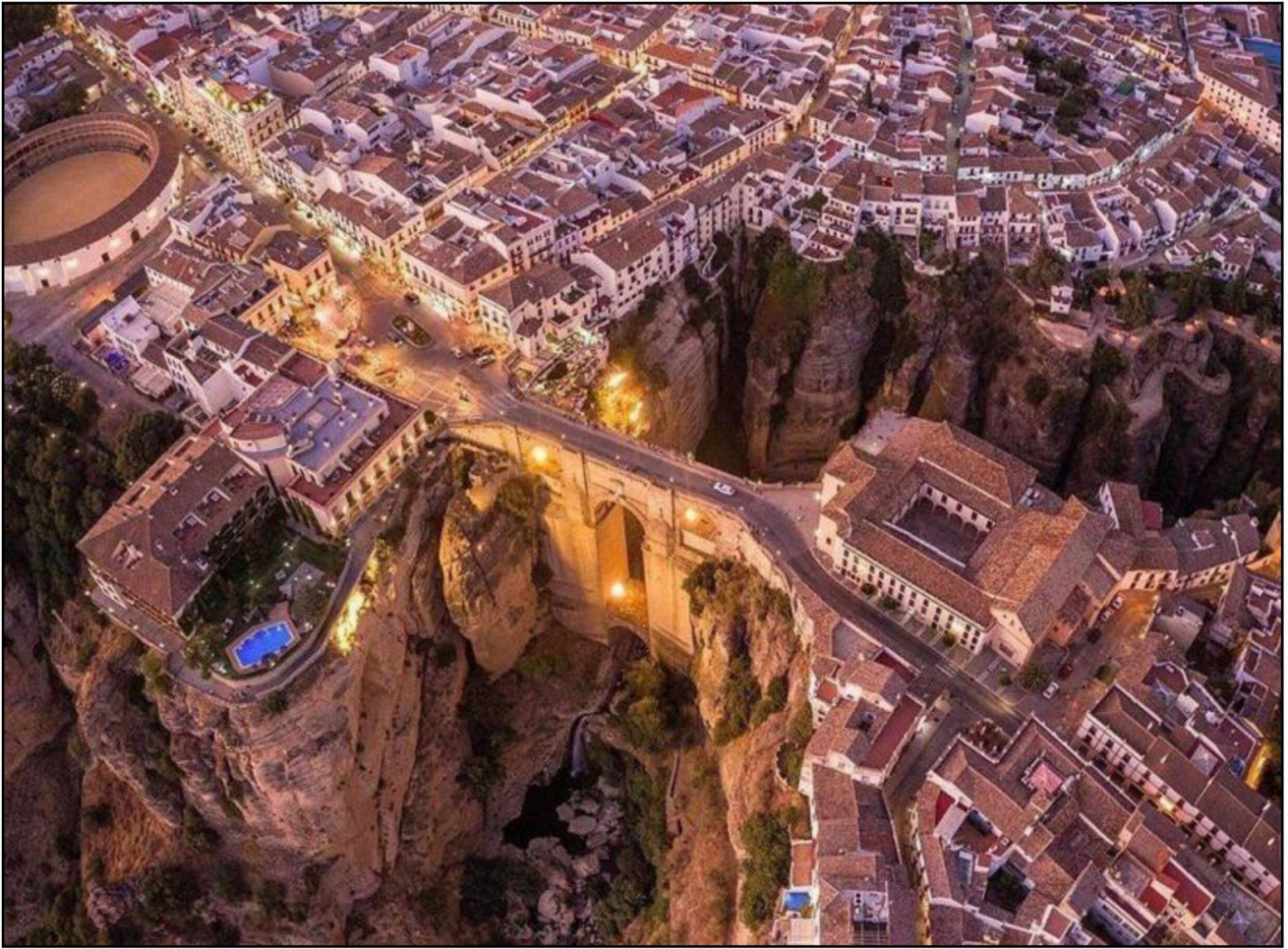
slow stepping, not light-footed, his body lost in

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

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

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





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

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

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

## **The Spanish Civil War**

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

The government had to deal with multiple problems

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

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

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

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

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

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



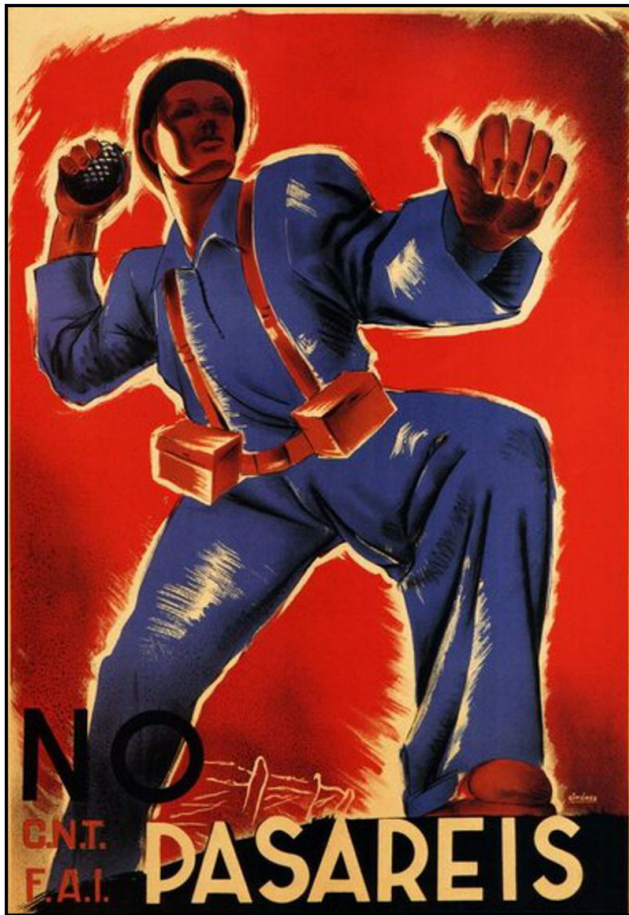


From Seville, General Franco sent troops northward to join up with the Nationalists besieging Madrid. Another key point in the fighting was near Teruel, where Nationalist soldiers were attempting to advance to the sea to cut off Barcelona from Madrid. Franco also sent troops eastward to relieve the city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

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



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



### Events in Ronda during 1936ca)

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

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



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

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

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

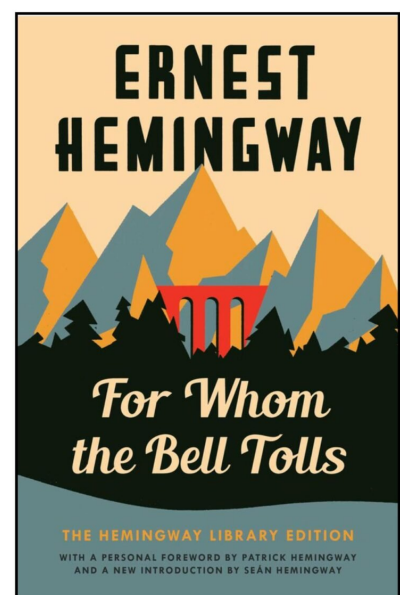
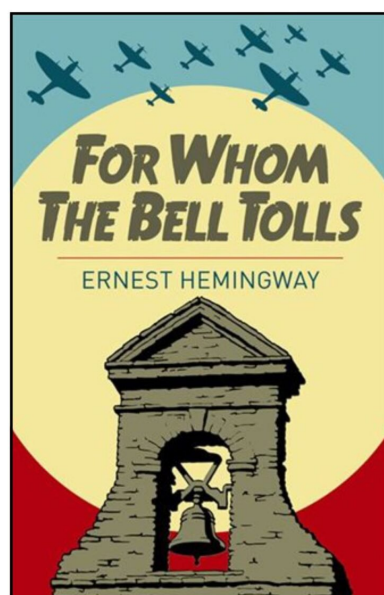
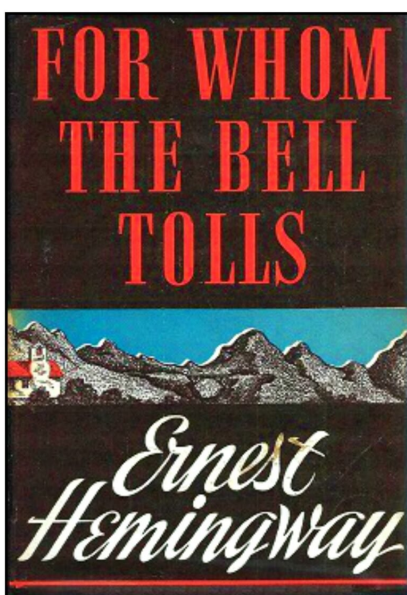


## For Whom the Bell Tolls

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



After the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, Hemingway wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a novel based on what he had heard about the violence perpetrated by both sides during the conflict. The following illustration shows some of the covers used by various editions of the book, the original on the left:



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



*upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) The quotation ends with:

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

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

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

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

river.

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

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

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

He placed them in two lines as you would place men for a rope pulling contest, or as they stand in a city to watch the ending of a bicycle road race with just room for the cyclists to pass between, or as men stood to allow the passage of a holy image in a procession. Two meters was left between the lines and they extended from the door of the *Ayuntamiento* clear across the plaza to the edge of the cliff. So that, from the doorway of the *Ayuntamiento*, looking across the plaza, one coming out would see two solid lines of people waiting.

They were armed with flails such as are used to beat out the grain and they were a good flail's length apart. All did not have flails, as enough flails could not be obtained. But most had flails obtained from the store of Don Guillermo Martin, who was a fascist and sold all sorts of agricultural implements. And those who did not have flails had heavy herdsman's clubs, or ox-goats, and some had wooden pitchforks; those with wooden tines that are used to fork the chaff and straw into the air after the flailing. Some had sickles and reaping hooks but these Pablo placed at the far end where the lines reached the edge of the cliff.

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

“To save bullets” I said. “And that each man should have his share in the responsibility”

“That it should start then. That it should start.” And I looked at him and saw that he was crying. “Why are you crying, Joaquin?” I asked him. “This is not to cry about.”

“I cannot help it, Pilar,” he said. “I have never killed any one.”

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

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

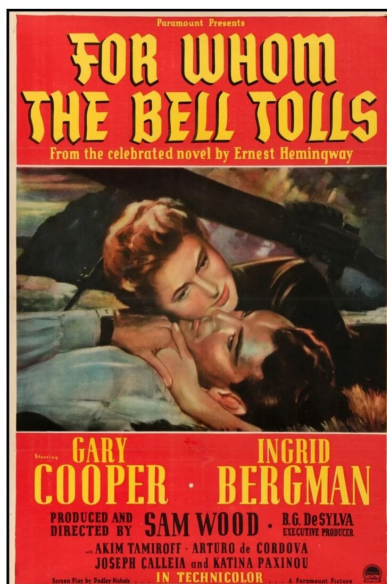
Later in the novel, Jordan and the guerilla band succeed in blowing up the bridge. but Jordan is severely wounded and unable to move. He convinces that the rest of the band to retreat while he stays to delay the advancing Nationalists. He insists that Maria leave with the guerillas. The novel ends with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

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

Hemingway leaves the thought unfinished. The novel ends with

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

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



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





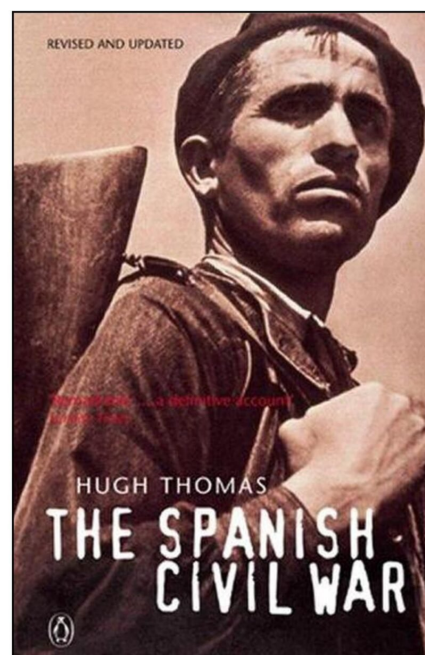
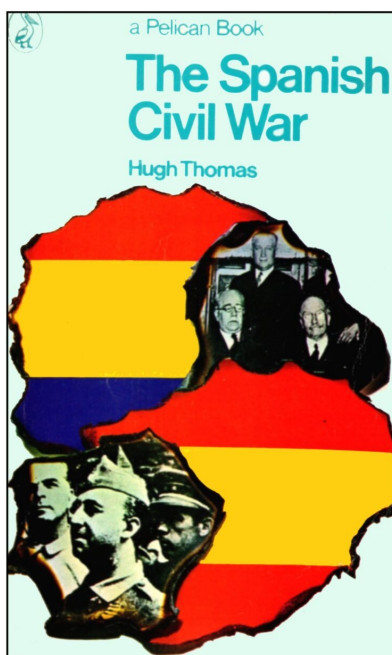
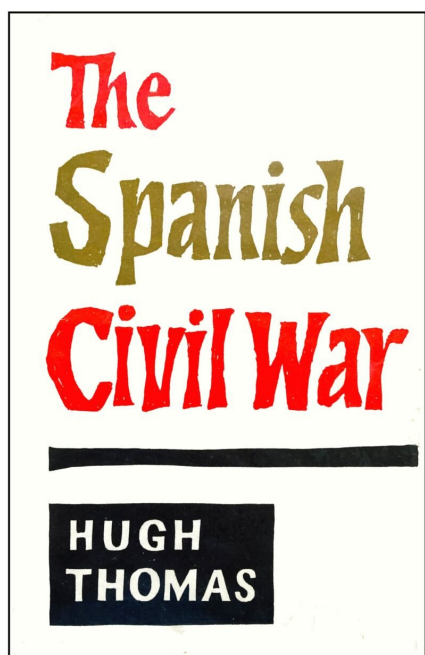
The bridge that Jordan dynamites just before the end of the movie is as high as the Puente Nuevo in Ronda:



## Historical Accounts of the Events in Ronda

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

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



Thomas discussed the events in Ronda:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

### **In the White City**

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

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

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

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

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



## Epilogue

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

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

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## Madness and Poetry

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

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

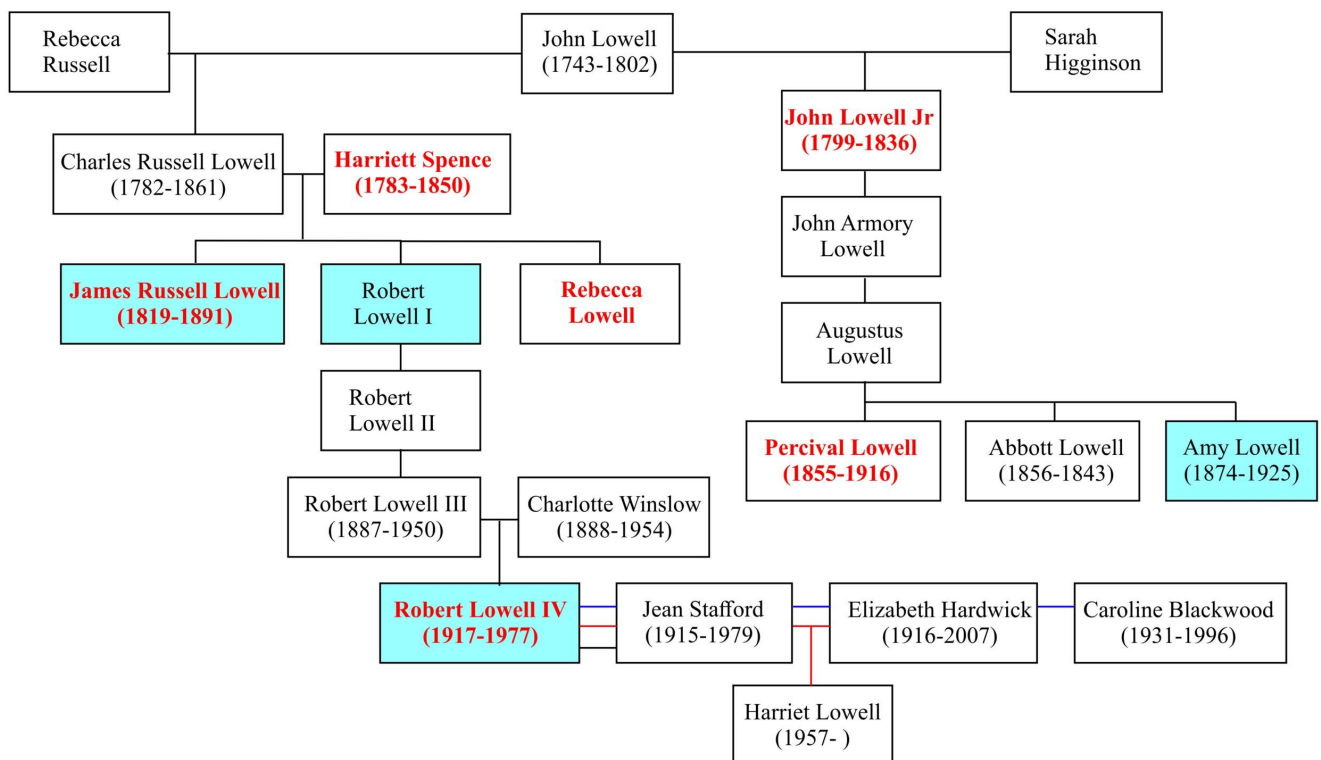
### Family Background

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

colonists who came to New England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.

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

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



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

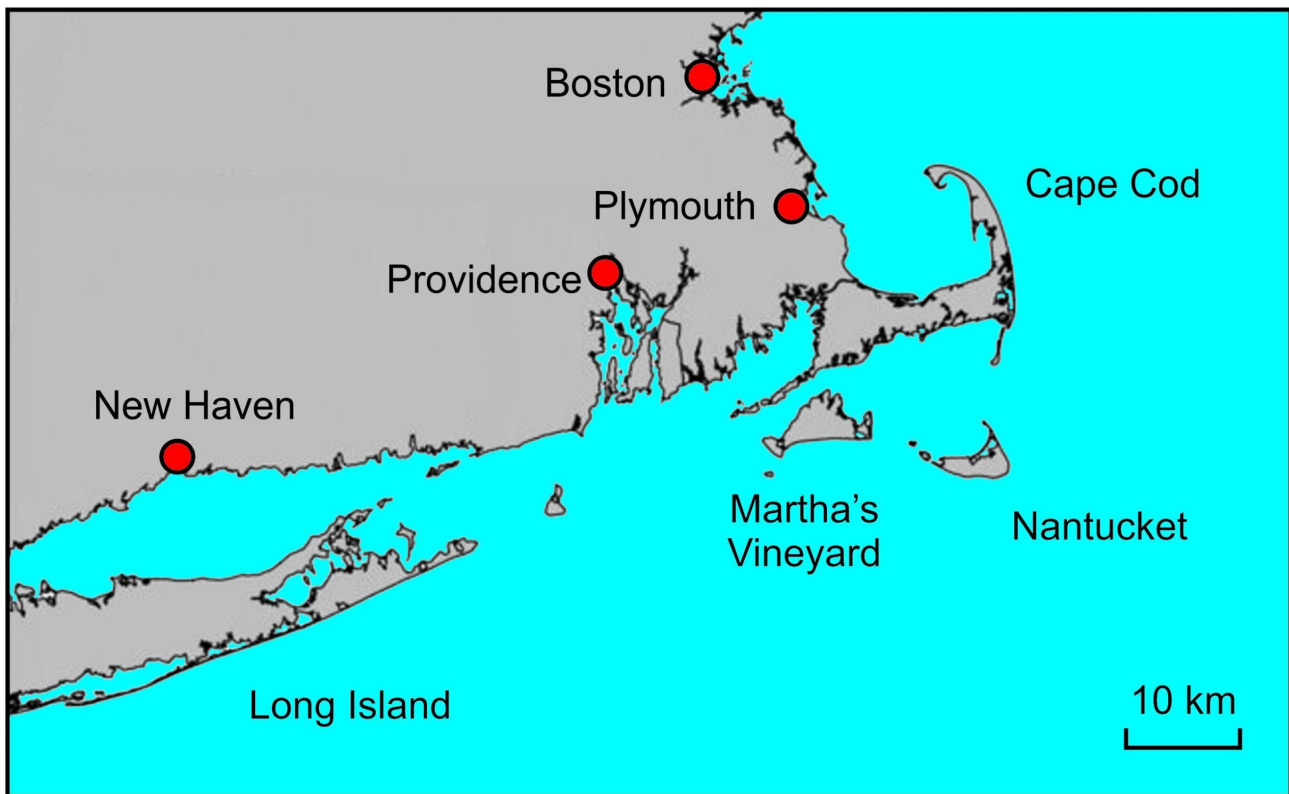
there for treatment on several occasions between 1958 and 1967.

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

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

## **Youth**

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



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

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

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



contempt for the laws of justice and charity between nations; it will destroy any possibility of a European or Asiatic national autonomy; it will leave China and Europe, the two natural power centers of the future, to the mercy of the USSR, a totalitarian tyranny committed to world revolution and total global domination through propaganda and violence.

In 1941 we undertook a patriotic war to preserve our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor against the lawless aggressions of a totalitarian league: in 1943 we are collaborating with the most unscrupulous and powerful of totalitarian dictators to destroy law, freedom, democracy, and above all, our continued national sovereignty. (quoted in Hamilton, 1982, p. 89)

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

## Lord Weary's Castle



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

Lowell looks to find salvation but finds indifference:

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

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/graveyard-2-walsingham.mp3>

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

*Isaiah* 53:2, which in the Vulgate reads

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

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

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

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

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

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

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

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/graveyard-3-section-vii.mp3>

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

And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. (*Genesis* 9: 11-13)

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

## Madness

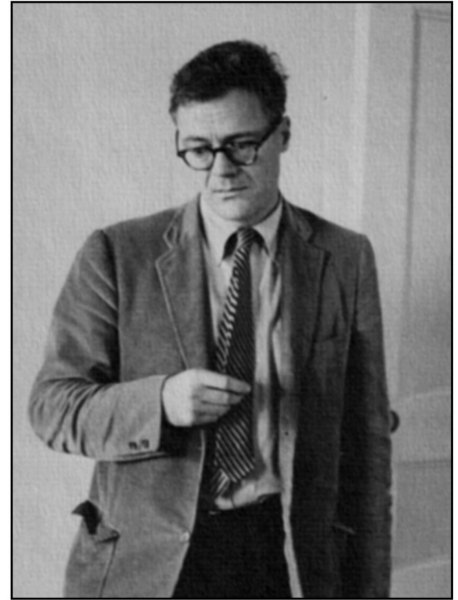
After *Lord Weary's Castle*, Lowell became famous. The following illustrations show photographs of him from youth to maturity:



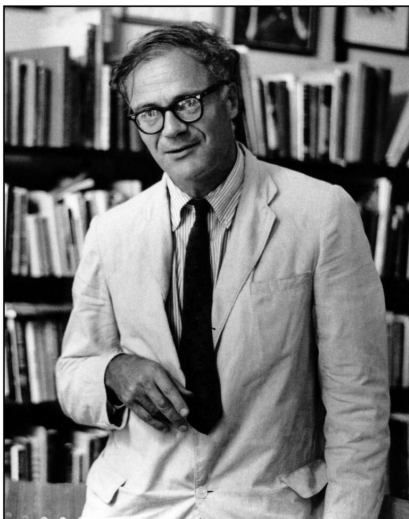
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1947



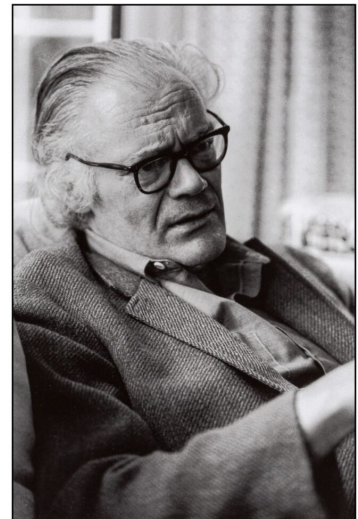
1961 (Henri  
Cartier-Bresson)



1965 (Elsa Dorfman)



1967 (Jane Brown)



1977 (Judith Aronson)

Lowell published his second book *The Mills of the Kavanagh* in 1948. In early 1949 he started to become “wound up” (Hamilton, 2003, p 140). While teaching at Yaddo, an artists’ community in Saratoga Springs, New York, he became unjustifiably



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

him at the March:

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

## Final Poems

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

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

a corkweight thing,  
to be offered *Deo gratias*  
in church on recovering from head-injury or migraine—  
now mercifully delivered in my hands,  
though shelved awhile unnoticed and unnoticed.  
Free of the unshakable terror that made me write . .  
.

I pick it up, a head holy and unholy,  
tensured or damaged,  
with gross black charcoaled brows and stern eyes  
frowning as if they had seen the splendor  
times past counting . . . unspoiled,  
solemn as a child is serious—  
light balsa wood the color of my skin.  
It is all childcraft, especially  
its shallow, chiseled ears,  
crudely healed scars lumped out  
to listen to itself, perhaps, not knowing  
it was made to be given up.  
Goodbye nothing. Blockhead,  
I would take you to church,  
if any church would take you . . .  
This winter, I thought  
I was created to be given away.



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

## Epilogue

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

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



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

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

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



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# Zeno of Elea

## Zeno of Elea

Zeno of Elea was a Greek philosopher who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. He described a set of paradoxes to prove that space and time are continuous and cannot be divided into discrete parts. The most famous of these are the *Paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise*, which purportedly shows that Achilles could never catch up with the much slower Tortoise, and the *Paradox of the Arrow*, which shows that an arrow in flight is always stationary.

## Life of Zeno

Very little is known about the life of Zeno of Elea (Palmer, 2021). Elea, modern-day Velia, was a settlement on the



southwest coast of Italy, founded in 540 BCE by Greeks from Phocaea, an Ionian city on the western coast of Anatolia. The Phocians were experienced sailors who had also established colonies in Catalonia and Marseille. The Persian invasion of the Ionian cities drove most of the Phocians toward their colonies, which together with other Greek settlements formed an extensive empire called Magna Grecia. Roman ruins, including the Porta Rosa and a theater have been excavated in Velia:





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## A Book of Paradoxes

Zeno wrote a book of forty paradoxes to defend the philosophy of Parmenides (Dowden, 2023). Unfortunately, the book did not survive and all we know about its contents are brief references in later writings by authors who may not have understood Zeno's thinking. A paradox is a logical argument that leads to a conclusion at odds with (*para*, beside or beyond) accepted opinion (*dox*) (Strobach, 2013). A paradox may be used to demonstrate that accepted opinion is wrong, or at least open to contradictory interpretation. However, the usual intent of a paradox is to show that the premises of the argument must be incorrect since the conclusion is so obviously impossible. This is a variant of the *reductio ad absurdum*. Any paradox therefore presents us with a choice:

either the conclusion is not really unacceptable, or else the starting point, or the reasoning, has some non-obvious flaw. (Sainsbury, 2009, p 3)

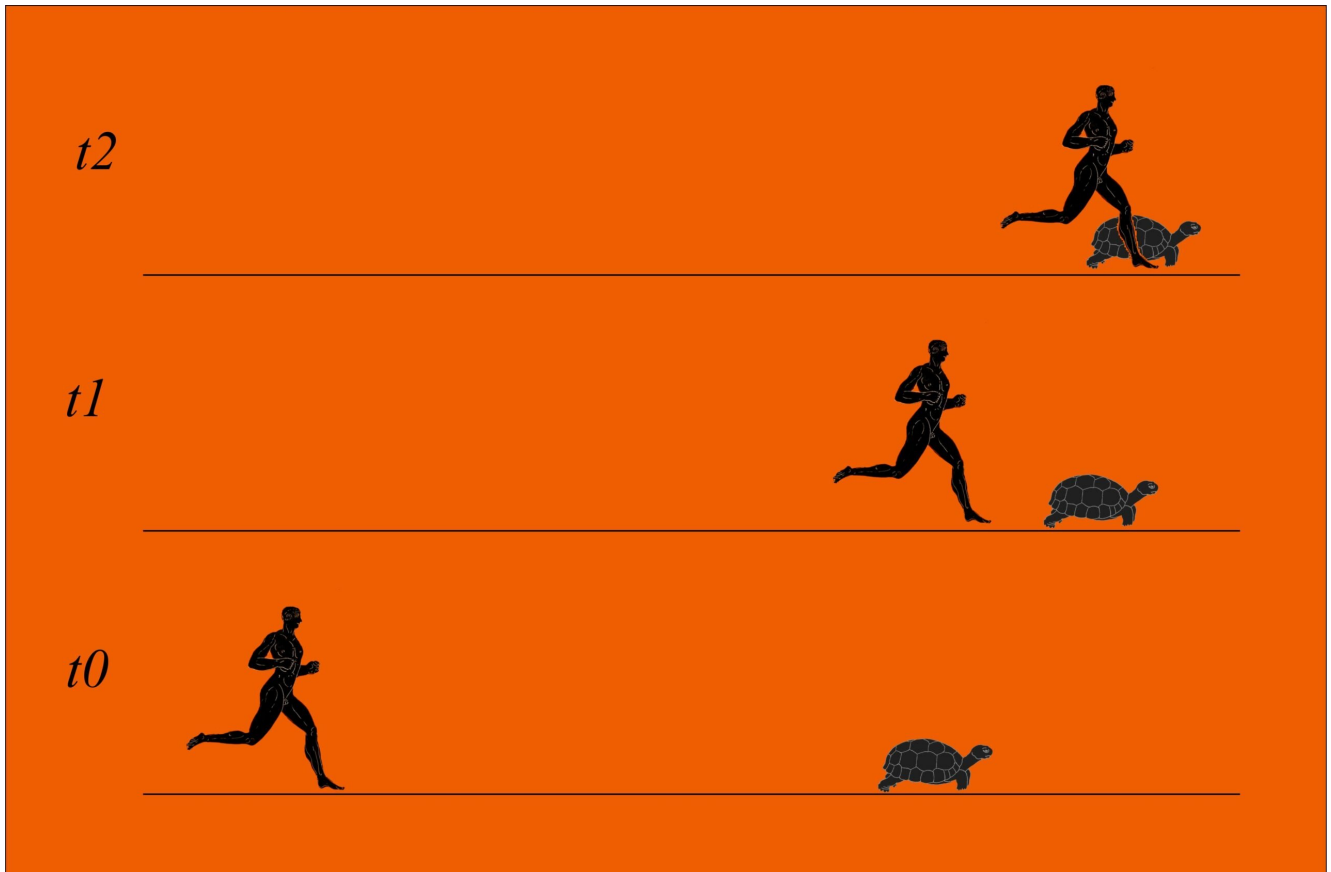
One problem with Zeno's paradoxes is that we do not know how to interpret them because we do not know how he intended them to be used. The following paragraphs will consider the two most famous of Zeno's paradoxes from the point of view of modern science and mathematics.

### Achilles and the Tortoise

The original paradox appears to have involved two runners one faster than the other. Their identification with Achilles and the Tortoise occurred later. In a race the speedy Achilles is attempting to pass a slow Tortoise, who has been given a head start. In order to catch up with the tortoise Achilles must first reach the point where the turtle began the race ( $t_0$ ). However, by then ( $t_1$ ) the tortoise has already moved ahead, albeit by a smaller distance than Achilles has traversed. Achilles must then reach the point to which the Tortoise had advanced. He can cover this extra distance by  $t_2$



but again the Tortoise has already moved ahead. Achilles continues to reach the point to which the Tortoise has advanced only to find that the Tortoise has already moved further on. Achilles can therefore never pass the Tortoise. The first three episodes of this infinite train are shown below. For ease of illustration, Achilles is made to run about 4 times faster than the Tortoise:



The paradox basically proposes that the time taken by Achilles to catch up with the Tortoise is composed of an infinite number of intervals. Even though the later intervals may become vanishingly small, an infinite number of intervals would take an infinite amount of time. Modern mathematics, however, has shown that infinite series like that of Achilles and the Tortoise can have a finite sum. An infinite geometric series of the form

$$\sum_{n=0}^{\infty} z^n$$

sums to a finite amount  $1/(1-z)$  if the absolute value of  $z$  is less than 1. For the example that we have been using the value of  $z$  is  $1/4$ , i.e., the ratio of the velocities between Tortoise and Achilles. The sum of the series is thus  $4/3$ .

This is demonstrated through the following equations. The sum of the series ( $T$ ) is equal to the time taken to cover the distance of the Tortoise's head start (for simplicity this is made equal to 1) plus the time taken to cover the distance that the Tortoise has covered in the meantime (equal to  $1/4$  since for our illustration Achilles travels 4 times faster than the Tortoise) plus  $1/16$  for the next abortive catch-up, and so on to infinity (...). The equations demonstrate that the sum of the series equals  $4/3$ .

$$T = 1 + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{16} + \frac{1}{64} + \dots$$

$$4T = 4 + 1 + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{16} + \dots$$

$$4T = 4 + T$$

$$3T = 4$$

$$T = \frac{4}{3}$$

The paradox can also be solved using algebraic equations. One can assume Achilles catches up with the Tortoise at a time  $T$  after travelling a distance  $D$ . The equation for Achilles is

$$D = T \cdot V_a \quad \text{where } V_a \text{ is the known velocity of Achilles}$$

And for the Tortoise is

$$D = T \cdot V_t + H \quad \text{where } H \text{ is the distance of the head start and } V_t \text{ is the velocity of the Tortoise}$$

Combining the two equations we have

$$T \cdot V_a = T \cdot V_t + H$$

Thence

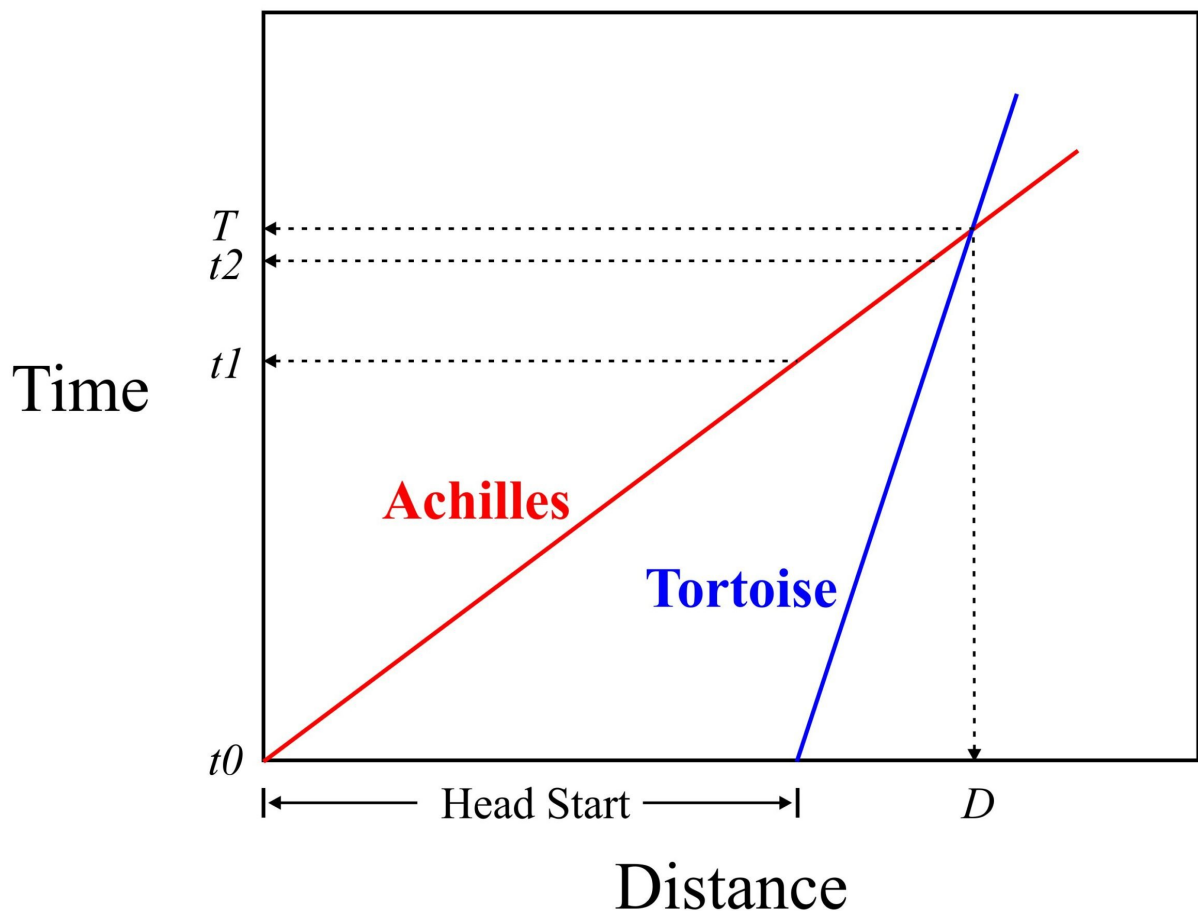
$$T = H / (V_a - V_t)$$

In our example  $V_t$  is 1/4 of  $V_a$

$$T = H / (3/4 \cdot V_a)$$

Or 4/3 the time that it takes Achilles to travel the distance of the Tortoise's head start.

These calculations can be represented graphically with distance plotted on the horizontal axis and time on the vertical axis:



A simple mathematical view of Zeno's paradox is to set the frame of reference to the moving Tortoise and to calculate the

speed of Achilles relative to this reference. In our example, the speed of Achilles relative to the Turtle is 3. This is  $\frac{3}{4}$  the speed of Achilles relative to the absolute reference and thus it will take Achilles  $\frac{4}{3}$  the time to catch up with the Tortoise.

These mathematical approaches allow us to understand the movements of Achilles and the Tortoise, to determine where they will be as time passes, and to calculate when Achilles will finally pass the Tortoise. However, they do not really resolve the paradox as presented by Zeno. If space and time are infinitely divisible into points and instants, it will take Achilles an infinite number of acts to catch up with the Tortoise, and an infinite number of acts will take forever (Black, 1970).

We do not know Zeno's original intent in formulating his paradoxes of motion. He probably did not wish to prove that motion is impossible, and that our perception of moving things is illusory. Rather, he likely wanted to prove that space and time are continuous and cannot be divided into discrete points and instants. This would be in keeping with the monism of his teacher Parmenides. Bertrand Russell (1926, p 174) stated that

The conclusion that Zeno wishes us to draw is that plurality is a delusion and that spaces and times are really indivisible.

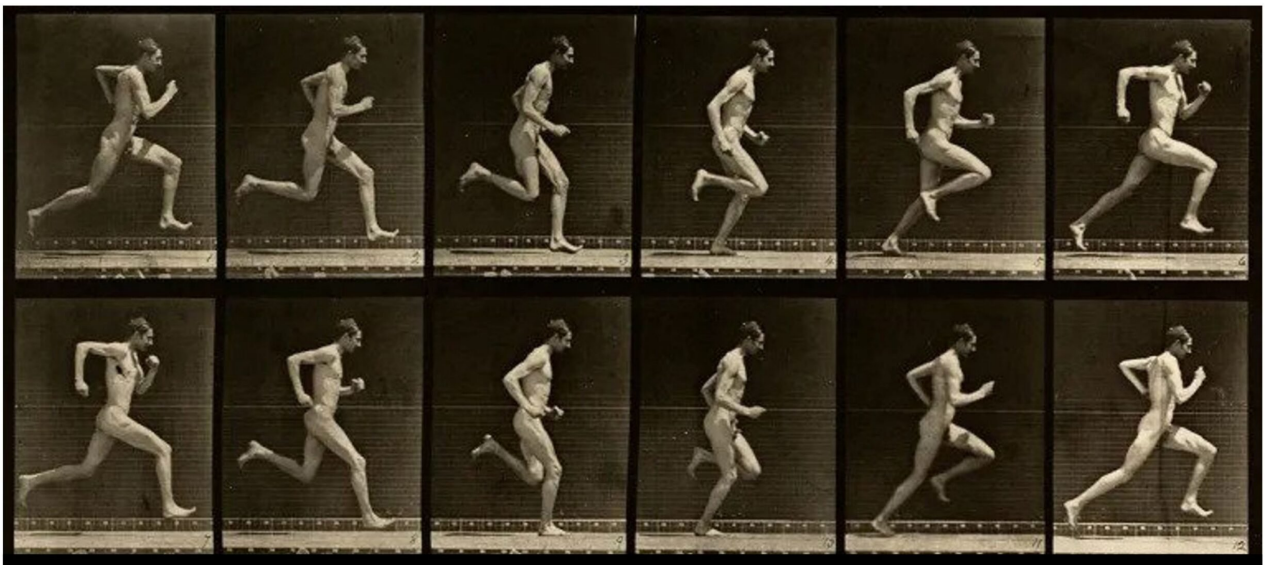
However, Russell goes on to propose that space and time may be infinitely divisible if we properly understand infinity.

### **Zeno's Arrow**

At any instant of time a flying arrow will occupy a space equal to its own size and therefore show no evidence of movement. Its flight is therefore a succession of rests. While it is moving, the arrow is always stationary.

Zeno had not observed an arrow at an instant of time: he could

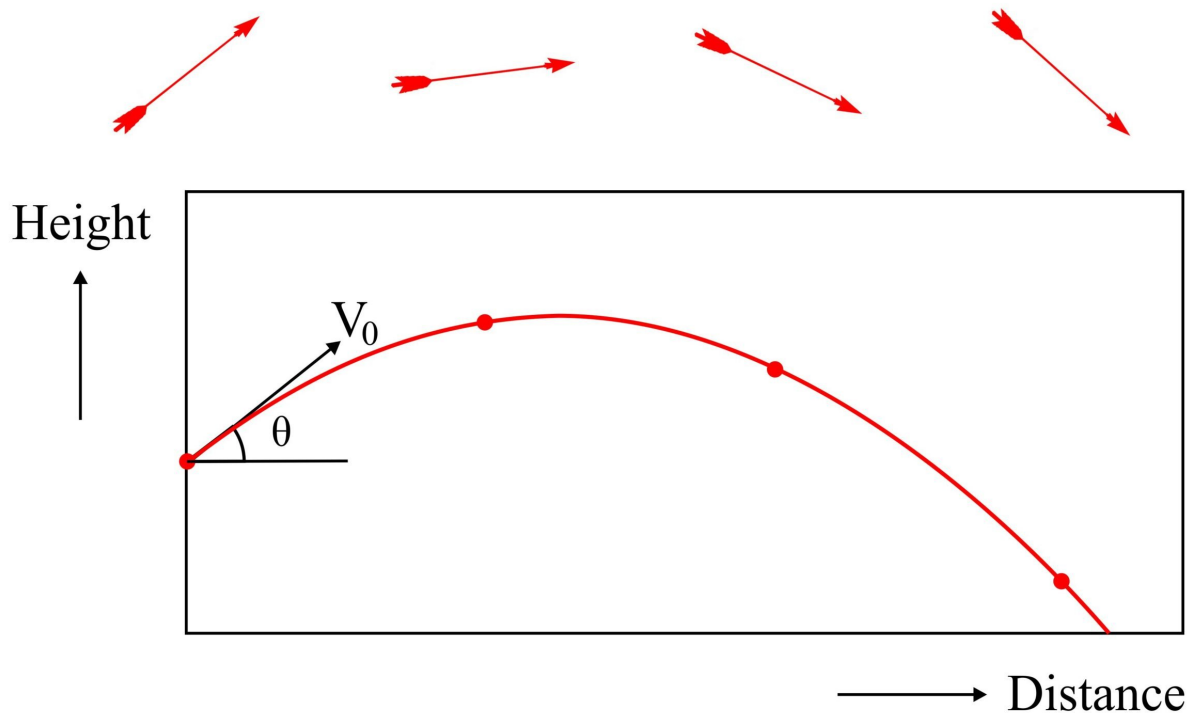
only imagine it. Modern high-speed photography can record moving objects at an instant of time. If the exposure time is very small, they appear unblurred, or completely stationary. The observer cannot tell that the object is moving from its instantaneous appearance. The first person to record motion using high-speed photography was Eadweard Muybridge (1840-1904). The following set of photographs of a running man were likely taken in the 1870s and printed in 1887.



The development of the stroboscope which could present brief flashes of bright light allowed photographers such as Harold Edgerton (1903-1990), also known as "Papa Flash," to examine very rapidly moving objects. The following photograph from the 1950s shows a moving bullet "caught" at two instants by two stroboscopic flashes separated by only a brief time (probably of the order of 50 microseconds).



At first glance, modern science apparently confirms the conclusion Zeno's *Arrow Paradox*: at any instant of time a moving arrow, man or bullet is stationary. However, just because something looks stationary does not mean that it does not have velocity. The trajectory of the arrow can be represented by two functions denoting its horizontal (x) and vertical (y) position:



The parabolic trajectory is determined by the initial velocity



( $V_0$ ) of the arrow as it is released from the bow, the angle ( $\theta$ ) at which it is released, its initial height above the ground ( $y_0$ ), and downward acceleration caused by gravity ( $g$ ). The following diagram shows a sample trajectory, together with views of the arrow at four instants of time. Note that the formulae do not consider the (very small) effects of friction and treat the horizontal velocity of the arrow as constant. The horizontal axis can therefore also represent time.

$$x_t = x_0 + v_0 t \cos(\theta)$$

$$y_t = y_0 + v_0 t \sin(\theta) - \frac{1}{2}gt^2$$

The invention of the calculus by Newton and Leibniz allowed us to calculate the velocity of a moving object at any instant in time. If the distance travelled can be represented by a function ( $f$ ), the velocity at any instant ( $t$ ) can be calculated by seeing how far the object travels in a tiny period of time ( $\Delta t$ )

$$\lim_{\Delta t \rightarrow 0} \frac{f(t + \Delta t) - f(t)}{\Delta t}$$

The limit as  $\Delta t$  approaches zero – the derivative of the function – is the object's instantaneous velocity. At any instant of time the object shows no evidence of movement, but it still has velocity. Though it appears stationary, it still moves.

The calculus allows us to calculate the velocity of the arrow at any instant (Reeder 2015). However, Zeno's paradox calls into question the idea of discrete instants in time. Motion is continuous; it is not a succession of stationary positions. William James (1910, p. 157):

Zeno's arguments were meant to show, not that motion could not really take place, but that it could not truly be conceived as

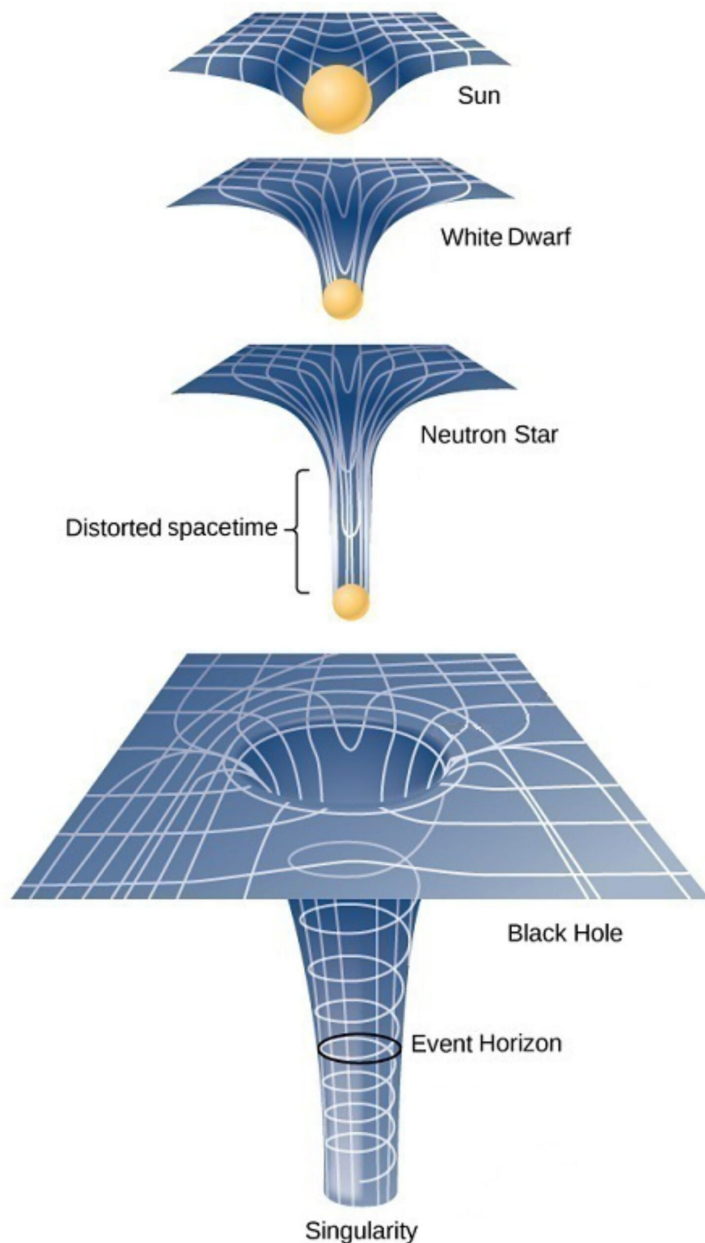
taking place by the successive occupancy of points. If a flying arrow occupies at each point of time a determinate point of space, its motion becomes nothing but a sum of rests, for it exists not, out of any point; and in the point it doesn't move. Motion cannot truly occur as thus discretely constituted.

## **Time and Space**

Zeno's paradoxes have been discussed extensively (Dowden, 2013; Grünbaum, 1967; Huggett, 2018; McLaughlin, 1994; Sainsbury, 2009; Salmon, 1970; Strobach, 2013). Most writers suggest that modern mathematics can handle the paradoxes: infinite series may sum to a finite amount and instantaneous velocities can be assessed with the infinitesimal calculus.

However, the nature of time and space remain imperfectly understood. A particular problem involves what might be considered the smoothness of these dimensions. Achilles does not run through an infinite set of decreasing distances to catch up with the Tortoise. Rather he runs smoothly and quickly passes the Tortoise. The arrow does not move from one stationary position to the next as if it were in a movie flickering at a slow frame-rate. The arrow moves smoothly from the bow to the target.

Modern conceptions of space and time propose that they are not absolute (e.g., Rovelli, 2018; Markosian et al., 2018). The fabric of space and time can be altered by gravity. A large mass like our sun will distort the adjacent space. Light travelling near such a mass will be deflected by the resultant curvature. A large mass also alters time, which passes more rapidly the closer one is to the mass. It is difficult to understand how such elastic dimensions can be represented by discrete points. The effects of gravity are illustrated in the following diagram, where the four-dimensional fabric of space is shown as a 2-dimensional mesh:



## Time's Arrow

Although we often consider our universe as existing in four dimensions, the dimension of time is distinct from the three spatial dimensions. Though we can move back and forth in space, we can only move forward in time.

Studies of statistical mechanics demonstrated that the state of a system can be described by the organization of its components. With the passage of time, this state can only change towards increasing disorder. In the formulation of Rudolf Clausius (1822-1888) of this disorder was called "entropy" (Greek *en*, in + *trope*, change). Ludwig Boltzmann

(1844-1906) considered entropy in terms of statistical mechanics. He described entropy ( $S$ ) in terms of the number ( $\Omega$ ) of possible microstates (organizations of its molecular components) that could result in a system's macrostate (temperature, pressure, volume, density, etc.). His formulation of entropy, and of the second law of thermodynamics (with the passage of time entropy can only increase) are:

$$S = k_B \ln \Omega$$

$$\Delta S \geq 0$$

where  $\ln$  is the natural logarithm and  $k_B$  is Boltzmann's constant.

The concept of entropy led Arthur Eddington to propose the idea of "Time's Arrow:"

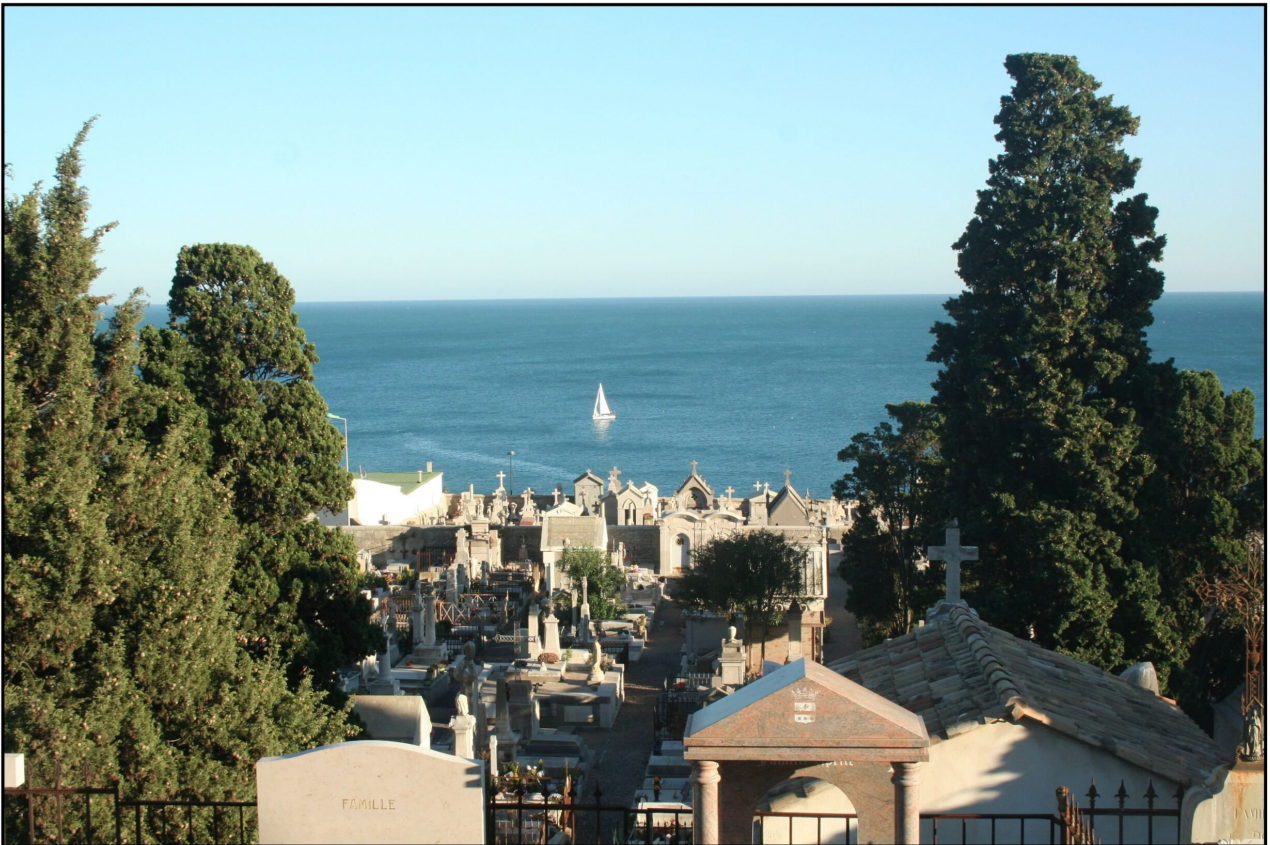
Let us draw an arrow arbitrarily. If as we follow the arrow we find more and more of the random element in the state of the world, then the arrow is pointing towards the future; if the random element decreases the arrow points towards the past. That is the only distinction known to physics. This follows at once if our fundamental contention is admitted that the introduction of randomness is the only thing which cannot be undone. I shall use the phrase "time's arrow" to express this one-way property of time which has no analogue in space. (Eddington, 1927, p 67.)

Unlike Zeno's Arrow which is concerned with the nature of motion in time, Eddington's arrow is concerned with the nature of time itself.

### **The Graveyard by the Sea**

In 1922, Paul Valéry wrote a long poem *Le Cimetière Marin* about time and mortality. Its setting is a cemetery

overlooking the Mediterranean Sea at Sète in Southern France:



At the poem's climax, Valéry calls on Zeno.:

Zénon! Cruel Zénon! Zénon d'Élée!  
M'as-tu percé de cette flèche ailée  
Qui vibre, vole, et qui ne vole pas!  
Le son m'enfante et la flèche me tue!  
Ah! le soleil . . . Quelle ombre de tortue  
Pour l'âme, Achille immobile à grands pas!

;Zeno, Zeno, cruel philosopher Zeno,  
Have you then pierced me with your feathered arrow  
That hums and flies, yet does not fly! The sounding  
Shaft gives me life, the arrow kills. Oh, sun! –  
Oh, what a tortoise-shadow to outrun  
My soul, Achilles' giant stride left standing!  
(translation by C. Day-Lewis, 1950)

Zeno, Zeno, the cruel, Elean Zeno!  
You've truly fixed me with that feathered arrow

Which quivers as it flies and never moves!  
The sound begets me and the arrow kills!  
Ah, sun! . . . What a tortoise shadow for the soul,  
Achilles motionless in his giant stride!  
(translation of David Paul, 1971)

(I have included two translations, one by Day-Lewis which maintains the rhyme scheme and a more literal version by Paul.)

Valéry's imagery is complex, it melds Time's Arrow with Zeno's paradoxes of the Arrow and of Achilles and the Tortoise. Time will proceed to death and disorder before we can ever attain eternity.

Valéry does not leave us stumbling unsuccessfully after the Tortoise. His poem ends with an invocation to live completely in the life we have no matter that it leads to death.

Le vent se lève! . . . Il faut tenter de vivre!  
L'air immense ouvre et referme mon livre,  
La vague en poudre ose jaillir des rocs!  
Envolez-vous, pages tout éblouies!  
Rompez, vagues! Rompez d'eaux réjouies  
Ce toit tranquille où picoraient des focs!

The wind is rising! . . . We must try to live!  
The huge air opens and shuts my book: the wave  
Dares to explode out of the rocks in reeking  
Spray. Fly away, my sun-bewildered pages!  
Break, waves! Break up with your rejoicing surges  
This quiet roof where sails like doves were  
pecking.  
(Day-Lewis)

The wind is rising! . . . We must try to live!  
The immense air opens and shuts my book,



A wave dares burst in powder over the rocks.  
Pages, whirl away in a dazzling riot!  
And break, waves, rejoicing, break that quiet  
Roof where foraging sails dipped their beaks!  
(Paul)

The last line of the poem alludes to its opening where Valéry likened the boats sailing on the sea to doves moving on an immense roof. That quiet roof – the sea – represents the eternity that we live not long enough to understand.

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# Apostola Apostolorum

## Apostola apostolorum

In the gospels of the Christian New Testament, Mary Magdalene was the first person to recognize the risen Christ. He told

her to tell the disciples the news of his resurrection, thus honoring her as the “apostle to the apostles.” In the Gnostic Gospels she appears as a visionary disciple of Jesus. In the centuries after her life, her story was conflated with that of the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus at a feast in the house of Simon, and Mary thus became a model of repentance. This posting discusses these and other ways in which we conceive of Mary Magdalene.

## **The Tower**

Mary Magdalene’s name likely comes from Magdala, a settlement on the Sea of Galilee during the years 300 BCE to 300 CE. Recent archeological excavations have unearthed evidence there of a synagogue, in which was found the “Magdala Stone,” with carvings showing a Menorah and images of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. The Aramaic word *magdala* means “tower.” These may have been related to fortification towers or to towers used for the drying of fish.

Another possible reason for Mary Magdalene’s name is that she was called the “Tower” for the strength of her faith in much the same way as Peter was called the “Rock” for his unwavering devotion (Valerio, 2021, pp 19-20). Saint Jerome (347-420 CE) reported that:

Mary of Magdala received the epithet ‘fortified with towers’ because of her earnestness and strength of faith, and was privileged to see the rising Christ before even the apostles. (quoted in Haskins, 1993, p 58)

## **Noli me tangere**

Mary Magdalene is specifically mentioned in the canonical gospels in connection with three events in the life of Jesus (Haskins, 1993, Chapter 1; Lupieri, 2011; Valerio, 2021, Chapter 1):

(i) During the time when Jesus was preaching and healing the

sick near Capernaum, the gospel of Luke describes his entourage as consisting of the twelve disciples

And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils,

And Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance. (*Luke 8: 2-3*)

No one knows for certain what was meant by the casting out of demons in those times. It likely represented a charismatic healing of an emotionally disturbed person. After Mary was cured of her affliction, she followed her healer, and provided him with monetary support.

(ii) Later, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, were present at the crucifixion of Jesus and his subsequent burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. In the synoptic gospels, no mention is made of any of the disciples being present: they were presumably terrified of being associated with the crucified Jesus. The gospel of John reports that a beloved disciple was also there:

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! (*John, 19: 25-27*)

Though the disciple "whom he loved" is usually considered to be John, it is also possible to interpret this passage as referring to Mary Magdalene.

(iii) The final mention of Mary Magdalene is in the discovery

of the empty tomb by the women who came to anoint the dead body of Jesus with spices and ointments. What then occurred is variously described in the different gospels. In most accounts, the women tell the disciples about the empty tomb, but no one understands what has happened. In one account (*Matthew*), Jesus then appears to all the women. In the clearest account (*John*), Mary Magdalene alone is the first to recognize the risen Christ:

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her. (*John* 20: 11-18)

Jesus' unusual request that she touch him not (*Noli me tangere* in the Vulgate) became the subject of multiple paintings and engravings. Christ is often shown with a gardening tool or holding a banner with a red cross, signifying his resurrection. The scene is set in a garden in the soft light

of morning. This new garden takes the place of that lost in Eden. Illustrated below are a fresco by Fra Angelico (1442) and a painting by Titian (1520).



By being the first to recognize the resurrected Jesus, Mary Magdalene became the *apostola apostolorum*, the apostle to the apostles, the person who first proclaimed the news of the resurrection. The Latin title allows the gender to be noted: Mary Magdalene was the female apostle who first told the male apostles about the resurrection. This was the subject of an illustration in the St Alban's psalter (circa 1140 CE), a masterpiece of English Romanesque painting (Carrasco, 1999):





Though the early church considered the Magdalene as the *apostola apostolorum*, this recognition was often given grudgingly by male priests who could not understand why such a role was granted to a woman. Mary was often related to Eve: Eve brought sin and death to man in the garden of Eden, Mary Magdalene witnessed man's salvation from sin in the garden of Arimathea. In the words of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE): *per feminam mors, per feminam vita* ("death through woman; life through woman" quoted by Jansen, 1998).

### **The Beloved Companion**

Mary Magdalene occurs frequently in other reports of Jesus written soon after his death. Fragments of *The Gospel of Mary* written in Coptic were discovered in 1896. This likely dates

to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, but concerns a tradition in early Christianity going back to a devoted follower of Jesus named Mary who, though not specifically named, was probably Mary Magdalene (King, 2003; Meyer & de Boer, 2004). Other Coptic writings such as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip* and *Pistis Sophia* ("Faith and Wisdom"), discovered in Nag Hammadi in 1945, also mention Mary, sometimes specifically calling her the Magdalene.

Compared to the canonical gospels, these "Gnostic" gospels are more concerned with the path from illusion to enlightenment than from repentance to salvation. Key to the Gnostic view of life is the need to seek the truth within oneself:

When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you dwell in poverty and you are poverty. (*Gospel of Thomas*, in Meyer, 2008, p 116)

In the Gnostic Gospels, Mary Magdalene is described as the beloved companion of Jesus:

The Saviour loved Mary of Magdala more than all the disciples, and he kissed her often on her mouth. (*Gospel of Philip*, in Meyer, 2008, p 142).

Several modern novelists have considered the close relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus (reviewed in Valerio, 2021, Chapter 5). Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1951) describes how Jesus, as he is dying on the cross, had a vision of a future life wherein he and Mary raised a family. Saramago's *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ* (1991) describes how the courtesan Mary introduced the young Jesus to physical love, and later left her profession to become his devoted companion. Valerio (2021, p 91) notes that that modern novelistic treatments of Jesus are concerned about the "irreconcilability of sacred and profane love" and "the

incomprehension of a God of love who paradoxically is unable to love a woman to the fullest.”

Many have speculated that Mary might have been married to Jesus. In 2012, this idea was brought into prominence by the discovery of a ancient papyrus fragment containing the words “Jesus said to them, ‘my wife...’ ” Unfortunately, this was later determined to be a forgery (Sabar 2020).

Whatever their relationship, Mary Magdalene was privy to teachings of Jesus of which the other disciples were unaware:

Peter said to Mary, ‘Sister, we know that the Saviour loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Saviour that you remember, the things you know that we don’t because we have not heard them.’ Mary responded, ‘I will teach you about what is hidden from you.’ (*Gospel of Mary*, in Meyer 2008, p 640)

In later fragments of the *Gospel of Mary*, the Magdalene describes the ascent of the soul away from darkness, desire, ignorance and wrath, until it is finally set loose from the world and attains rest (Meyer, 2008, p 642).

In several of the Gnostic Gospels, the male disciples, Peter in particular, complain about Mary’s special status and dispute her reports of Jesus and his teachings. Over the time that these gospels were written, orthodox beliefs were consolidating around the idea that women were inferior to men and could not serve as Christian priests. And these priests desired that believers should be taught the truth by the church rather than seek it within themselves.

## **Beata Peccatrix**

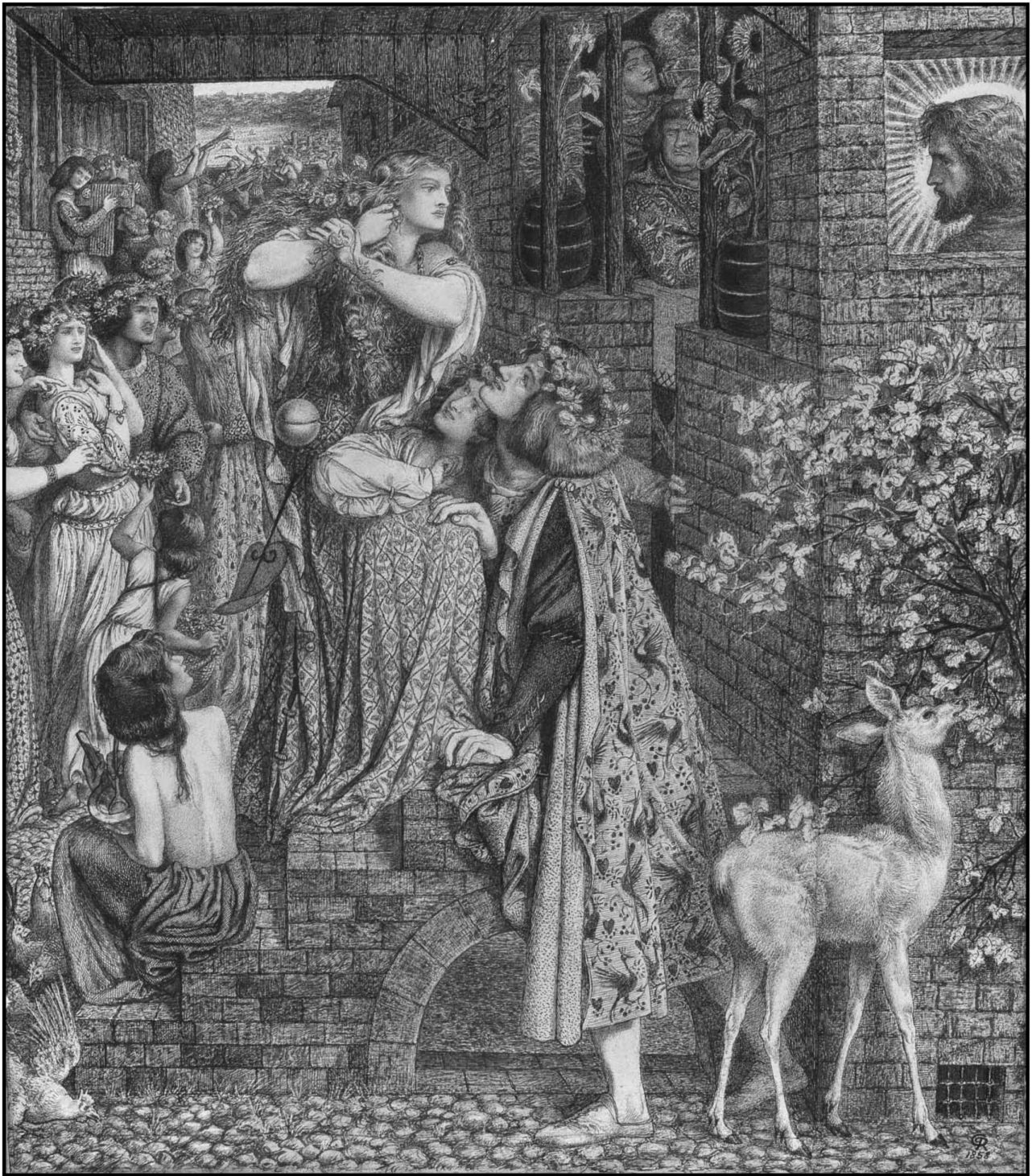
Mary, deriving from the Hebrew “Miriam,” the sister of Moses, was a common name in Palestine at the time of Jesus. The many women named Mary in the gospels are difficult to distinguish and are often conflated into one person. In 591 CE, Pope

Gregory the Great proposed that Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene were one and the same person (discussed by Haskins, 1993, pp 95-97, and Ehrman 2006, pp. 187-92). This placed Mary Magdalene at the raising of Lazarus from the dead (John 11) and at the anointing of Jesus:

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. (*John* 12: 3).

In Matthew and Mark's version the anointing took place at a dinner in the house of Simon, and in Luke's version, the unnamed woman who anointed the feet of Jesus was a "sinner." Since Mary Magdalene had been exorcised of seven devils, Gregory inferred that she had been subject to all the seven deadly sins. His pronouncement led to the idea that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute who gave up her life of luxury and indulgence to become a follower of Jesus. Mary is also often conflated with the unnamed "woman taken in adultery" that Jesus saved from the Pharisees who wished to stone her (*John* 8).

The dramatic moment of her decision to renounce her life of sin is illustrated in the 1858 drawing *Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti together with its accompanying sonnet:



Why wilt thou cast the roses from thine hair?  
Nay, be thou all a rose,—wreath, lips, and cheek.  
□Nay, not this house,—that banquet-house we seek;  
See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.  
This delicate day of love we two will share  
□Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.  
□What, sweet one,—hold'st thou still the foolish



freak?

Nay, when I kiss thy feet they 'll leave the stair."

"Oh loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face

□That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,

□□My hair, my tears He craves to-day:—and oh!

What words can tell what other day and place

□Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?

□□He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!"

At the center of the drawing Mary (a portrait of the actress Ruth Herbert) sees Jesus and casts the roses from her hair. Despite the protestation of her richly dressed companion (a portrait of the poet Charles Swinburne), she decides to leave the procession of revelers.

After Pope Gregory's conflation of Mary with the sinful woman who repented of her sins and anointed the feet of Christ, the Magdalene became commonly viewed as the *beata peccatrix* ("holy sinner"). Numerous paintings have depicted her stunning beauty and her sincere repentance (Haskins, 1993, particularly Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Below is Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene* (1595).





A beautiful young woman with auburn hair sits in a shadowy room; she has removed her jewelry and is quietly weeping. This was the first realistic portrait of the Magdalene: Caravaggio had used an actual prostitute as his model. In his commentary on the painting Hunt (2012, p 174) remarks

Caravaggio paints the Magdalene possibly ambiguously, choosing the moment after she has loosened her hair, an act sometimes perceived as a provocative act in which a courtesan would have usually prepared to bed a client-lover, but here more likely an allusion for her preparation to wash Christ's feet. ... the chains on the floor around the Magdalene in the painting may be gold but they could nonetheless be interpreted as having bound the Magdalene to a life of rich material "possession"—even the putative "demonic" possession from which she was exorcised.

Apostolos-Cappadona (2005, p 219) comments on the position of the Magdalene's head

Leaning toward her left shoulder, her lowered head droops downward and her chin tilts onto her collarbone in a pose empathetic to that of the crucified Christ.

Unfortunately, paintings of the repentant Magdalene often lapse into sentimentality. Indeed, the word "maudlin" derives from her name. Many paintings are extremely disconcerting in the sense that the viewer is invited to enjoy the view of her naked body while thinking holy thoughts about the denial of the flesh.

Misogyny in many forms runs through the history of Christianity and plays forever with our understanding of the Magdalene:

One can't help but think that the men who relish this recollection of Mary the penitent sinner are those who are trying to inform their own world with their own vision of what sexual and gendered relationships ought to be, with women not enticing men with the dangers of sex but falling at their feet in humble submission and penitence. (Ehrman, 2006, p 192).

One of the legacies of the concept of the Magdalene as a reformed prostitute was the foundation of institutions to help wayward females. Though some of these may have provided safe asylum for abused women, many simply imprisoned and exploited their charges. The most notorious of these institutions were the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland. Here unmarried mothers gave birth to children that were taken from them. As penance for their sins, they then worked as slaves in laundries to raise money for the church.

## **Legends of Mary**

Mary Magdalene the Apostle soon inspired some amazing stories. These were collected by Jacobus de Voragine for his book about the saints entitled *The Golden Legend* (circa 1260).

According to legend, Mary Magdalene together with Bishop Maximin, Martha and the resurrected Lazarus were cast adrift in the Mediterranean Sea by an anti-Christian mob. Though the boat has neither rudder nor tackle, they were miraculously carried to the West and made landfall in the Camargue near Marseille. There on the steps of a pagan temple, Mary Magdalene preached the gospel of Christ. One of the pagan leaders came to the temple to make offerings to the gods so that his wife might bear him a child. Mary prayed that the Lord might give them a son. When his wife conceived, the leader decided that they should go to Saint Peter in Rome on a pilgrimage of thanks. Unfortunately, during the voyage a storm arose and the wife died in childbirth. Fearful that they had offended the gods, the sailors left her and the newborn son on a rocky island. When the pagan leader reached Rome, Saint Peter consoled him, told him that all would be well, and took him to Jerusalem to see where Jesus had lived and died.

When the pagan leader finally travelled back to Marseille, he came upon the rocky island where his dead wife had been left. There he found his two-year-old son, capering on the rocks and nursing at the breast of his dead mother. Mary Magdalene had miraculously intervened to preserve the body of the mother and the life of the son.

After several years preaching the gospel in the South of France, Mary Magdalene retired to a deserted mountainous region, where she lived for thirty years as a hermit. During this time, she had no need of earthly food. Instead, she was daily transported into the sky to dine with the angels. Ultimately, she received her last communion from Bishop Maximin and died. The Basilicas of Sainte Marie Madeleine in both Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume, Provence, and Vézelay, Burgundy, purport to have relics of the saint.



The story of the Magdalene arriving in France and the miracle of the child who was nourished at his dead mother's breast is depicted in one of the frescos (illustrated below, lower right) by pupils of Giotto in the Magdalen Chapel of the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi (Mignozzi, 2019). Other frescos in the cycle illustrate the anointing of Jesus, the raising of Lazarus, and the *Noli me tangere* episode. In the Lazarus episode, Christ speaks the words "Lazarus come forth" (Vulgate *Lazare veni foras*, John 11: 43). In the fresco these words are written in reverse order, to illustrate how they travelled from Jesus to Lazarus:



Jacopo de Voragine also reports the story that Mary Magdalene was married to John the Evangelist, and that John left Mary on their wedding night to follow Jesus. Indignant that she had been deprived of her husband, Mary indulged herself in the

pleasures of the flesh. Not willing to let the calling of John be the cause of her damnation, Jesus later convinced her to repent and join his disciples. This version of the story was expanded in Yourcenar's passionate story of the Madeleine in her collection of prose poems entitled *Fires* (1935). Though Mary loves Jesus passionately, she realizes that she must give him up to his destiny:

So as not to ruin his career as Saviour, I consented to see him die as a mistress consents to the rich marriage of the man she loves. (p 72).

### **Ascetic Mary**

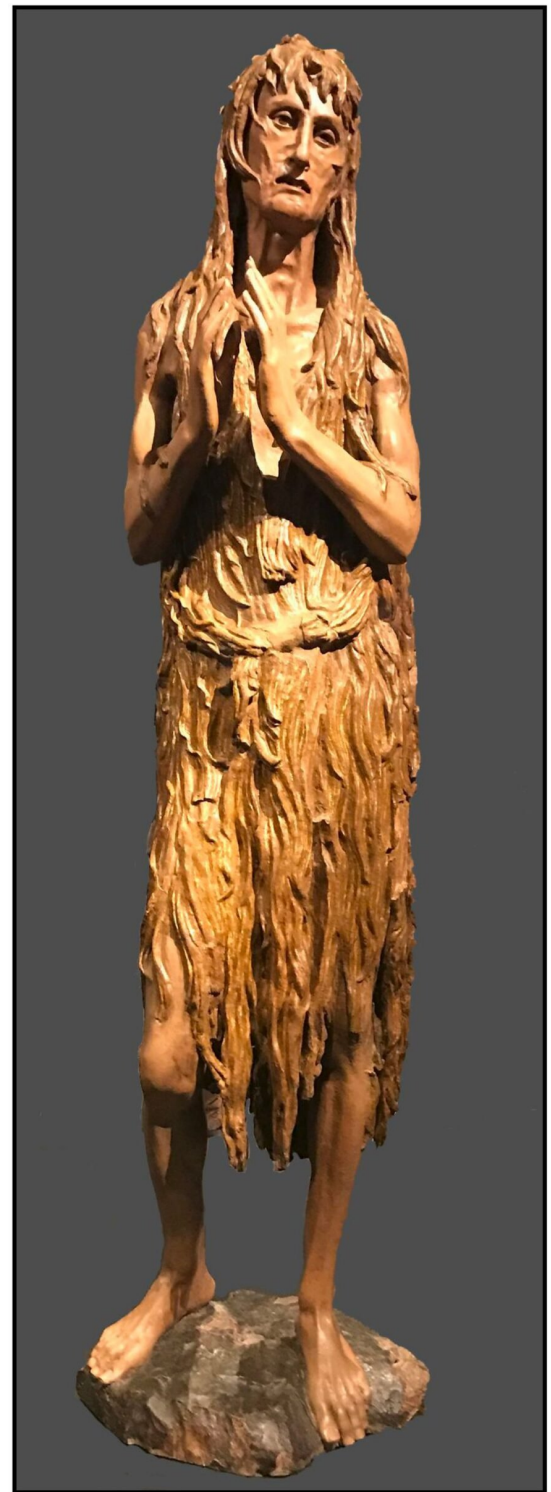
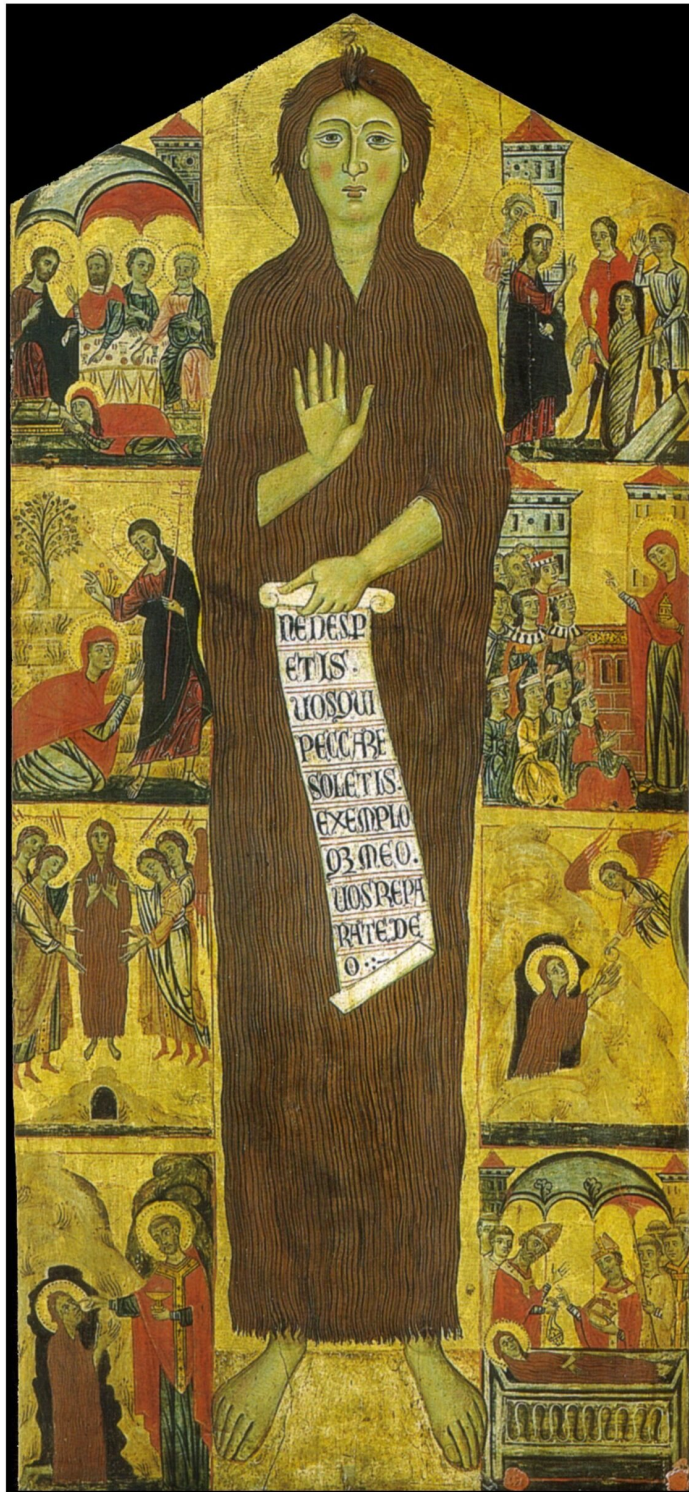
*The Golden Legend* also included the story of Mary of Egypt, a prostitute born in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE, who left her profession and became a hermit in the desert. Her clothes wasted away so that her hair was her only covering.

Mary of Egypt was soon conflated with Mary Magdalene. The depiction of the Magdalene covered in her own hair began in Italy with the painting of the Master of the Magdalene (1285) illustrated on the left below (Bradfield, 2002; Huggins, 2016). In the central portrait, Mary holds a banner stating

*Ne desp[er]etis vos qui peccare soletis exemplo meo vos reparate Deo* (Despair not you who are accustomed to sin, and by my example, return to God.)

On both sides of are episodes from her life: On the left are shown *Mary Anointing Christ's Feet*, *Noli Me Tangere*, *Mary Borne to Heaven by Angels*, and *Bishop Maximin giving Mary her Last Communion*. On the right are *The Resurrection of Lazarus*, *Mary Magdalene Preaching*, *An Angel Feeding Mary in the Desert*, and *the Funeral of Mary Magdalene*





In 1455, Donatello created a wooden sculpture of *The Penitent Magdalene*, unclothed except for her own hair (illustrated on the right above). In 1492, Riemenschneider carved a series of panels for the altar of Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Münnerstadt, Germany (Chapuis, 1999, Kalden-Rosenfeld, 2004). These show *Christ in the House of Simon*, *Noli me Tangere*, *Mary*

*Magdalene's Last Communion, and Mary Magdalene's Entombment.* In the latter two panels (on the right) Mary is clothed only in her hair, although in these examples the hair appears to grow from all her body:

\*7

## **The Visionary**

In the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary asks Jesus about a vision she experienced:

She said, 'I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, "Lord, I saw you today in a vision." He answered me, "Blessed are you for not wavering at seeing me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure." I said to him, "So now, Lord, does a person who sees a vision see it with the soul or with the spirit?" The Saviour answered, "A person does not see with the soul or with the spirit. Rather, the mind which exists between these two sees the vision ..." ' (Meyer, 2008, pp 641-2)

This makes a skeptic wonder whether her meeting the resurrected Jesus was a visionary rather than real experience. In his *Vie de Jésus* (1863) Renan noted that Mary Magdalene had earlier been exorcised of her devils, and therefore questioned the veracity of Mary Magdalene's encounter with Jesus in the garden outside the empty tomb.

The life of Jesus, to the historian, ends with his last sigh. But so deep was the trace which he had left in the hearts of his disciples and of a few devoted women, that, for weeks to come, he was to them living and consoling. Had his body been taken away, or did enthusiasm, always credulous, afterwards generate the mass of accounts by which faith in the resurrection was sought to be established? This, for want of peremptory evidence, we shall never know. We may say, however, that the strong imagination of Mary Magdalene here enacted a principal part. Divine power of



love! Sacred moments in which the passion of a hallucinated woman gives to the world a resurrected God!

The request of Jesus that Mary not touch him was unusual. Was it because he was just a vision and that there was nothing to touch?

## **The Holy Grail**



The Holy Grail (old French *San Gréal*) is a long-lost treasure sought by knights of old. The most common interpretation is that it is the cup ("holy chalice") used by Jesus at the last supper. The word "grail" might have derived from the Greek *krater* (a bowl used for mixing wine with water). According to some legends this cup was also used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood dripping from the wounds of the crucified Jesus. Other legends describe how the cup was then brought by

Joseph to France or Britain, and kept in some undiscovered Castle of the Holy Grail, where it was guarded by the Grail Maiden. Dante Gabriel Rossetti painted this *Damsel of the Sanct Gréal* in 1874 (illustrated on the right).

In 1982, Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln published a reinterpretation of these legends in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Based upon a reading of *san gréal* as *sang réal* (royal blood), they conceived the holy grail as representing the bloodline of Jesus. They proposed that Mary Magdalene conceived one or more children by Jesus and raised her family in France. Saint Sarah of Provence was perhaps her daughter (Starbird, 1993). Baigent and his co-authors proposed that, over the years, the descendants of Jesus and Mary were protected by the Cathars, the Knights Templar, and the Priory of Sion against the forces of orthodoxy that tried to destroy them. These speculations are the basis of Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), in which the last surviving descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is ultimately discovered in modern Paris.

## **Epilogue**

We can never know the real Mary Magdalene. She has become a legend, and legends have various interpretations. Perhaps her most characteristic trait is her human-ness: she is not tainted with divinity. She enjoyed physical love, repented of her sins, and had one main loving relationship with a man, who was crucified for what he taught. After his death, Mary had visions of his continued presence. She tried to continue his teaching, but was maligned for being a woman. She gave birth to a daughter and fled to France to raise her family.

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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* (2<sup>nd</sup> 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 were 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* (13<sup>th</sup> 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

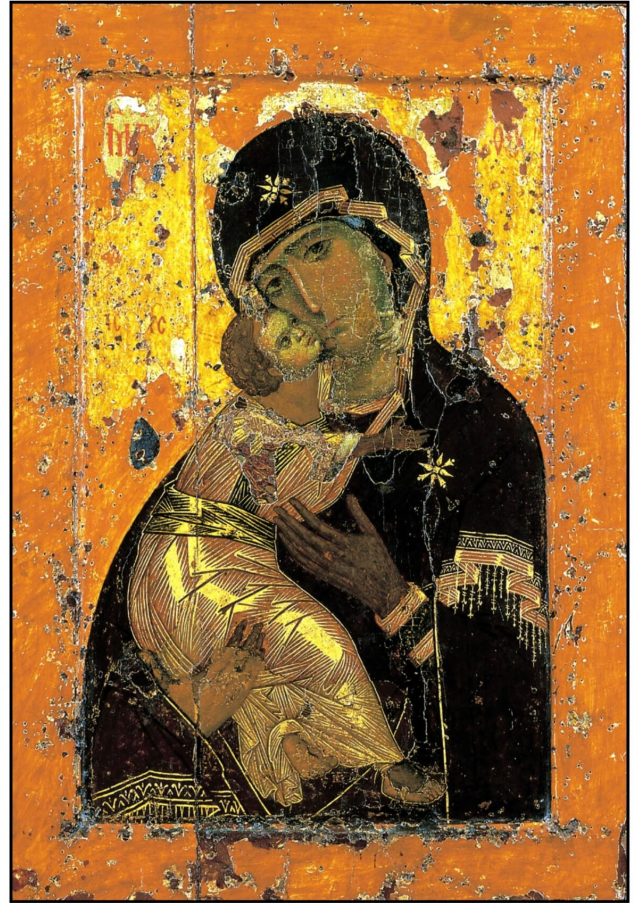
visitation with Elizabeth, the nativity of Christ, presentation of Jesus in the temple, and the crucifixion, she is scarcely mentioned. In one brief episode she visited her son while he was teaching and was ignored (Mark 6: 31-34). However, Christ did acknowledge her at the crucifixion, telling John, "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 (9<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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,	Hail
Mary, full of grace,	
Dominus tecum	the Lord
is with thee	
benedicta tu in mulieribus	Blessed art
thou amongst women,	
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  
sinners,  
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

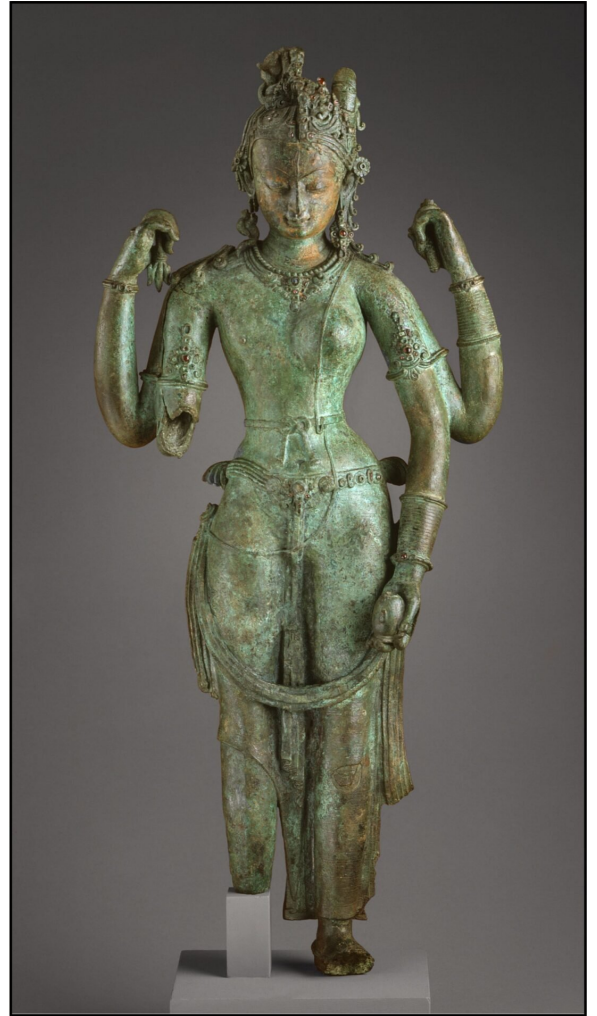
In contrast with the Western (or Abrahamic) religions, Hinduism is adorned with goddesses of many types and purposes (Kinsley, 1986; Pattanaik, 2000). Eroticism is an acknowledged part of divinity.

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” (13<sup>th</sup> 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* (11<sup>th</sup> 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* (9<sup>th</sup> Century CE) and a gilt copper-alloy casting of *Tara* (14<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 (13<sup>th</sup> Century) and a Chinese representation of Guanyin (16<sup>th</sup> 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](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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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## Searching for the Dao

This post presents some ideas about the *Dào* (“Way”) as described in the *Dàodéjīng* (“Book of the Way and its Virtue”), that legend claims was composed by *Lǎozī* in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE. The *Dào* cannot be explained in words. But that has never stopped anyone from writing about it.

### An Incident at Hangu Pass

No one is sure of the season or even the year. It was probably at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BCE), and it would have been appropriate if it were autumn. An old man riding on a water buffalo, together with a young servant, requested passage to the west through the frontier gate at Hangu. They were leaving the violence and corruption of the Kingdom of the Eastern Zhou, which was slowly dissolving into anarchy, a time that was later historians called the Warring



States Period (475-221 BCE).

*Yīnxǐ*, the head guardsman, realized that the old man was of some importance. In answer to his questions, the old man confirmed that he had been the Royal Archivist at the court of Zhou. He had resigned his position, and was now on his way to the mountains to find peace. *Yīnxǐ* requested that the old man not leave without providing him with a summary of his wisdom. The scholar obliged and wrote out a summary of all that he considered important. And then he departed, never to be heard of again.

The writings that he left with *Yīnxǐ* became known as the *Dàodéjīng* – the “Book of the Way and its Virtue” (*Tao Te Ching* in the old Wade-Giles system of romanization), containing about 5000 characters in 81 brief chapters. The first section of the book (chapters 1-37) dealt with the *Dào* (“way”), and the second section with *Dé* (“virtue”). The author became known as *Lǎozī* – the “Old Master” (*Lao Tzu* in Wade-Giles). Sometimes the book itself is also referred to as *Lǎozī*.

I have told the story as best I can. There are several legends about what happened, and I am not sure which are true, or even whether *Lǎozī* was an actual person (Graham, 1998; Chan, 2000). The story does explain the nature of the book – an anthology of cryptic sayings and opinions on the nature of the universe and how people should behave.

The Eastern Zhou dynasty had its court in Chengzhou, now called Luoyáng. From there the king tried to maintain his rule over the surrounding feudal states. After many years of internecine warfare, the Qin state in the west ultimately prevailed over the others and founded the first Chinese Empire in 221 BCE.



The frontier gate in the Hangu Pass has been preserved as the centerpiece of an archeological site in Xin'an:



*Lǎozī* on his water buffalo was portrayed by *Chao Buzhi* in an ink painting (around 1100 CE) now in the Palace Museum in Taipei:





A carved jade circle from the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century represents the meeting between *Lǎozī* (right) and *Yīnxǐ* (left) with the Hangu Gate at the top.



In 1938, Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) felt definite empathy for *Lǎozī*. He was living in Denmark, an exile from his home in Germany, which was descending into the horrors of Nazism. He wrote a poem *The Legend of How the Tao te Ching Came into Being on Lao Tse's Journey into Exile*, which was later published in *Tales from the Calendar* (1949, translated 1961). The custom's officer asks the boy attending on *Lǎozī* what he has learned from the old man and receives the answer

... Daß das weiche Wasser in Bewegung  
Mit der Zeit den harten Stein besiegt.  
[That over time the gentlest water  
Defeats the hardest stone]

This paraphrases some lines from chapter 78 of the *Dàodéjīng*

Brecht ends his poem with

Aber rühmen wir nicht nur den Weisen Dessen Name auf  
dem Buche prangt! Denn man muß dem Weisen seine  
Weisheit erst entreißen. Darum sei der Zöllner auch  
bedankt: Er hat sie ihm abverlangt.

[But we should not just praise the Sage  
Whose name is displayed on the book.  
Since we must retrieve from the Wise their wisdom,  
The customs officer should also be thanked  
For demanding it of him.]

### The Nature of the *Dào*

The main focus of *Lǎozī* 's book is the *Dào* (pinyin, *Tao* in Wade-Gilles). The character is composed of the “walk/march” radical on the left (a leg taking a step forward) and the “head/chief” radical on the upper right (a head with hair or horns above a stylized face). The illustration below shows the Small Seal Script version (which would have been used at the beginning of the Qin dynasty) on the left, and the modern version on the right.



As a noun, *Dào* is most often translated as “way” or “path.” When it is used as a verb it generally means “say” or “explain.” This confluence of “way” and “word” also occurs in the Christian gospel of *John* (1:1, and 14:6), where the source



of everything is called the word (*logos*) and salvation is obtained through the way (*odos*) (Ching, 1993, p. 88).

In *Lǎozī* 's book, the *Dào* represents the underlying and enduring principle of the universe, something completely beyond human comprehension (Schwartz, 2000):

The *Dào* that can be explained is not the eternal *Dào*;  
The Name that can be told is not the eternal Name.

The nameless is the source of heaven and earth,  
The mother of everything which can be named.

Free from desire, you can realize its mystery;  
Caught in desire, you see only its manifestations.

That these two aspects are both same and different  
Is the paradox:

Mystery of mystery,  
Gateway to wonder.

[Chapter 1, my translation. I am indebted to Mitchell (1988) for the opposition of “mystery” and “manifestations.” And to Pepper and Wang (2021) for their word-by-word analysis.]

Livia Kohn (2020, p 16) proposed:

One way to think of *Dào* is as two concentric circles, a smaller one in the center and a larger one on the periphery. The dense, smaller circle in the center is *Dào* at the root of creative change—tight, concentrated, intense, and ultimately unknowable, ineffable, and beyond conscious or sensory human attainment... The larger circle at the periphery is *Dào* as it appears in the world, the patterned cycle of life and visible nature. Here we can see *Dào* as it comes and goes, rises and sets, rains and shines, lightens and darkens— the everchanging yet everlasting, cyclical alteration of natural patterns, life and death... This is *Dào*

as natural transformations: the metamorphoses of insects, ways of bodily dissolution, and the inevitable entropy of life. This natural, tangible *Dào* is what people can study and learn to create harmony in the world; the cosmic, ineffable *Dào*, on the other hand, they need to open to by resting in clarity and stillness to find true authenticity in living.

Her description fits with that in Chapter 11 of the *Dàodéjīng*:

Thirty spokes converge on the wheel's hub,  
The emptiness of which allows the cart to be used.

And perhaps point to Eliot's image in *Burnt Norton* (1941)

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh  
nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the  
dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement.

As pointed out by Kenner (1959, pp 297-8))

This is the philosophers' paradox of the Wheel, the exact center of which is precisely motionless, whatever the velocity of the rim.

## ***Yīn and Yáng***

The *Dào* is the source of all the different things in the world. The multiplicity of the world is described in Chapter 2 of the *Dàodéjīng* (translation by Ursula Le Guin, 1997):

For being and nonbeing  
arise together;  
hard and easy  
compete with each other;  
long and short

shape each other;  
high and low  
depend on each other;  
note and voice  
make music together;  
before and after  
follow each other.

The source of this multiplicity is proclaimed in Chapter 42  
(my translation)

The *Dào* gives birth to one  
One gives birth to two  
Two give birth to three  
Three gives birth to the myriad things of the world.

These carry *Yīn* on their back and *Yáng* in their arms  
And together they achieve harmony

*Yīn* is water, earth, night, female; *Yáng* is fire, sky, day, male. Through much of the *Dàodéjīng*, *Lǎozī* is more partial to *Yīn*, the eternal female. *Yīn* and *Yáng* mix to form a third type of being and from this intermingling comes everything – *Wànwù* (ten thousand things). This process is depicted in the *Tàijítú* symbol: the outer circle represents the whole while the light and dark areas represent its opposing manifestations. The *Tàijítú* in turn becomes the center of the *Bāguà* (“eight symbols”) map, representing all the different elements of the world.

Name	Nature
乾 Qián	天 Sky (Heaven)
巽 Xùn	風 Wind
坎 Kǎn	水 Water
艮 Gèn	山 Mountain
坤 Kūn	地 Earth
震 Zhèn	雷 Thunder
離 Lí	火 Fire
兌 Duì	澤 Lake



## The Rule of Dé

The character for *Dé* (pinyin, *Te* in Wade-Giles) contains on the left the radical for “step/road.” The upper right of the character represents “truth” – something placed on a pedestal to be examined. The lower right is the radical for “heart.” The character thus embodies the idea of following the path of the true heart. *Dé* is translated as “virtue” or “morality.” The illustration below shows the Small Seal Script version on the left and the modern version on the right.

德 德

According to *Lǎozī*, virtue is attained by behaving in harmony with the *Dào*. Exactly how one does this is not completely clear. When he wrote his book, *Lǎozī* had decided that he needed to retire from the world, and much of his thought espouses the concept of *wéiwúwéi* – “acting without acting.” He urged leaders not to interfere with the lives of their people

and not to overburden them with taxes. He urged generals to exercise restraint and patience.

Acting in harmony with the *Dào* means doing things for the good of all rather than the benefit of one. Occasionally *Lǎozī* does recommend particular virtues. The following is from Chapter 67 of the *Dàodéjīng*:

I have three treasures  
that I hold and protect:  
first is compassion,  
second is austerity  
third is reluctance to excel.

Because I am kind I can be valiant,  
Because I am frugal I can be generous  
Because I am humble I can be a leader.

[My translation owes much to Red Pine (2004), from whom I took the names of the treasures. Other expressions derive from Pepper and Wang (2021).]

## **The Religion of Dàoism**

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE, *Zhāng Dàolíng* was visited by the spirit of *Lǎozī*, and proclaimed himself the first “Celestial Master” of the *Dào*. (Ching, 1993; Hendrichke, 2000, Kohn 2020; Robinet, 1992; Wong, 1997). Dàoism became an organized religion. *Lǎozī* was deified. Various other sages and believers were raised to the rank of “Immortals.” The descendants of *Zhang Dàolíng* have continued to lead the religion to the present day. Dàoism as a religion provided its adherents with rituals, prayers, scriptures, talismans, and divination. Some of the “austerity” of *Lǎozī* was perhaps lost in the proliferating ceremonies.

Dàoism was immensely popular. Temples sprang up everywhere. Dàoism was particularly attracted to the mountains, perhaps because this is where *Lǎozī* attained his immortality after

leaving through Hangu Pass. Statues of *Lǎozī* and the immortals abound. The following is a large statue of *Lǎozī* created during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). It is located in the Qingyuan Mountain Park near Quanzhou city in Southern China.



## The Art of Dàoism

Much of the art associated with Dàoism concerns the activities of the Immortals (Little, 2000; Little & Eichman, 2000). However, during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) when the Mongols controlled China and ruled an Empire that spread as far west as Europe, several artists evolved a style of landscape painting that attempted to portray the simple power of nature (Barnhart, 1983; Cahill, 1976; Scott, 2006).

Probably the most famous of these painters was *Ní Zàn* (1301-1374), an aristocrat who gave up his worldly goods and retired from public life to live as an ascetic. One of his



last paintings, now in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, is entitled *Woods and Valleys of Mount Yu* (1372).



The poem appended to the top of the painting identifies where it was created and concludes:

We watch the clouds and apply our paint;

We drink wine and write poems.  
The joyous feelings of this day  
Will linger long after we have parted.

The painting portrays the stillness of the water in the lake and the power of the mountains on the further shore. These seem to embody the eternal forces of *Yīn* and *Yáng*. In the foreground are a few of the ten thousand things that make up our particular world. The most powerful part of the painting is that which is not painted – the water representing the force of *Yīn*.

The spirit at the center of all is called the dark female,  
Gateway of the foundations of heaven and earth,  
Which lasts unbroken and forever: use it.  
[*Dàodéjīng*, Chapter 6, my translation]

## Final Thoughts

Most people believe that the universe is governed by rules. Many believe that such rules are purposeful and that the universe is evolving toward some goal. We are a hopeful species and we like to think of this process as benevolent rather than blind. Many of our religions urge us to fit our individual intentions to this more general goal. Of all this we are unsure. But there is something behind it all:

Something there is, whose veiled creation was  
Before the earth or sky began to be;  
So silent, so aloof and so alone,  
It changes not, nor fails, but touches all:  
Conceive it as the mother of the world.  
I do not know its name;  
A name for it is “Way.”  
[*Dàodéjīng*, Chapter 25, Blakney (1955) translation]

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## Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) is one of the most famous of the Roman Emperors. Some of his renown is related to the many representations of the Emperor that have persisted to the present day: the Aurelian Column documenting the Marcomannic Wars he waged on the Northern frontiers of the Empire; the bas-reliefs that were initially mounted on a triumphal arch in Rome, and later preserved when the arch was destroyed; and the equestrian statue that, from the Renaissance, was displayed in

Rome's Piazza de Campidoglio on a pedestal designed by Michelangelo. Most of Marcus' fame, however, derives from the book that he wrote during the many years when he campaigned against the Germanic Tribes who threatened to cross the Danube and invade the Empire. This book, which has come to be known as the *Meditations*, presents a philosophy that derives from Greek Stoicism: to live each day as if it were one's last, to act in accord with nature, not to become upset by whatever happens, and to help others as best one can.

## **The Life of Marcus Aurelius**

Marcus was born in 121CE, the son of Emperor Hadrian's nephew. After his father's death in 124 CE, Marcus was adopted by his grandfather Marcus Annius Verus.

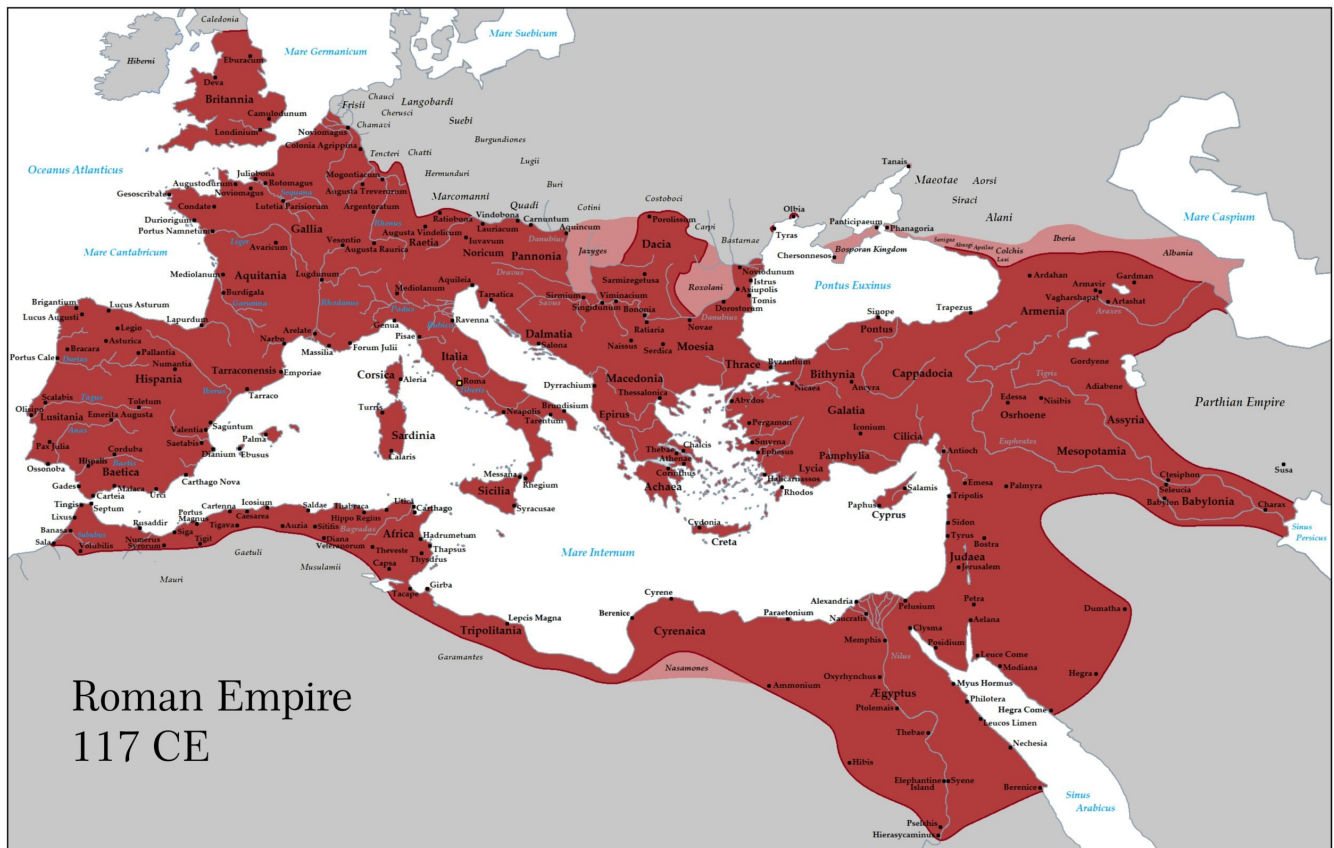
Marcus was educated by a series of prominent tutors, whom he thanks in the first section of the *Meditations*. From Diognetus, he learned "about not getting carried away by empty enthusiasm;" from Rusticus "understanding the importance of correction and treatment of one's character;" from Apollonius "self-reliance and indisputable immunity to the dice-rolls of fortune;" from Sextus "the true meaning of living in accord with nature;" and from Fronto "understanding the nature of despotic malice and hypocrisy."

In 138 CE Marcus was adopted by his uncle, the Emperor Antoninus Pius, as his heir, and assumed the name Marcus Aurelius ("golden") Antoninus. From his adoptive father, he learned "calmness and an unshakeable adherence to deliberately made decisions" (this and preceding quotations from the Waterfield translation, 2021). In 145 CE Marcus married Faustina, the daughter of Antoninus.

With the death of Antoninus Pius in 161 CE, Marcus became joint Emperor with Lucius Verus, whom Antoninus had also adopted. Together they assumed rule over the huge Roman Empire, which, since the days of the Emperor Trajan (53 -117



CE), extended from Portugal in the West to Syria in the East, and from Britain in the North to North Africa in the South:

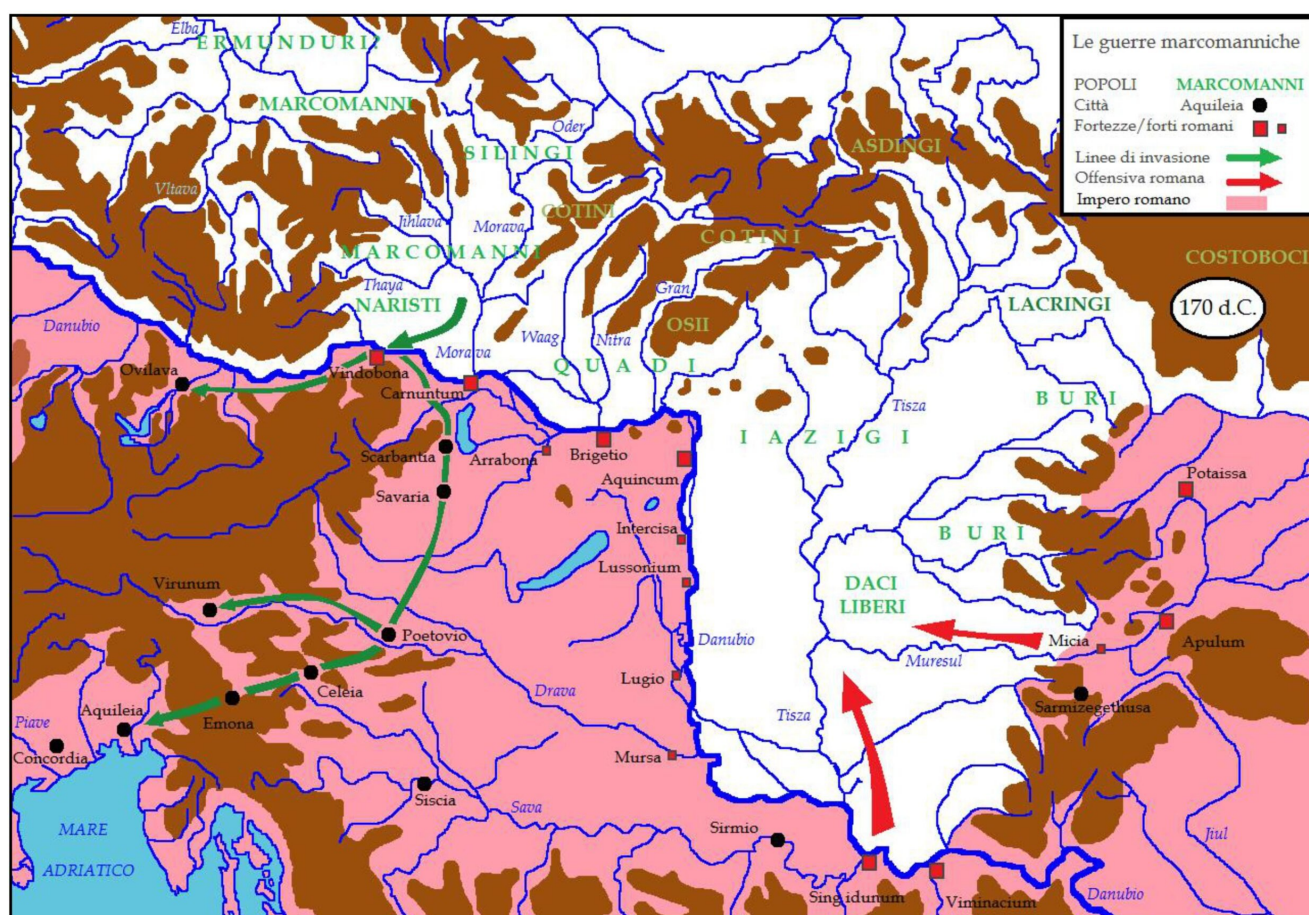


At the accession of Marcus and Lucius, the empire was in turmoil. Rebellions were breaking out in Britain, and the Germanic tribes were harassing the Empire's frontier on the Danube. Most importantly, the Parthian king, Vologases III, had invaded the Eastern province of Armenia, and threatened to enter Syria. Marcus dispatched generals to Britain and the Danube, and Lucius led an army against the Parthians. The Northern troubles were quickly subdued, and after some initial defeats, the Roman legions finally repulsed the Parthians and invaded Mesopotamia. By 165 CE the empire was once again secure. Lucius returned home to Roma, and Avidius Cassius, one of the most successful of the Roman generals in the East, was made governor of Syria.

However, soldiers returning from the Eastern wars brought with them the Antonine Plague which spread throughout the Roman Empire from 165 to 180 CE, killing about 10% of the population.

No one is absolutely sure of the nature of the disease. Most believe that it was a virulent strain of smallpox (*Variola*).

In 166 CE the Marcomanni (derived from proto-Germanic “men of the border”) crossed the Danube and invaded the province of Pannonia (present-day Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Hungary) – see map below. Marcus and Lucius led the Roman legions against the invaders, but the Marcomannic Wars dragged on until Marcus’ death. In 168 CE, Lucius Verus succumbed to the Antonine Plague on the way home from one of the Northern campaigns, leaving Marcus as sole Emperor.



In 175 CE Avidius Cassius, by then the Supreme Commander in the East, having been misinformed that Marcus Aurelius was near death, declared himself Emperor. Marcus Aurelius and the Roman Senate planned an expedition to the East to put down the usurper. However, there was no need. One of Cassius’ centurions murdered him, and sent his head to Rome. Marcus

refused to see it and had it properly buried.

For the last decade of his life, Marcus was primarily involved in the Marcomannic Wars. He spent little time in Rome, apparently preferring the rigor and solitude of the campaigns to the pleasures of the capital. Slowly, he brought peace to the Empire's Northern frontier. The Aurelian Column in Rome (planned in the late 170s and finally constructed just after Marcus' death) portrays various episodes from the wars (Beckmann 2011). The scenes illustrated below show (in counter-clockwise order from the lower left): the legions crossing the Danube River on a bridge of boats; the "Rain Miracle" when the surrounded Roman soldiers, lacking food and water, were rescued by a tremendous downpour represented by the Rain God; the siege of a Barbarian fort using the *testudo* (turtle), wherein the Roman soldiers attacked under cover of their interlocked shields; and Marcus (at the center, perhaps with his son Commodus on the left and a Roman General on the right) accepting the surrender of two Barbarian chieftains, one of whom who offers the Emperor his mantle.

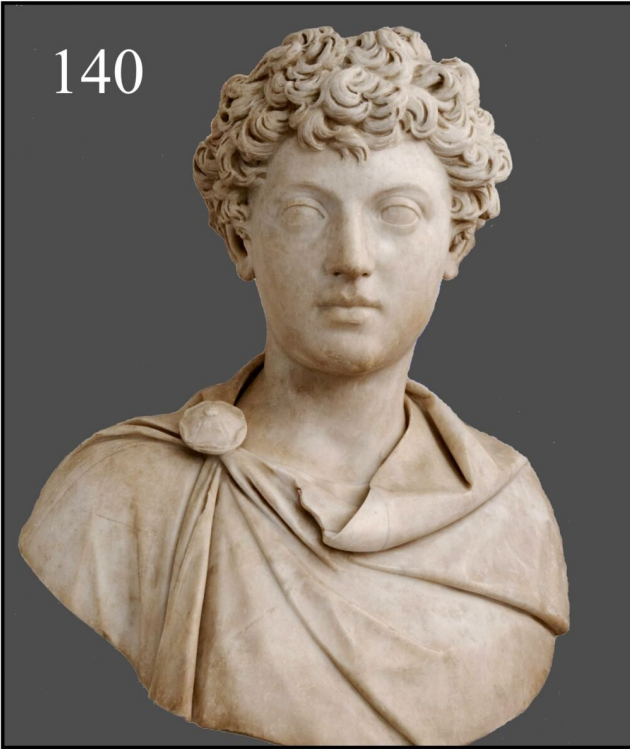


Marcus died in 180 CE in Sirmium, (presently Sremska Mitrovica in Serbia) a Roman settlement about 25 km south of the Danube. Sirmium was later to become a major capital in the Eastern Empire, but at the time of Marcus' death it was likely only a small fortified settlement. Marcus had been spitting up blood, and may have suffered from tuberculosis. It is also possible that he was another victim of the Antonine Plague. Some rumors suggested that his doctors had hastened his death in order to curry favor with his son and heir, Commodus, but there is no clear evidence for this.

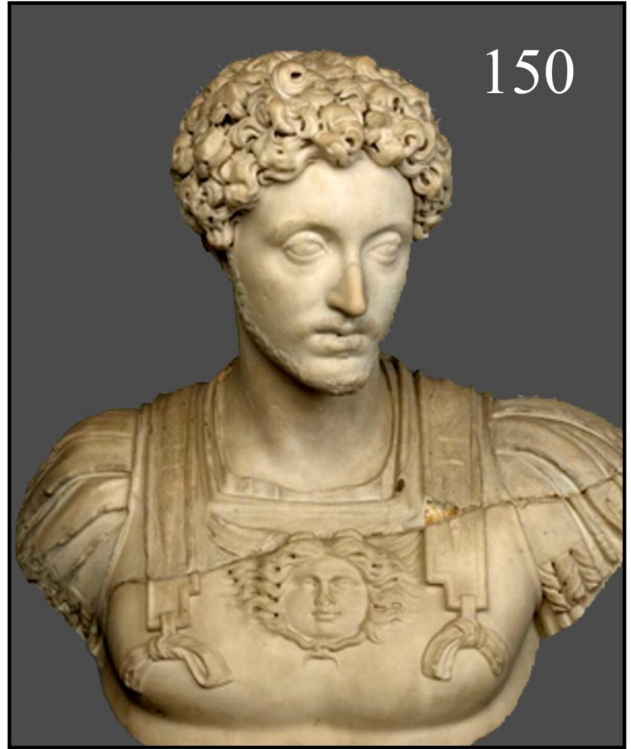
Many portrait busts were made of Marcus Aurelius (Boschung 2012a). Below are a selection of these busts with approximate dates. The upper busts are from the Capitoline Museum in Rome and Farnborough Hall in Warwickshire, UK; the lower busts are from the British Museum and from the Metropolitan Museum in New York.



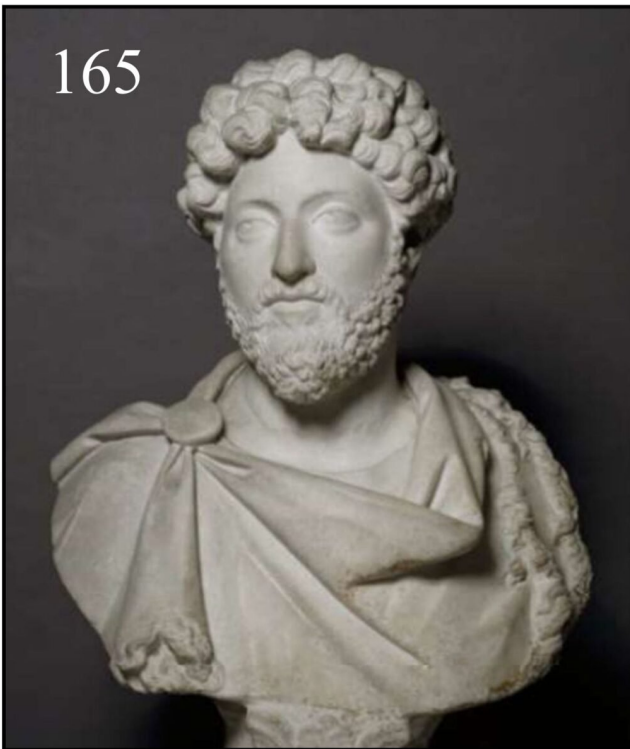
140



150



165



170



The reign of Commodus, the son and successor of Marcus Aurelius, marked the end of the greatest years of the Roman Empire. In his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), Gibbon describes the 84 years between the death of Domitian in 96 to the death of Marcus in 180 CE as the time when the Roman Empire truly flourished. The Emperors of this

time (Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius – often considered the “Good Emperors,” a term originating with Machiavelli) tempered their power with virtue. However, this could not last when all that stopped an Emperor from abusing his absolute power was his own sense of what was good:

The labors of these monarchs were overpaid by the immense reward that inseparably waited on their success; by the honest pride of virtue, and by the exquisite delight of beholding the general happiness of which they were the authors. A just but melancholy reflection imbittered, however, the noblest of human enjoyments. They must often have recollected the instability of a happiness which depended on the character of single man. The fatal moment was perhaps approaching, when some licentious youth, or some jealous tyrant, would abuse, to the destruction, that absolute power, which they had exerted for the benefit of their people. The ideal restraints of the senate and the laws might serve to display the virtues, but could never correct the vices, of the emperor. The military force was a blind and irresistible instrument of oppression; and the corruption of Roman manners would always supply flatterers eager to applaud, and ministers prepared to serve, the fear or the avarice, the lust or the cruelty, of their master. (Gibbon, 1776, Chapter III)

Commodus was just such a cruel master.

## **The Arch of Triumph**





Towards the end of the reign of Marcus Aurelius, a monumental arch was erected in Rome to commemorate his triumph over the Barbarians (Boschung, 2012b). No one is sure where the arch was constructed or when it was taken down. Of the eleven known bas-reliefs on the arch, eight were re-used on the Arch of Constantine which was built in 315 CE. Three other reliefs are now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. One of these (on the right) shows Marcus offering mercy to the conquered Barbarians. The other two (below) show Marcus in his triumphal chariot with a Nike of Victory on his shoulders, and Marcus making a sacrifice to the Gods in gratitude for his success.



## The Equestrian Statue

The equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius was likely cast at about the same time as the monumental arch (Stewart, 2012). The statue is made of gilded bronze, as befits the name "Aurelius." Its survival through the late Roman years and medieval period has been attributed to its being mistakenly considered a representation of Constantine the Great (272-337 CE), the Emperor who made Christianity the religion of the Empire.





Joseph Brodsky provided a marvelous description of the statue in his *Homage to Marcus Aurelius* (1995):

The Romans, superstitious like all Italians, maintain that when the bronze Marcus hits the ground, the end of the world will occur. Whatever the origin of this superstition, it stands to reason if one bears in mind that Marcus' motto was Equanimity. The word suggests balance, composure under pressure, evenness of mental disposition; literally: equation of the animus, i.e., keeping the soul—and thus the world—in check. Give this formula of the Stoic posture a possible mis-spelling and you'll get the monument's definition: Equinimity. The horseman tilts, though, somewhat, as if leaning toward his subjects, and his hand is stretched out in a gesture that is a cross between a greeting and a blessing. So much so that for a while some insisted that this was not Marcus Aurelius but Constantine, who converted Rome to Christianity. For that, however, the horseman's face is too serene, too free of zeal or ardor, too uninvolved. It is the face of detachment, not of love—and detachment is precisely what Christianity never could manage. No, this is no Constantine, and no Christian. The face is devoid of any sentiment; it is a postscript to passions, and the lowered corners of the mouth bespeak the lack of illusion. Had there been a smile, you could think perhaps of the Buddha; but the Stoics knew too much about physics to toy with the finality of human existence in any fashion. The face shines with the bronze's original gold, but the hair and the beard have oxidized and turned green, the way one turns gray. All thought aspires to the condition of metal; and the bronze denies you any entry, including interpretation or touch. What you've got here, then, is detachment per se. And out of this detachment the Emperor leans toward you slightly, extending his right hand either to greet you or to bless you—which is to say, acknowledge your presence. For where he is, there is no you, and vice versa. The left hand theoretically holds the reins, which

are either missing now or were never there in the first place: a horse would obey this rider no matter what. Especially it it represented Nature. For he represents Reason.

Brodsky notes that the fact that Marcus Aurelius has been so long remembered on horseback plays counterpoint to what the Emperor wrote about the transience of life, and quotes his own translation of Book VII Chapter 23 of *The Meditations*.

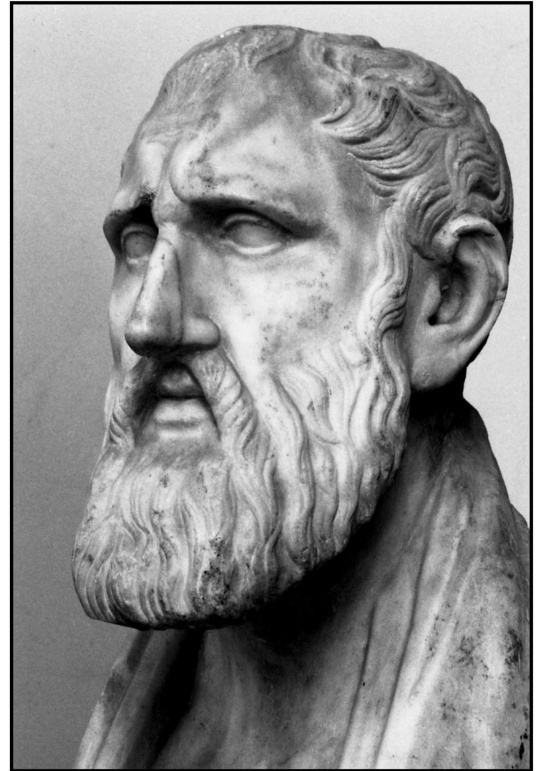
The universal nature out of the universal substance, as if it were wax, now molds the figure of a horse, then melting this down uses the material for a tree, next for a man, next for something else; and each of these things subsists for a very short time. Yet it is no hard-ship for a box to be broken up, as it was none for it to be nailed together.

## **Stoicism**

The success of Marcus Aurelius as an Emperor owed much to his Stoicism. Gibbon (1776, Chapter III) remarked

At the age of twelve years he embraced the rigid system of the Stoics, which taught him to submit his body to his mind, his passions to his reason; to consider virtue as the only good, vice as the only evil, all things external as things indifferent. His meditations, composed in the tumult of the camp, are still extant; and he even condescended to give lessons of philosophy, in a more public manner than was perhaps consistent with the modesty of sage, or the dignity of an emperor. But his life was the noblest commentary on the precepts of Zeno. He was severe to himself, indulgent to the imperfections of others, just and beneficent to all mankind. ... War he detested, as the disgrace and calamity of human nature; but when the necessity of a just defence called upon him to take up arms, he readily exposed his person to eight winter campaigns, on the frozen banks of the Danube, the severity of which was at last fatal to the

weakness of his constitution.



Any understanding of the Emperor's philosophy and writings will require at least some brief acquaintance with Stoicism, the philosophical system initially proposed by philosophers in Athens, most importantly by Zeno of Citium (344-262 BCE). The illustration on the right shows a Roman copy of an Hellenic portrait bust of Zeno, now in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples.

The name derives from the *Stoa poikile* (painted porch) on the Northern edge of the *Agora* (gathering place) in the center of Athens, where Zeno and his followers met to discuss philosophy. Stoicism was one of several schools of philosophy Hellenistic Athens. Epicureanism and Skepticism were others.

Stoicism was mainly concerned with three areas of knowledge: logic, physics and ethics. According to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE, quoted in Inwood & Gerson, p 110)



They compare philosophy to an animal, likening logic to the bones and sinews, ethics to the fleshier parts and physics to the soul. ... Or to a productive field, of which logic is the wall surrounding it, ethics the fruit and physics is the land and trees.

### **a) logic**

The Stoics, particularly Chrysippus of Soli (279-206 BCE) made significant advances in formalizing our logic. Aristotle had given us term (or predicate) logic of the form

All men are mortal  
Socrates is a man  
Therefore Socrates is mortal

The Stoics described the principles of propositional (or statement) logic of which the following syllogisms are examples

If p then q	If p
then q	
Given p	Given
Not q	
Therefore q	
Therefore Not p	
(modus ponens)	(modus
tollens)	

Term logic deals with what things are; propositional logic deals with how things are related. Term logic provides us with classifications and definitions; propositional logic gives us causes and their effects.

### **b) physics**

Stoic studies of logic had shown how the parts of the world were closely connected, and how reason could organize events according to cause and effect. The Stoics then proposed that

the whole universe is pervaded by an intelligence, called *logos* (word, thought, discourse, reason), that arranges everything to ensure the maximum benefit for all its components. The idea of a universe directed toward the good by Providence (from *pro+videre* to foresee) clearly differentiated the Stoics from the Epicureans, who proposed a universe composed of atoms that interact without purpose.

The ideas of the Stoics were later taken up by the early Christians, who proposed that Christ was the physical representation of the *logos*. The Apostle Paul gave a sermon in Athens to an assembly of philosophers, many of them Stoics, relating the new religion to their ideas:

God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

For in him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17: 24-28)

### **c) ethics**

Ethics was the essence of stoicism. Philosophy should be considered as a way of life rather than a body of knowledge. Stoics proposed that we should act in "accord" with Nature – living our lives the way that the *logos* intended us to live, and thereby fulfilling our own human nature. Their goal was not the happiness sought by the Epicureans but the virtue attained by doing good. Nevertheless, virtue brings happiness

(or tranquility) through the knowledge that we are acting our part in the divine purpose of the universe.

The Stoics believed that things of themselves do not cause pain or happiness. These effects occur only if we allow our governing soul to be affected by them. The true stoic would not allow his or her inner self to be upset by pain or carried away by lust. Many have therefore concluded that the Stoic suppresses all emotion, but this is not true. As pointed out by Waterfield (2021, p lii) Stoics can experience three good feelings (*eupatheia*):

Volition (the rational pursuit of something), caution (the rational avoidance of something) and joy (rational elation).

Acting in accord with Nature means that we must do what we can to benefit our fellows. Stoics were drawn to formal public service. In this they once again distinguished themselves from the Epicureans who eschewed politics.

#### **d) Roman Stoicism**

The Romans took to Greek philosophy with enthusiasm. Although the poets were more likely to side with the Epicureans and live only for the moment, those in government found more comfort in Stoicism. They followed the ethics of Stoicism but cared little for the physics. It mattered not whether the universe was purposeful or random, one must still aspire to virtue. Seneca the Younger (4 BCE – 65 CE) wrote

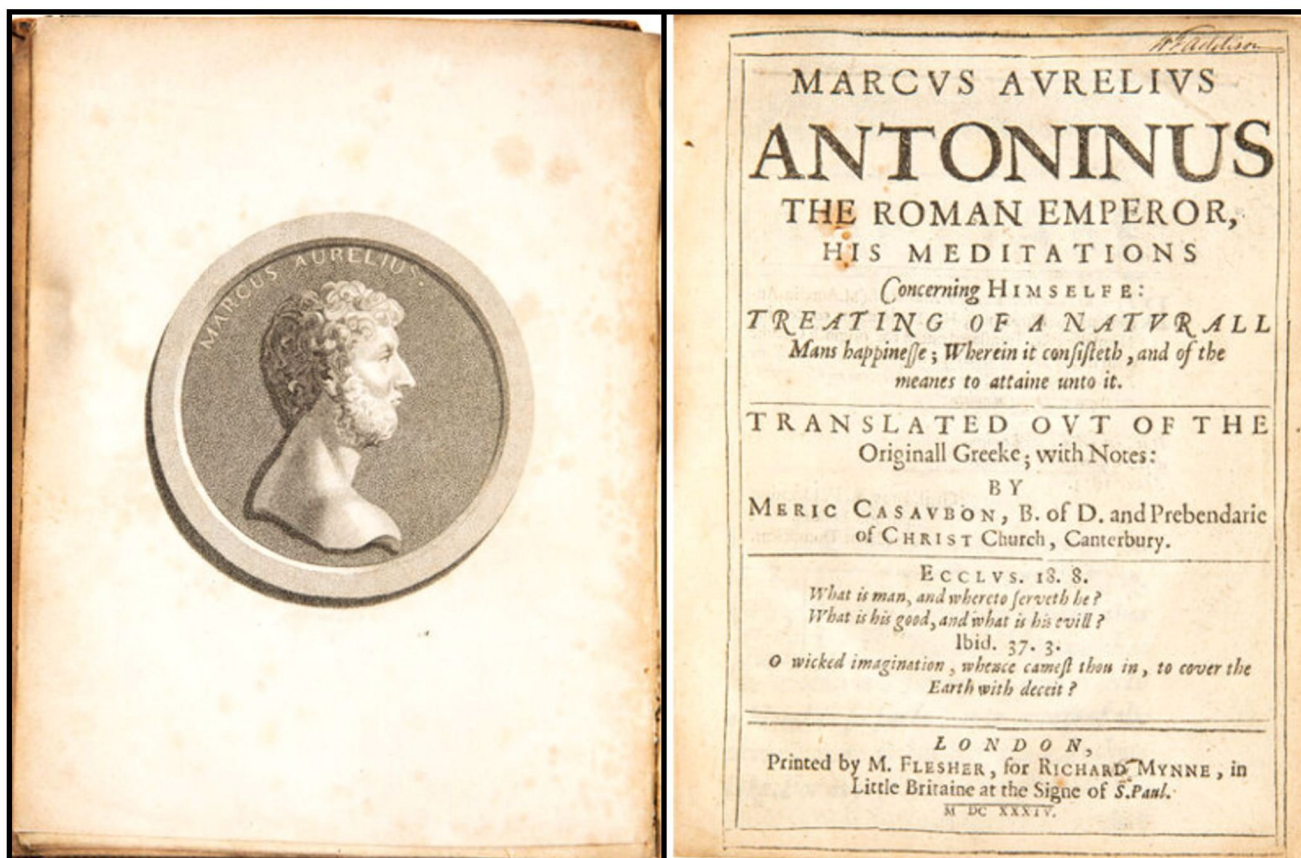
Someone will say, "What use is philosophy to me if there is fate? What use is it if God is in charge? What use, if chance has the mastery? For what is certain cannot be changed, and against what is uncertain there is no way to prepare oneself. Either God has pre-empted my planning and decreed what I should do, or fortune has left nothing for my planning to achieve." No matter which is true, Lucilius, or even if they all are, we must still practice philosophy. Perhaps the inexorable law of fate constrains us; perhaps

God, the universal arbiter, governs all events; perhaps it is chance that drives human affairs, and disrupts them: all the same, it is philosophy that must preserve us. Philosophy will urge us to give willing obedience to God, and but a grudging obedience to fortune. It will teach you to follow God; to cope with chance. (*Letters to Lucilius* 16: 4-5)

### **The *Meditations***

During the last years of his life, Marcus would retire by himself in his army tent near the Danube to contemplate and to write about what he was thinking. As befitting their philosophical nature, these thoughts were written in Greek, even though Marcus was not completely fluent in this language. After his death Marcus' notes were compiled by his secretaries into a book called Τὰ εἰς ἑαυτόν (*Ta Eis Heauton*, "Things to oneself"). Meric Casaubon entitled his translation of the book *Meditations* (1634), and this title has become widely accepted in English German uses *Selbstbetrachtungen*, self-examinations, and French uses the simple *Pensées*, thoughts. The illustration below shows the title page of Casaubon's translation. He uses as an epigraph a quotation from *Ecclesiasticus* 18:8

What is man, and whereto serveth he? What is his good, and what is his evil?



In the first section (Book I) Marcus thanks those who helped him during his life. The next sections (Books II to XII) contain a variety of thoughts, questions, quotations, aphorisms, and longer discussions. Each of these sections is a combination of a diary of his thoughts and a “commonplace book” – a trove of ideas to be evaluated and remembered. The writing has no overall organizing principle, is very repetitious and occasionally contradicts itself. The ideas are easier to read intermittently and randomly rather than in sequence.

The book is not easy to translate. Marcus’ Greek “is not noted for its elegance; it can be crabbed and awkward” (Hard, 2011). His “writing is often concise, occasionally even to the point of being no more than notes and jottings” (Waterfield, 2021). The “expressions are often obscure and he uses awkward and unusual construction” (Staniforth 1964). As an example of the difficulties, we can look at the various translations of the famous first sentence of Book II Chapter 11:

Ὡς ἤδη δυνατοῦ ὄντος ἐξιέναι τοῦ βίου, οὕτως ἕκαστα ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν καὶ διανοεῖσθαι.

However/by

now/mighty/truly/sum/any/life,/therefore/each/action/and/word/and/be minded.

Casaubon (1634): Whatsoever thou dost affect, whatsoever thou dost project, so do, and so project all, as one who, for aught thou knowest, may at this very present depart out of this life.

Long (1862): Since it is possible that you may depart from life this very moment, regulate every act and thought accordingly.

Haines (1916): Let thine every deed and word and thought be those of a man who can depart from life this moment.

Staniforth (1964): In all you do or say or think, recollect that at any time the power of withdrawal from life is in your own hands.

Hard (2011): Let your every action, word and thought be those of one who could depart from life at any moment.

Dewinetz (2019): You could die right now, so act like it.

Waterfield (2021): Everything you do and say and think should be predicated on the possibility of your imminent departure from life.

Other than this famous exhortation to live as if one were about to die, the following are some of the main ideas proposed in *The Meditations*:

### **(i) assent**

The universe is proceeding as it must. The mind must live in accord with the universe, accepting its ends and not worrying



about its means.

Always think of the universe as one living organism, with a single substance and a single soul: and observe how all things are submitted to the single perceptivity of this one whole, all are moved by its single impulse, and all play their part in the causation of every event that happens. Remark the intricacy of the skein, the complexity of the web. (IV: 40, Staniforth)

There are thus two reasons why you should be contented with whatever happens to you. Firstly, that it was for you that it came about, and it was prescribed for you and stands in a special relationship to you as something that was woven into your destiny from the beginning ...and secondly that, for the power which governs the whole that which comes to each of us individually contributes to its own well-being and perfection. (V: 48, Hard)

We are all working together to one end, some with knowledge and design, and others without knowing what they do. (VI: 42, Long)

## **(ii) tranquility**

The person has three parts – the body, the spirit and the mind (or ruling center). The impressions from the world affect the body and activate the spirit. Yet one must not let the mind be ruled by these reflex activations. One must keep oneself beyond the reach of the passions by retreating into the mind and acting only according to reason:

Be like a headland: the waves beat against it continuously, but it stands fast and around it the boiling water dies down. (IV: 49, Waterfield)

An intelligence free of passions is a mighty citadel, for man has no stronghold more secure to which he can retreat. (VIII: 48, Hard)

### **(iii) benevolence**

One should help others as best one can.

That which is not in the interests of the hive cannot be in the interests of the bee (VI: 53, Haines)

Men exist for the sake of one another. Teach them or bear with them. (VIII: 59, Long).

Precisely because you personally are part of the whole that is the body politic, every one of your actions should contribute to a life the purpose of which is to improve society (IX: 23, Waterfield)

First, never act without plan and purpose. Second, set your sights on no other goal but the common good. (XII: 20, Waterfield)

### **Epilogue**

Throughout *The Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius insists that his own life was but a tiny moment in the life of the universe and that he would not be remembered beyond his death:

Soon you will have forgotten the world, and soon the world will have forgotten you (VII;21, Staniforth).

Keep all time and all being constantly before your mind, and see that, in terms of being, every individual thing is no more than a fig seed, and in terms of time no more than a twist of a drill (X: 17, Waterfield)

Despite these comments, Marcus Aurelius has been remembered and revered for almost two millennia. I shall complete the post with a longer quotation from *The Meditations* about the passage of time, and with a photograph of the one of his best-preserved portrait busts, now in the Musée Saint-Raymond in Toulouse.



A person's lifetime is a moment, his existence a flowing

stream, his perception dull, the entire fabric of his body readily subject to decay, his soul an aimless wanderer, his fortune erratic, his fame uncertain. In short: the body is nothing but a river; the soul is dream and delusion; life is war and a sojourn in a strange land; and oblivion is all there is to posthumous fame. What, then, can escort us safely on our way? Only one thing: philosophy. This consists in keeping the guardian spirit within us safe from assault and harm, never swayed by pleasure or pain, purposeful when it acts, free from dishonesty or dissemblance, and never dependent on action or inaction from anyone else. It also consists in accepting what happens, the lot one has been assigned, as coming from the same source as oneself, and in always awaiting death with a serene mind, understanding that it's no more than the disintegration of the elements of which every living creature is a compound. If there's nothing unusual in the elements themselves changing moment by moment one into another, why should the alteration and disintegration of them all be a cause for anxiety? It's in accord with nature, and nothing that's in accord with nature is bad. Book II:17 (Waterfield, 2021)

## **Translations of the *Meditations***

The original Greek is available at the Perseus Website.

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# Michelangelo: The Late Pietàs

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

## The Deposition

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

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

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

Two ladders are placed on opposite sides of the cross.

Joseph ascends the ladder placed on the right side and tries to extract the nail from His hand. But this is difficult, because the long, heavy nail is fixed firmly into the wood; and it does not seem possible to do it without great pressure on the hand of the Lord. Yet it is not brutal, because he acts faithfully; and the Lord accepts everything. The nail pulled out. John makes a sign to Joseph to extend the said nail to him, that the Lady might not see it. Afterwards Nicodemus extracts the other nail from the left hand and similarly gives it to John. Nicodemus descends and comes to the nail in the feet. Joseph supported the body of the Lord: happy indeed is this Joseph, who deserves thus to embrace the body of the Lord! Then the Lady reverently receives the hanging right hand and places it against her cheek, gazes upon it and kisses it with heavy tears and sorrowful sighs. The nail in the feet pulled out, Joseph descends part way, and all receive the body of the Lord and place it on the ground. The Lady supports the head and shoulders in her lap, the Magdalen the feet at which she had formerly found so much grace. (translation Ragusa & Green, 1961).

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



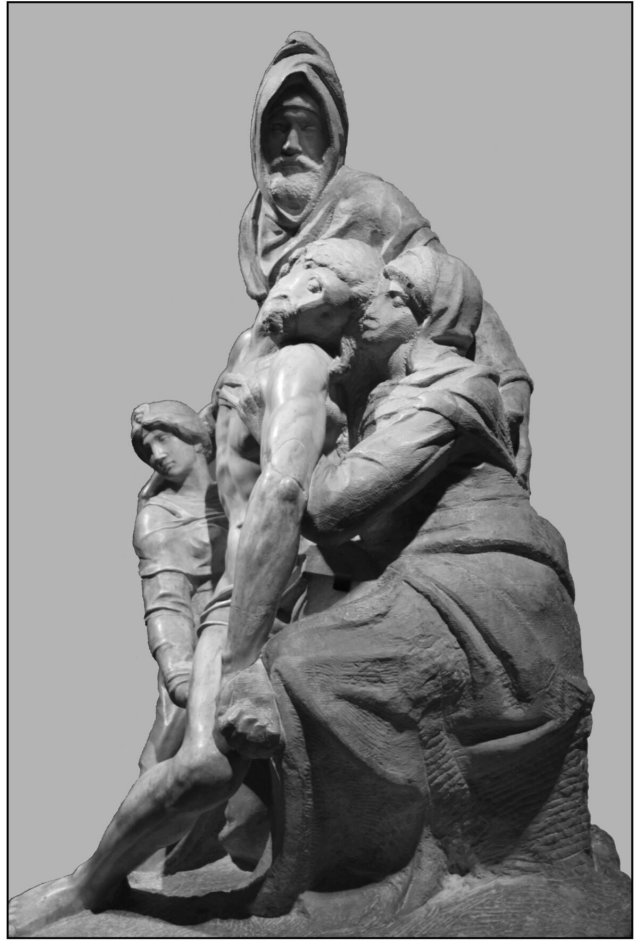
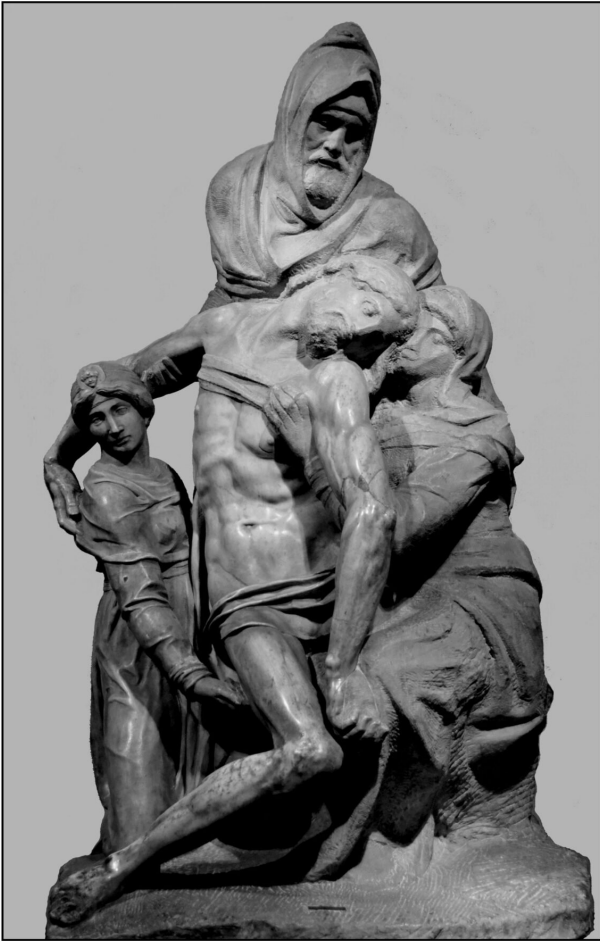
## The Florentine Pietà

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

The spirit and genius of Michelangelo could not remain idle; and so, since he was unable to paint, he set to work on a

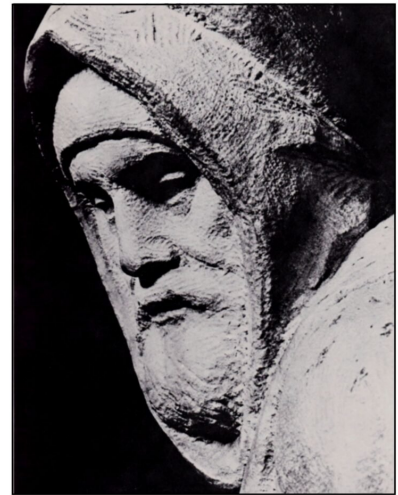
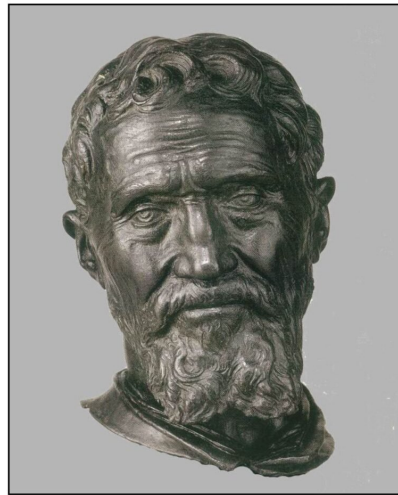
piece of marble, intending to carve four figures in the round and larger than life-size (including a dead Christ) to amuse and occupy himself and also, as he used to say himself, because using the hammer kept his body healthy. This Christ, taken down from the cross, is supported by Our Lady, by Nicodemus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

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



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





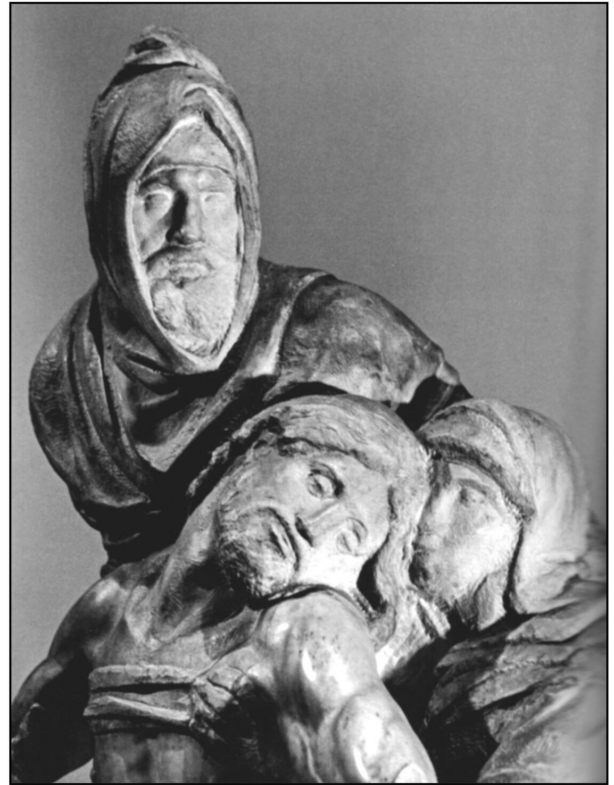
Michelangelo worked on the sculpture for several years, but could not make it conform to what he envisioned. The first problem was with Christ's right leg, which was meant to rest on the lap of the Virgin Mary. The leg did not sit right. Exasperated, he broke the leg off. A later wax model of the sculpture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





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

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



## The Rondini Pietà



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

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



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

Irving Stone (1961) imagines:

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

Christ he converted into the left arm and hand of the Virgin. Christ's magnificent long legs were now out of proportion, constituting three fifths of the entire body. The new attenuation created an emotional effect of limpidity, youth and grace. Now he began to be satisfied. Through the distortion of the elongated figure he felt that he had achieved a truth about man: the heart might tire but humanity, carried on its ever-young legs, would continue to move across the face of the earth.

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



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

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

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

## The Poetry

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

Molto diletta al gusto intero e sano  
l'opra della prim'arte, che n'assembra  
i volti e gli atti, e con più vive membra,  
di cera o terra o pietra un corp' umano.

Se po' 'l tempo ingiurioso, aspro e villano<sup>5</sup>  
la rompe o storce o del tutto dismembra,  
la beltà che prim'era si rimembra,  
e serba a miglior loco il piacer vano.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



yet happy, if I am now approaching a double death? Of one I am quite certain, and the other threatens me.

Neither painting nor sculpting can any longer quieten my soul, turned now to that divine love which on the cross, to embrace us, opened wide its arms. (# 285, translation, Ryan, 1996)

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

### ***Non Finito***

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



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

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

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

Se 'l mie rozzo martello i duri sassi  
forma d'uman aspetto or questo or quello,  
dal ministro che 'l guida, iscorge e tiello,  
prendendo il moto, va con gli altrui passi.

Ma quel divin che in cielo alberga e stassi,<sup>5</sup>  
altri, e sé più, col propio andar fa bello;  
e se nessun martel senza martello  
si può far, da quel vivo ogni altro fassi.

E perché 'l colpo è di valor più pieno  
quant'alza più se stesso alla fucina,<sup>10</sup>  
sopra 'l mie questo al ciel n'è gito a volo.

Onde a me non finito verràà meno,  
s'or non gli dà la fabbrica divina  
aiuto a farlo, c'al mondo era solo.

If my rough hammer, in shaping the hard stones into the form of this or that human appearance, derives its motion from the master who guides, directs and sustains it, then it moves as another would have it do.

But that divine hammer, which lodges and abides in heaven, with its own movement makes others beautiful, and all the more itself; and if no hammer can be made without a hammer,

then every other hammer is made from that living one.

And since every blow is of greater strength the higher the hammer is raised at the forge, this one has flown to heaven above mine.

So mine will remain unfinished for me, if the divine smith will not now give help to make it to him who was on earth my only help. (# 46, translation, Ryan, 1996)

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

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

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

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

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

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

human transcendence.

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## Short Day with Sound

As I stated in my pre-Christmas post about *On this Short Day of Frost and Sun*, I have made a copy of the file with embedded sounds. For each of the poems, there is a recitation, often by the author of the poem. While inserting the soundfiles, I also corrected a few typographical errors in the original pdf.

The resultant pdf file is very large – 588 KB. Because of its size it is only available on my google drive:

On this Short Day of Frost and Sun Text and Sound version 1.0

I have not been able to download the file on my phone, and I think that it would be too complicated to operate on a phone or a simple tablet. It should be downloaded onto a computer. Your browser may complain that the file is too large to check for viruses, but that you can “download anyway.” There are no viruses in the file.

Once you have downloaded the file to your computer, it should be opened using Adobe Acrobat Reader (free to download.) If the file is opened in other pdf-reading programs, the file will either be rejected as too large, or the sound files won't work. For example, Google may automatically try to read the file using its Google-Doc programs but this will not work.

In order to listen to the embedded sound files, you must set up the Adobe Reader to play multimedia files. To do this follow these steps:

**Edit > Preferences (bottom) > Multimedia & 3D (in menu)> tick box for Enable Playing of Multimedia & 3D content (topmost box).**

Like its soundless cousin, the file is best viewed using a full-screen two-page viewing mode. To set this up in Adobe follow these steps:

**View > Page Display > Two Page View**

This is a screen-shot of what it looks like when it works.



Judith  
Anderson



### Divinely Superfluous Beauty

The storm-dances of gulls, the barking game of seals,  
Over and under the ocean...  
Divinely superfluous beauty  
Rules the games, presides over destinies, makes trees grow  
And hills tower, waves fall  
The incredible beauty of joy  
Starts with fire the joining of lips, O let our loves too  
Be joined, there is not a maiden  
Burns and thirsts for love  
More than my blood for you, by the shore of seals while the wings  
Weave like a web in the air  
Divinely superfluous beauty.

Robinson Jeffers, 1924

Auden



### Musée des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forget  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse  
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.  
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

W. H. Auden, 1939

73

### Divinely Superfluous Beauty

Robinson Jeffers lived most of his adult life in Carmel, California, where he and a stone-mason built Tor House on Carmel Point. He and his wife Una lived there for the rest of their lives. From the house and the adjacent Hawk Tower, they could watch the waves and listen to the seals.

The poem's rhythm is irregular and there is no rhyme. Long lines alternate with pairs of shorter lines. The final image of the flying seagulls – "while the wings weave like a web in the air divinely superfluous beauty" – sums up the poet's response to nature: there is no need for it to be so beautiful, and yet it is.

### Musée des Beaux Arts

Auden and Isherwood visited Brussels at the end of December 1938, just before they emigrated to America. At the *Musée des Beaux Arts*, Auden was struck by the paintings of Pieter Brueghel the Elder.

In this poem he describes details from three of the paintings. *The Massacre of the Innocents* shows Herod's soldiers murdering the babies of Bethlehem, while dogs play and a horse scratches his head against a tree ("behind" sounds better). *The Census at Bethlehem* shows Joseph and Mary arriving at the inn amidst all the activity in a Flemish winter village, such as the children skating on the frozen pond. Finally, in *The Fall of Icarus*, the amazing event of a boy falling out of the sky and disappearing into the water is portrayed as a minor detail in the lower right of the painting. Everything



else goes on as if nothing had happened. This is the message of the poem. Monumentous happenings and great disasters occur, but life goes on as if they had not. This response may appear cold and cruel but is, in fact, an affirmation that human beings will survive come what may.

The poem uses lines of irregular length and variable rhythm. Every line except one ("place") rhymes with another line but there is no definite rhyme scheme. Despite its irregularities, the poem sails calmly on.

73

# On this Short Day

One of my most pleasant pastimes is reading poetry. For several years now, I have been putting together a collection of poems that I have enjoyed at various times in my life, and I have added some comments about each of them.



The Poet, Picasso, 1911

I realize that most people do not read poetry. However, on the off-chance that you might like it, the anthology is available in pdf format by clicking on the link below. Once the file is opened you can save it to your own device.

On this short day of frost and sun Text 1.1

Although the pdf can be read by any pdf reader, it is probably best looked at two-pages at a time (like a book) using Adobe Acrobat Reader DC (free) and a relatively large screen. To do this, follow the instructions given at the beginning of the book. Adobe also allows you to search for particular poems by title or by author.

As noted in the preface, I also have sound-files containing recitations of all the poems, many by the authors, themselves. Early in the new year I shall find some way of embedding these in a larger "text and sound" pdf.