

# Knowledge of Good and Evil

According to the book of Genesis, Yahweh created Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden. He commanded them on pain of death not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. However, Eve was convinced by the Serpent to eat of the tree, and she in turn convinced Adam to do the same. For their disobedience, Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. The interpretation of this myth has led to the Christian idea that humanity is forever tainted by "Original Sin," and that our only hope for immortality is through the sacrifice of Christ which offers redemption from sin and entry into eternity to those who believe in him. The concept of Original Sin has become dangerously ingrained in Christian thinking, and needs reworking,

## The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

The book of Genesis contains two narratives of the creation. In the second (*Genesis* 2:4-25), attributed to a writer/editor called *J* (Rosenberg & Bloom, 1990), Yahweh created Adam by breathing into a lump of earth, and placed him in a garden in Eden. He then grew the trees of the garden:

And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (*Genesis* 2: 9)

Yahweh enjoined Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat  
But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (*Genesis* 2: 16-17)

J then tells how God created Eve as a companion for Adam, and narrates the story of man's fall from innocence (*Genesis* 3: 1-24). Eve was asked by the Serpent whether she and Adam must not eat from any of the trees of Eden:

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (*Genesis* 3: 2-3)

The Serpent convinces her that eating of the Tree of Knowledge would actually open her eyes to the divine knowledge of good and evil. The interaction between Eve and the Serpent is the subject of many paintings, among which is the tempera painting of William Blake (1800) in the Victoria and Albert Museum. This and the subsequent illustrations are derived from the Blake Archive:





Eve ate the fruit and gave some to Adam who likewise ate. Yahweh quickly realized how Adam and Eve had disobeyed him.

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (*Genesis* 3: 22-24)

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden is depicted in an 1808 watercolor by William Blake which was to illustrate the ending of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674). In this telling of the story, the archangel Michael leads Adam and Eve out of Paradise:



For now, too nigh  
The Arch-Angel stood; and, from the other hill  
To their fixed station, all in bright array



The Cherubim descended; on the ground  
Gliding meteorous, as evening-mist  
Risen from a river o'er the marish glides,  
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel  
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,  
The brandished sword of God before them blazed,  
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,  
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,  
Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat  
In either hand the hastening Angel caught  
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate  
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast  
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.  
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms:  
Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Though Milton's words portray the gravity of what has happened to Adam and Eve, they are also touched with hope. They had each other; their eyes were open; they could learn to survive; perhaps they might even thrive. The world was all before them.

The story of Adam and Eve and how they disobeyed Yahweh's commandment not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has been retold again and again in the years since it was first written down in Judeo-Christian scripture (Greenblatt, 2017). In the Christian world it led to the idea of "Original Sin" (Boyce, 2015): because of the transgression of Adam and Eve, all human beings are doomed to die, unless they accept Christ as their savior.

## **One or Two Trees?**

Yahweh's prohibition and Eve's words to the Serpent suggest that there is only one special tree in the garden: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. One is therefore tempted to re-examine the first mention of the two trees. The conjunction between them may be translated both as "and" and as "that is to say". Thus, the Tree of Life, may just be another name for the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and *Genesis* 2:9 might read

the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, that is to say, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

However, when Yahweh condemned Adam and Eve for their transgression, he did so lest they also partake of the Tree of Life and become immortal. Those supporting the existence of only one special tree in Eden have suggested that perhaps the word translated as "also" might actually mean "again." The issues about one or two trees have been discussed by Makowiecki (2021) and Zevelt (2013, Chapter 7).

My preferred interpretation is that there is only one special tree, that eating of that tree opens the mind to knowledge, and that, if our knowledge becomes great enough, we might somehow become immortal.

## **Good and Evil**

The phrase "good and evil" needs two important explications. The first is that it is an example of a merism, "a figure of speech in which opposite extremes imply everything between them" (Robinson, 2024, p 77). When we say that we searched "high and low" we mean that we searched everywhere. The Bible makes frequent use of the device: the expression "heavens and the earth" (*Genesis* 1:1) includes everything between; "evening and morning" (*Genesis* 1:5) means the whole day (including afternoon and night); "alpha and omega" (*Revelations* 22: 13) means the complete alphabet of existence. Thus, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the tree of all knowledge



characterized by the extremes of good and evil.

The second point of explication concerns the word translated as “evil.” The original Hebrew word can mean both “bad” and “evil” (Kass, 2003, p 63, see also Speiser, 1964, and Rosenberg & Bloom, 1990). Both are value judgements. However, we often conceive of “evil” as pain and suffering that is intentionally rather than naturally caused. Thus, though murder is considered evil, an earthquake is not. However, this distinction becomes fuzzy if we believe the natural world to be controlled by divine intentions. Arnold (2008, p 64) points out that God created both good and evil. In the words of God proclaimed through his prophet Isaiah:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. (*Isaiah*, 45: 7)

According to our definitions of “evil” and “bad,” knowledge of good and bad could then refer to everything, whereas knowledge of good and evil is primarily concerned with moral judgements (Hartmann, 2002, Chapter V; Laird, 2014, Chapter V). I much prefer to interpret the story of Eden in the latter sense. A moral judgement combines an assessment of what we perceive with a decision about what we should do in the light of the predicted consequences. Morality requires a consciousness of a self that can control one’s actions, or in religious terms, a soul that has free will. The very act of disobeying is an exercise of such free will.

When the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened by the knowledge of good and evil, the first thing that they noted was their shame at being naked. This combines self-consciousness with the idea that one should not unnecessarily incite the lust of others.

Kass (2004, p 68) sums up his discussion of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad:

The knowledge prohibited is autonomous knowledge of how to live, found in or procured from one’s own garden (nature),

based on human experience of the visible world. The opposite of obedience, it is the kind of knowledge that is implicit in the act of violating a prohibition, indeed, in any act of choosing for oneself.

He goes on to say that this knowledge may not be sufficient for us to behave as we should. We also require rules such as the Ten Commandments to instruct us how to live:

But this autonomous knowledge of good and bad is not true knowledge of good and bad; human beings on their own will not find true knowledge of how to live. This must be supplied by what is later called revelation.

I find myself agreeing with his initial statements and disagreeing with those that follow. The commandments were not miraculously revealed to us by Moses: that story is as mythical as the story of Eden. Rather these rules were proposed on the basis of how human beings had learned to live with each other.

## **Original Sin**

Though it is not directly discussed in the Bible, Talmudic and Christian interpretations of the disobedience of Adam and Eve led to the idea that all their descendants were afflicted with their Original Sin and that this explains our mortality and our suffering (Boyce, 2015; Greenblatt, 2017, Chapters 5 and 6; Zevit, 2013, Chapter 1). The apostle Paul wrote

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (*Romans* 5: 12)

Paul proclaimed that Christ died to save us from this fate, and that belief in him can lead to eternal life. Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was the great champion of Original Sin. He argued against the teachings of an English theologian Pelagius (354-413 CE), who proposed that human beings are not born



innately sinful, but rather free to choose between good and evil:

Day by day, hour by hour, we have to reach decisions; and in each decision, we can choose good or evil. The freedom to choose makes us like God: if we choose evil, that freedom becomes a curse; if we choose good, it becomes our greatest blessing.

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge they were exercising their freedom of choice ... Before eating the fruit they did not know the difference between good and evil; thus they did not possess the knowledge which enables human beings to exercise freedom of choice. By eating the fruit they acquired this knowledge, and from that moment onwards they were free. Thus the story of their banishment from Eden is in truth the story of how the human race gained its freedom: by eating fruit from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve became mature human beings, responsible to God for their actions. (both quotations from Pelagius are in Boyce, 2015, p 15)

The story of Eden can thus be interpreted as Adam and Eve deciding not to remain in blissful innocence. They could have stayed in the garden, obeyed Yahweh's commandment and led a life of simplicity and comfort. Instead, by eating of the tree of knowledge they gained insight into the complexities of a life independent of Yahweh's care, a life wherein they made their own decisions rather than just accepting what Yahweh commanded. Their act of disobedience was an assertion of their freedom.

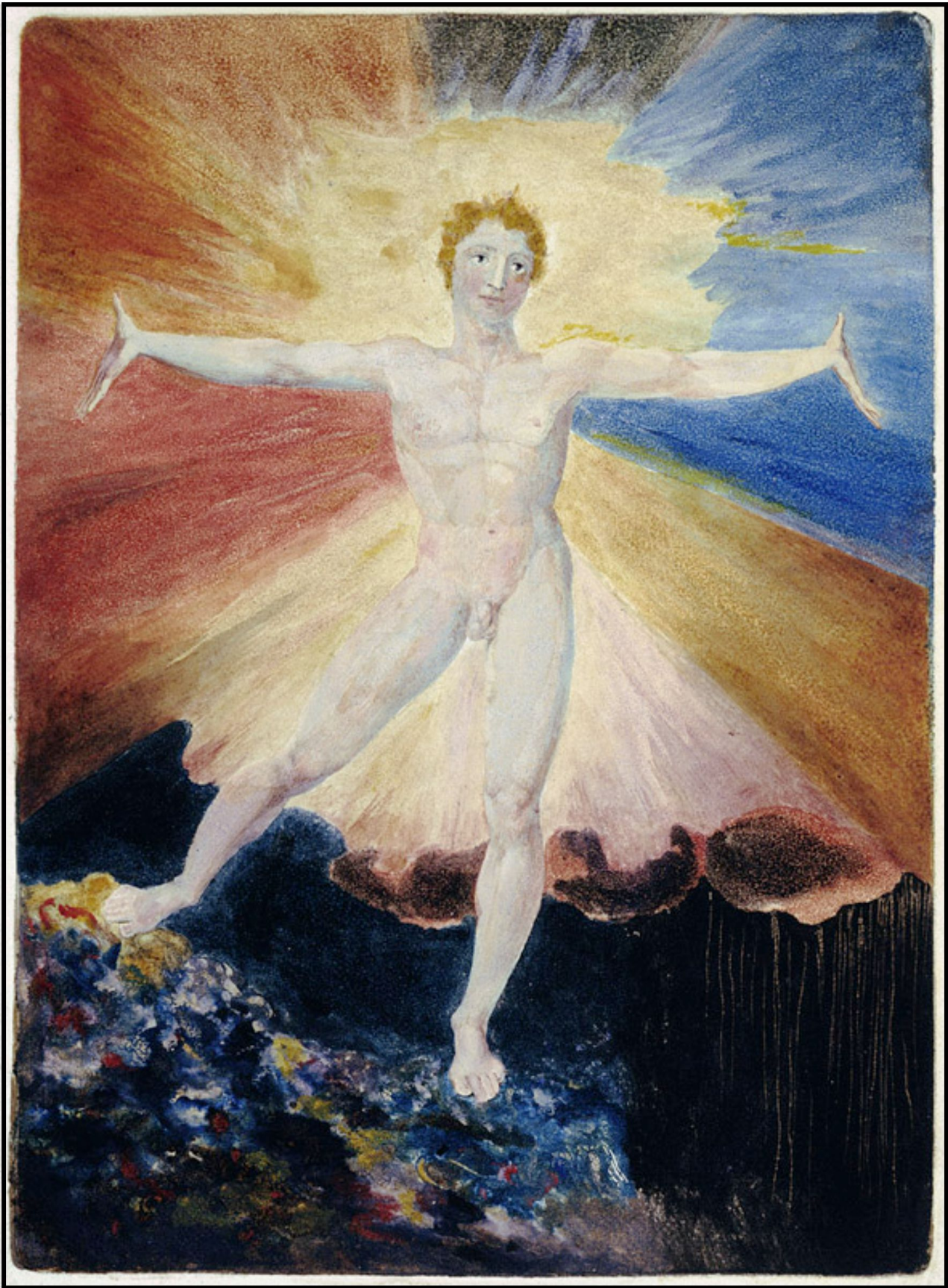
However, Augustine prevailed over Pelagius. At the Synod of Carthage (418CE), Original Sin became one of the essential doctrines of the Christian Church (Denzinger, 2012, p 223). This was unfortunate. Thinking of humanity as being free to choose, as being able to learn to do what is good, is far more productive than simply considering humanity as doomed to die.

## Freedom to Choose

The story of Adam and Eve is not a realistic story of human origins. However, myths often contain true ideas about human nature. During our evolution, human beings gained a special kind of knowledge. We became conscious of ourselves as beings able to decide freely among possible actions on the basis of the good or evil these actions might entail. We also learned that with freedom comes responsibility. We must not act just for our own good but also for the good of others.

On this note I would like to conclude with a third image from the work of William Blake: *Rose Albion* (1795). We do not know exactly what Blake was depicting. A common interpretation is that the image represents man (or more specifically, England) freed from the shackles of materialism. It might also represent the more general idea of humanity as free to choose.





References

- Alter, Robert. (2004). *The five books of Moses: a translation with commentary*. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Arnold, B. T. (2009). *Genesis*. Cambridge University Press (The New Cambridge Bible Commentary).
- Boyce, J. (2015). *Born bad: original sin and the making of the Western world*. Counterpoint Press.
- Denzinger, H. (2012). *Compendium of creeds, definitions, and declarations on matters of faith and morals* (P. Hünermann, H. Hoping, R. L. Fastiggi, & A. E. Nash, Eds.; 43rd ed.). Ignatius Press.
- Greenblatt, S. (2017). *The rise and fall of Adam and Eve*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Hartmann, N. (1932, reprinted 2002) *Moral Phenomena*. Transaction Publishers.
- Kass, Leon. (2003). *The beginning of wisdom: reading Genesis*. Free Press.
- Laird, J. (2014). *A study in moral theory*. Routledge.
- Makowiecki, M. (2021). Untangled branches: the Edenic tree(s) and the multivocal WAW. *Journal of Theological Studies*, 71(2), 441–457.
- Robinson, M. (2024). *Reading Genesis*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Rosenberg, J., & Bloom, H. (1990). *The book of J*. Grove Weidenfeld.
- Speiser, E. A. (1964). *Genesis: introduction, translation, and notes*. Doubleday (Anchor Bible).
- Zevit, Z. (2013). *What really happened in the Garden of Eden?* Yale University Press.

---

# Du Fu: Poet, Sage, Historian

## Du Fu: Poet, Sage, Historian

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

## Failing the Examinations

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



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

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

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



allowed him to marry and raise a small family.

## Taishan



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

望嶽

wàng yuè

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

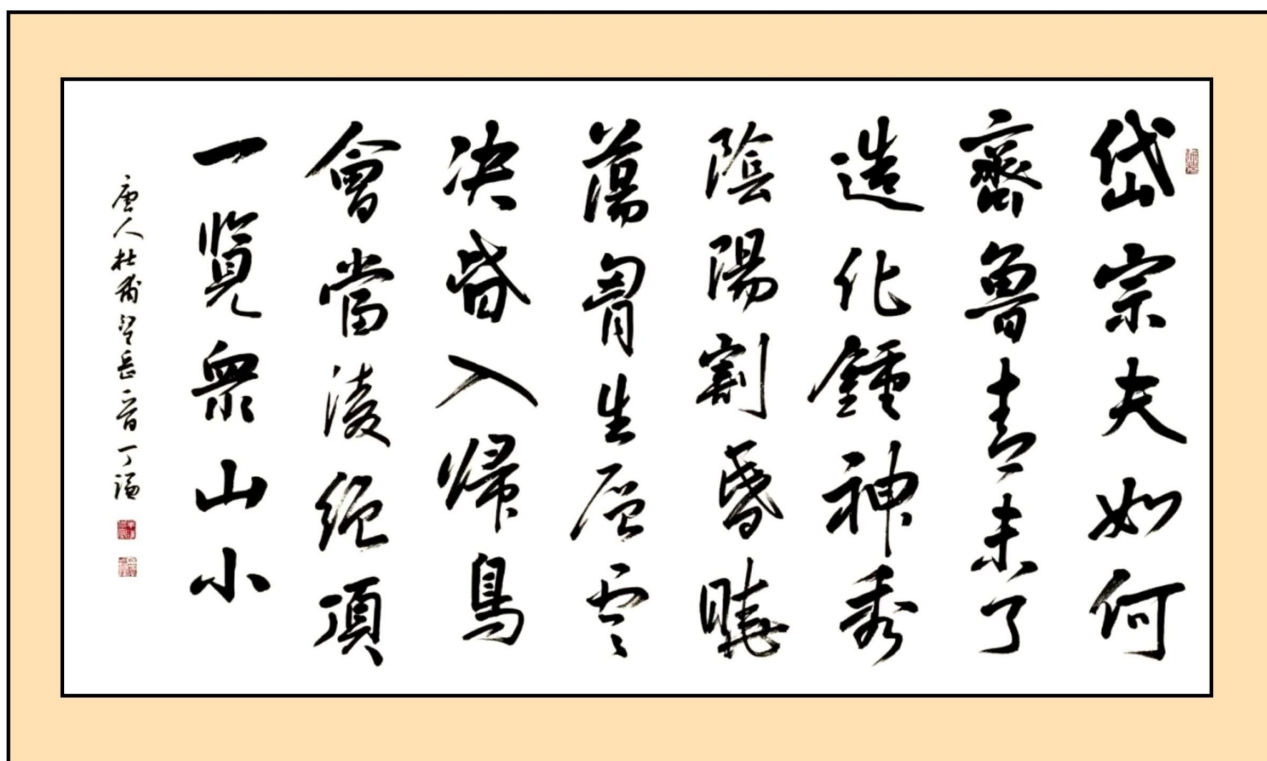
dài zōng fū rú hé  
qí lǚ qīng wèi liǎo  
zào huà zhōng shén xiù  
yīn yáng gē hūn xiǎo  
dàng xiōng shēng céng yún  
jué zì rù guī niǎo  
huì dāng líng jué dǐng  
yī lǎn zhòng shān xiǎo

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

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

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





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

gaze/behold      mountain

*Daizong* (ancient name for Taishan)      then  
like      what

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

create      change      concentrate      divine      beauty

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

cleave      dusk      dawn

heave      chest      birth      layer      cloud

burst      eye      enter      return      bird

soon      when      reach      extreme      summit

one      glance      all      mountain      small.

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

Gazing on the Peak

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



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

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

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

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

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

### **Zhang’s Hermitage**

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

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

題張氏隱居

tí zhāng shì yǐn jū

春山無伴獨相求

chūn shān wú bàn dú xiāng qiú

伐木丁丁山更幽。

fá mù dīng dīng shān gēng yōu

澗道餘寒歷冰雪，

jiàn dào yú hán lì bīng xuě

石門斜日到林丘。

shí mén xié rì dào lín qiū

不貪夜識金銀氣，

bù tān yè shí jīn yín qì

遠害朝看麋鹿遊。

yuǎn hài zhāo kàn mí lù yóu

乘興杳然迷出處，

chéng xīng yǎo rán mí chū chǔ

對君疑是泛虛舟。

duì jūn yí shì fàn xū zhōu

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

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

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

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

Written on the Wall at Chang's Hermitage

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

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

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

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





澗道餘寒歷冰雪  
石門斜日到林止

乙巳臘月寫

少陵詩意十

二幀似

旭成賢甥時年

七十有四時敘





## The An Lushan Rebellion

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

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



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

## Moonlit Night

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

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

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

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

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

### Moonlit Night

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

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

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

[https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/06-Songs-In-Time-of-War\\_-Moonlit-Nig.mp3](https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/06-Songs-In-Time-of-War_-Moonlit-Nig.mp3)

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

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

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



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

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

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

## Spring View

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

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

The following is a reading of the poem from the website



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

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

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

國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺淚  
恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵萬金  
白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪

乙酉春尾 姜裕緒書於亞城



國破山河在城春草木深感時花濺淚  
恨別鳥驚心烽火連三月家書抵萬金  
白頭搔更短渾欲不勝簪

杜甫春望 辛丑臘月五心銘



國破山河在  
城春草木深  
感時花濺淚  
恨別鳥驚心  
烽火連三月  
家書抵萬金  
白頭搔更短  
渾欲不勝簪

杜甫春望  
歲次壬子  
無道書



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The second couplet has been interpreted in different ways.

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

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

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

### **The Thatched Cottage**

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







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

糝徑楊花鋪白氈，  
點溪荷葉疊青錢。  
筍根雉子無人見，  
沙上鳬雛傍母眠。

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

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

The following translation is by Burton Watson (2002):

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

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

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

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

yáng  
(willow)

楊

楊

楊

杨

Bronze  
Inscription

Seal  
Script

Traditional

Simplified

fú  
(duck)

𪇧

𪇧

鳬

鳬

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

江動月移石，  
 溪虛雲傍花。  
 鳥棲知故道，  
 帆過宿誰家。

jiāng dòng yuè yí shí  
 xī xū yún bàng huā  
 niǎo qī zhī gù dào  
 fān guò sù shuí jiā

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

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

1987):

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

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

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

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

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



江動月移石溪虛雲傍花鳥樓知  
故道帆過宿誰家  
桂林 同源書

### Above the Gorges

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

請看石上藤蘿月  
已映洲前蘆花





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

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

A character-by-character translation is:

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

The following is Stephen Owen's translation:

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

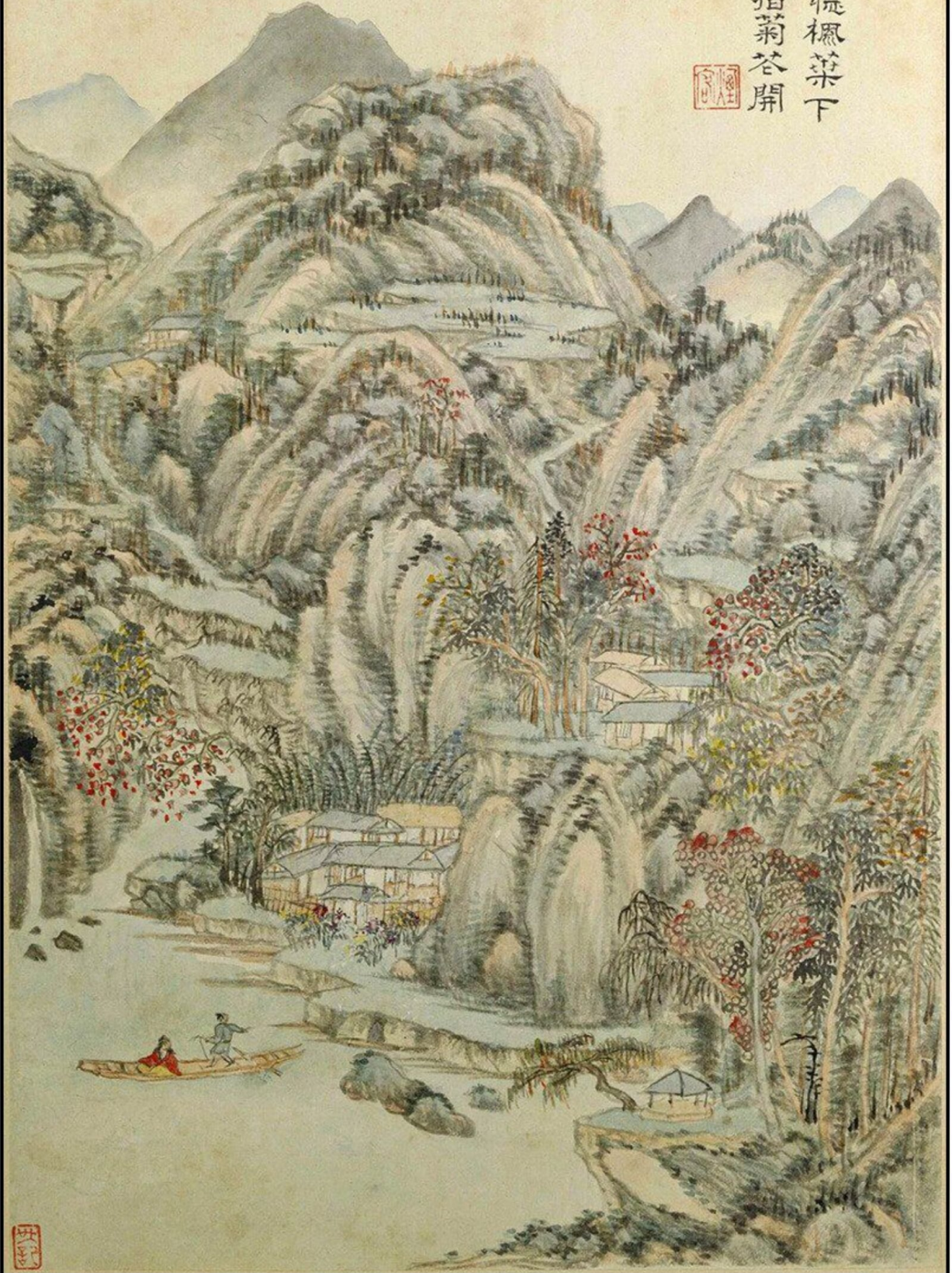
Where rocks came out, from below you listened to the leaves  
of maples falling,  
as the sweep moved back and forth you pointed behind to  
chrysanthemums in bloom.

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

the wild and the cultivated.



石出倒懸楓葉下  
櫓搖背指菊苔開



## On the River

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

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

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

The following is a reading of the poem from Librivox:

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

Holyoak (2015) provides a rhymed translation:

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

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

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

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

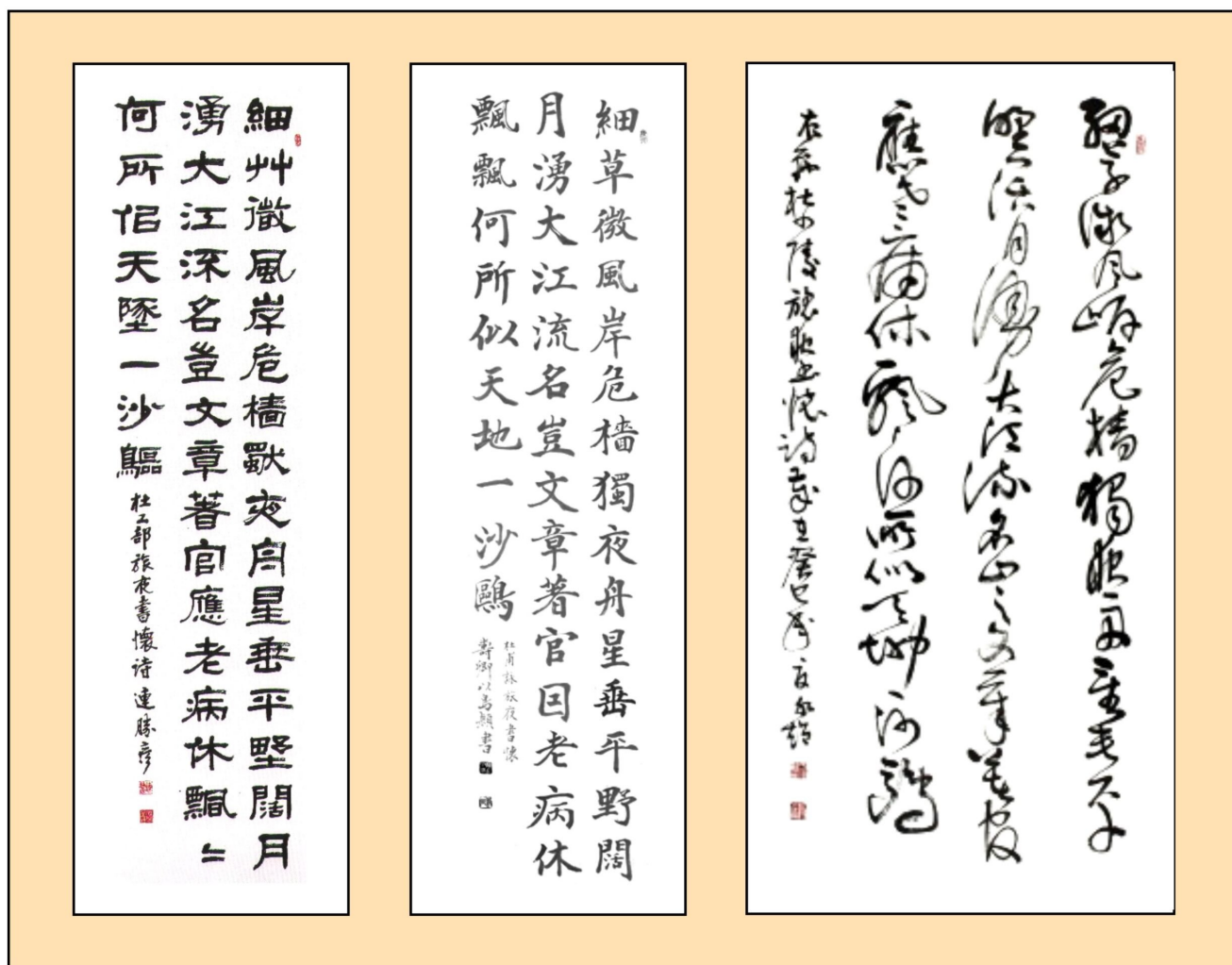
Kenneth Rexroth (1956) translates the poem in free verse:

#### Night Thoughts While Travelling

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

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





## Changing Times

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

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

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

## precepts of Confucianism:

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

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

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

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



## References

- Alexander, M. (2008). *A little book of Du Fu*. Mark Alexander. (Much of the material in the book is available on Chinese Poems website).
- Bender, L. R. (2021). *Du Fu transforms: tradition and ethics amid societal collapse*. Harvard University Asia Center.
- Chan, J. W. (2018). Du Fu: the poet as historian. In Zong-Qi Cai. (Ed.) *How to read Chinese poetry in context: poetic culture from antiquity through the Tang*. (pp 236-247). Columbia University Press.
- Chou, E. S. (1995). *Reconsidering Tu Fu: literary greatness and cultural context*. Cambridge University Press.
- Collet, H., & Cheng, W. (2014). *Tu Fu: Dieux et diables pleurant, poèmes*. Moundarren.
- Cooper, A. R. V. (1973). *Li Po and Tu Fu*. Penguin Books.
- Egan, R. (2020). Ming-Qing paintings inscribed with Du Fu's poetic lines. In Xiaofei Tian (Ed.). *Reading Du Fu: nine views*. (pp 129-142). Hong Kong University Press
- Hawkes, D. (1967 revised and reprinted, 2016). *A little primer of Tu Fu*. New York Review of Books.
- Hinton, D. (1989, expanded and revised 2020a). *The selected poems of Tu Fu*. New Directions.
- Hinton, D. (2019). *Awakened cosmos: the mind of classical Chinese poetry*. Shambhala.
- Hinton, D. (2020b). *China root: Taoism, Ch'an, and original Zen*. Shambhala
- Holyoak, K. (2015). *Facing the moon: poems of Li Bai and Du*

Fu. Oyster River Press.

Hsieh, D. (1994). Du Fu's "Gazing at the Mountain." *Chinese Literature, Essays, Articles, Reviews*, 16, 1–18.

Hung, W. (1952, reprinted 2014). *Tu Fu: China's Greatest Poet*. Harvard University Press

Owen, S. (1981). Tu Fu. In S. Owen, *The Great Age of Chinese Poetry: The High T'ang*. (pp 183-224). Yale University.

Owen, S. (2010). The cultural Tang (650–1020). In Chang, K. S., & Owen, S. (Eds). *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* (Vol. 1, pp. 286–380). Cambridge University Press.

Owen, S., (edited by P. W. Kroll & D. X. Warner, 2016). *The poetry of Du Fu*. (6 volumes). De Gruyter. (Available to download in pdf format.)

Rexroth, K. (1956). *One hundred poems from the Chinese*. New Directions.

Rouzer, P. (2020). Refuges and refugees: how Du Fu writes Buddhism. In Xiaofei Tian (Ed.). *Reading Du Fu: nine views*. (pp. 75-92). Hong Kong University Press.

Seaton, J. P., & Cryer, J. (with calligraphy by Mo Ji-yu, and painting by Huang Yon-hou, 1987). *Bright moon, perching bird: poems of Li Po and Tu Fu*. Wesleyan University Press.

Seth, V. (1997). *Three Chinese poets: translations of poems by Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu*. Phoenix.

Sullivan, M. (1974). *The three perfections: Chinese painting, poetry, and calligraphy*. Thames and Hudson.

Xiaofei Tian (Ed.). (2020). *Reading Du Fu: nine views*. Hong Kong University Press.

Zhang, Y. (2018). On 10 Chan-Buddhism images in the poetry of Du Fu. *Studies in Chinese Religions*, 4(3), 318–340.

Wai-lim Yip. (1997). *Chinese Poetry*, Duke University Press.

Watson, B. (2002). *The selected poems of Du Fu*. Columbia University Press.

Wong, S. S. (1970) The quatrains (*Chüeh-Chü* 絕句) of Tu Fu. *Monumenta Serica*, 29, 142-162

Yang, M. V. (2016). Man and nature: a study of Du Fu's poetry. *Monumenta Serica*, 50, 315-336.

Young, D. (2008). *Du Fu: a life in poetry*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Zong-Qi Cai (2008). *How to read Chinese poetry: a guided anthology*. Columbia University Press. (audio files are available at website).

---

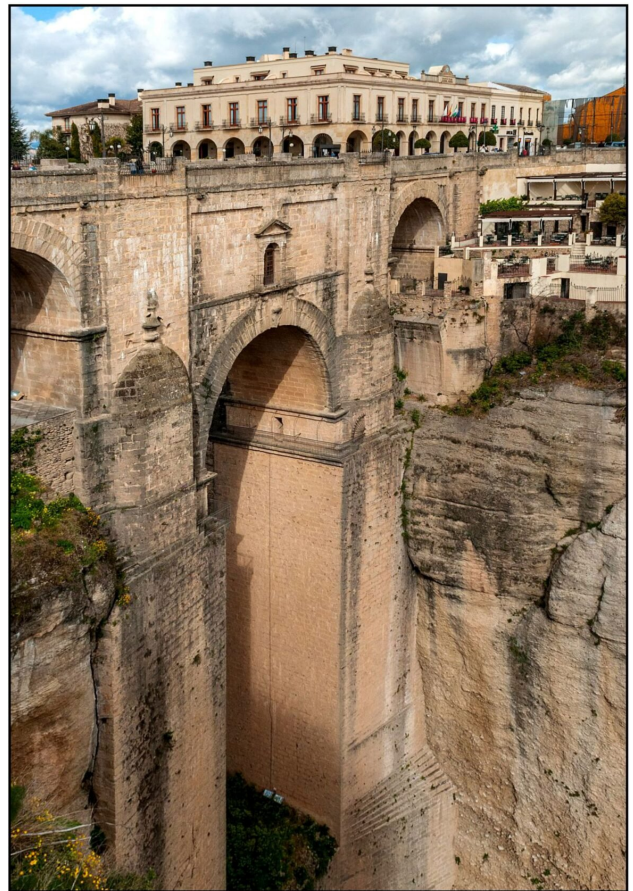
## History, Myth and Fiction

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.

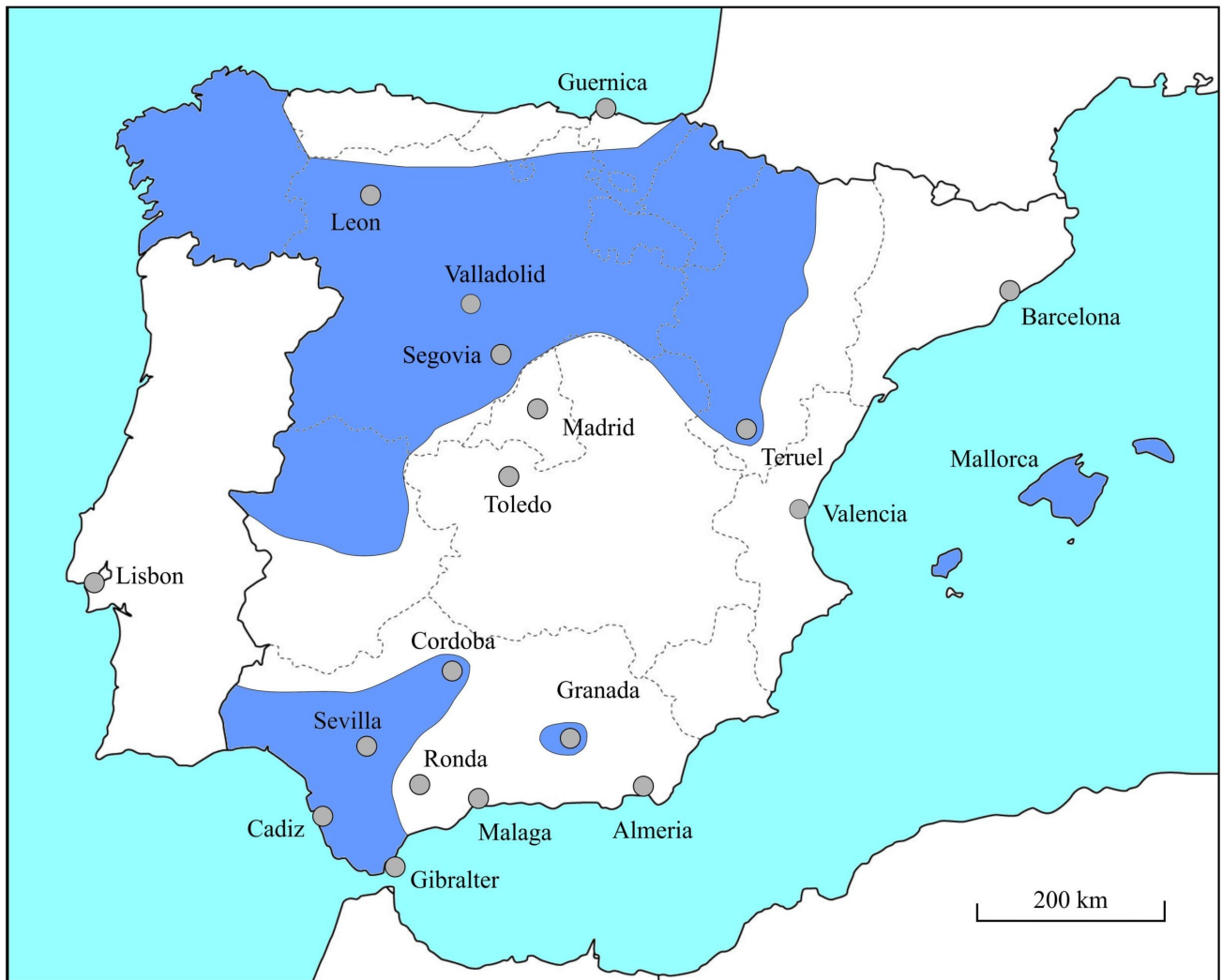
In the election of January, 1936, the left-wing parties in the Popular Front won a majority against a coalition of the right-wing parties named the National Front. Many have suggested that the election was rigged to some extent, and the voting was followed by much violence. Manuel Azana Diaz (1880-1940), 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:



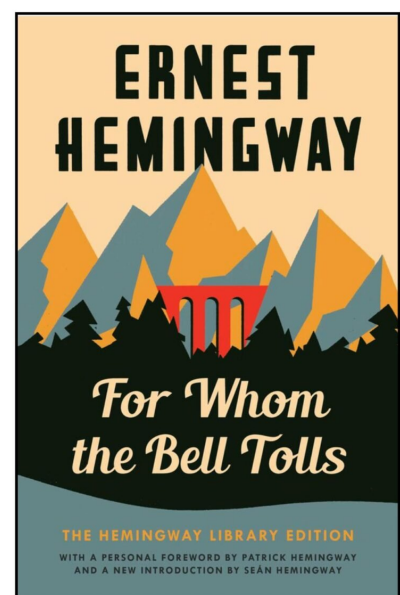
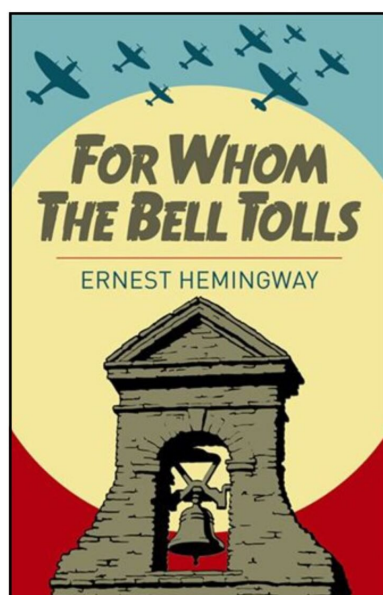
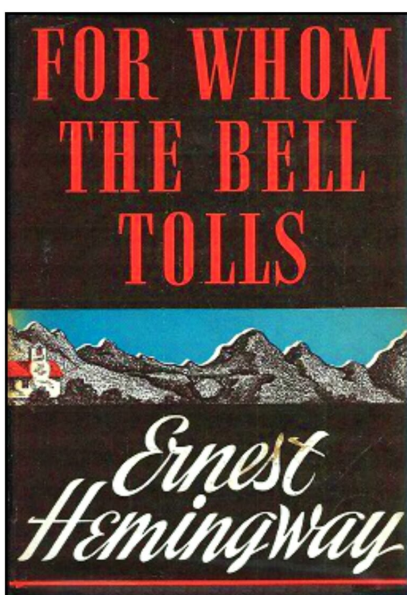


## For Whom the Bell Tolls

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.

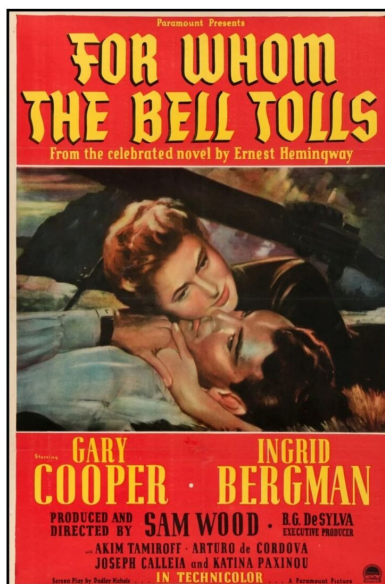
Later in the novel, Jordan and the guerilla band succeed in blowing up the bridge. but Jordan is severely wounded and unable to move. He convinces that the rest of the band to retreat while he stays to delay the advancing Nationalists. He insists that Maria leave with the guerillas. The novel ends with 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:

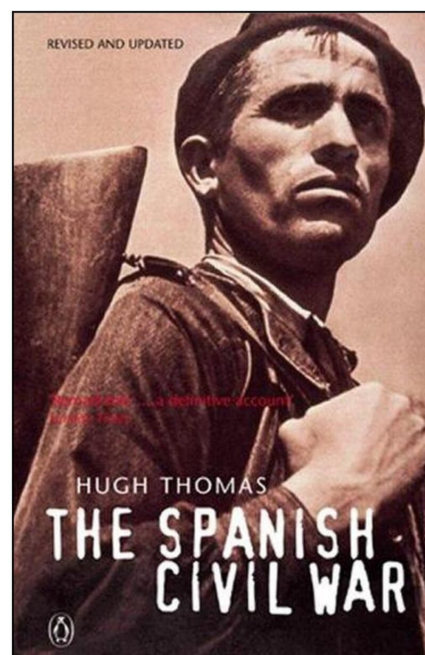
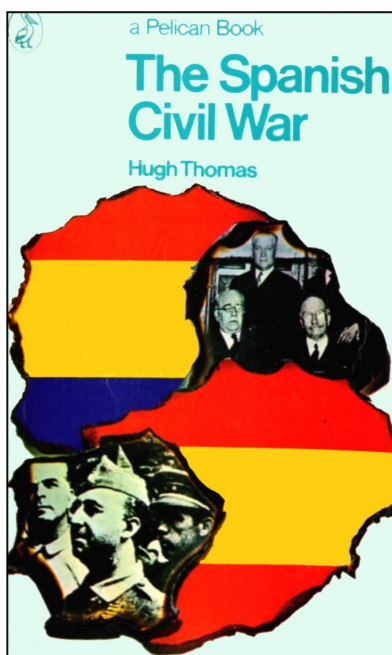
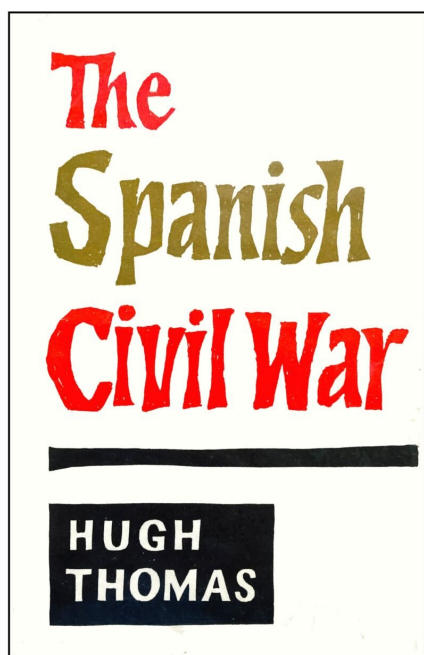


## Historical Accounts of the Events in Ronda

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.

## References

Anderson, P. (2017). Knowing and acknowledging Spain's dark Civil War past. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 52(1), 129–139.

Buckley, R. (1997): Revolution in Ronda: the facts in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. *Hemingway Review*, 17(1), 49-57.

Corbin, J. (1995). Truth and myth in history: an example from the Spanish Civil War. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 25(4), 609-625

Graham, H. (2005). *The Spanish Civil War: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Hemingway, E. (1932). *Death in the afternoon*. Scribner.

Hemingway, E. (1940). *For whom the bell tolls*. Scribner.

Levine, P. (2009). *News of the world: poems*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Levine, P. (2016). The Spanish Civil War in Poetry. In Levine, P. (edited by Hirsch E., 2016). *My lost poets: a life in poetry*. (pp 139-163). Alfred A. Knopf.

Michaud, J. (2012). Hemingway, Castro, and Cuba. *New Yorker* (May 24, 2012).

Payne, S. G. (2012). *The Spanish Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.

Preston, P. (2012). *The Spanish holocaust: inquisition and extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain*. HarperPress.

Stewart, R., & Majada Neila, J. (2014). *Bethune in Spain*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Thomas, H. (1961, revised and enlarged, 1989). *The Spanish Civil War*. Harper & Row.

---

## 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)

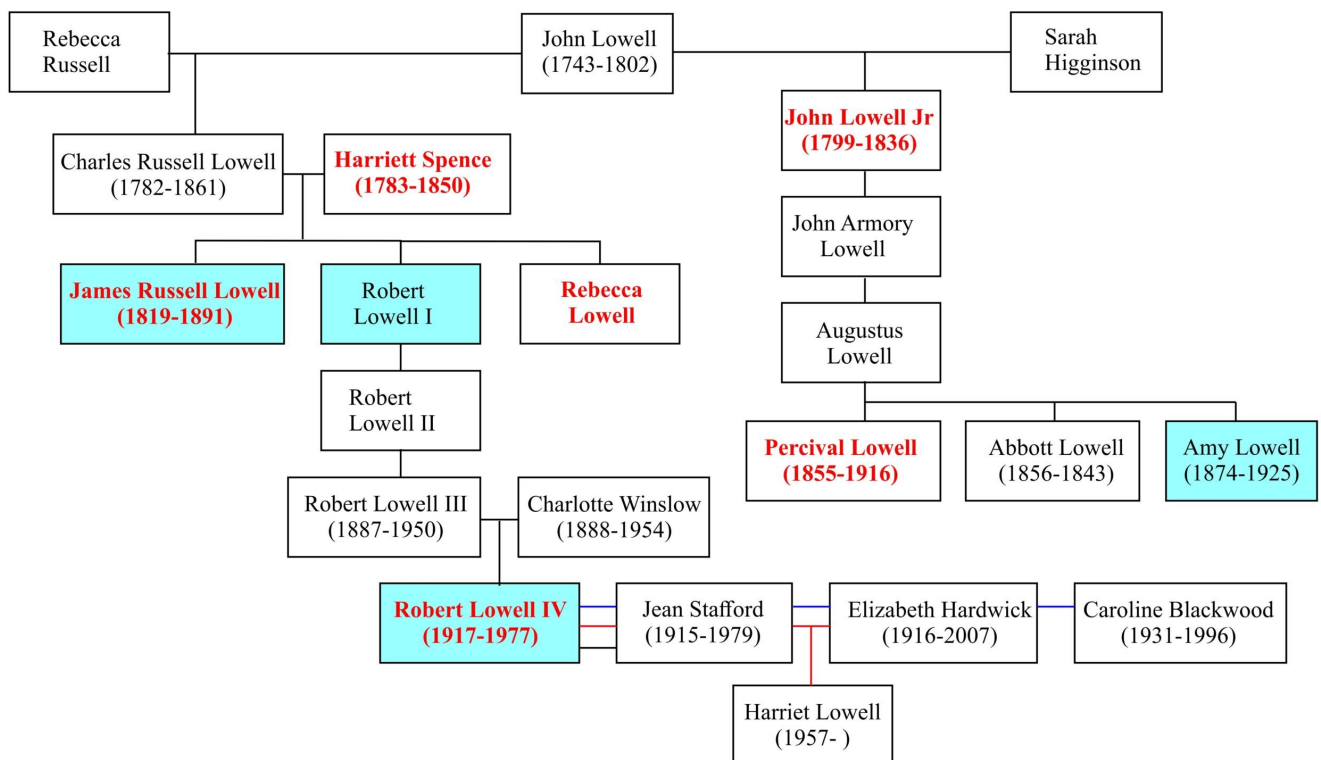
### Family Background

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.

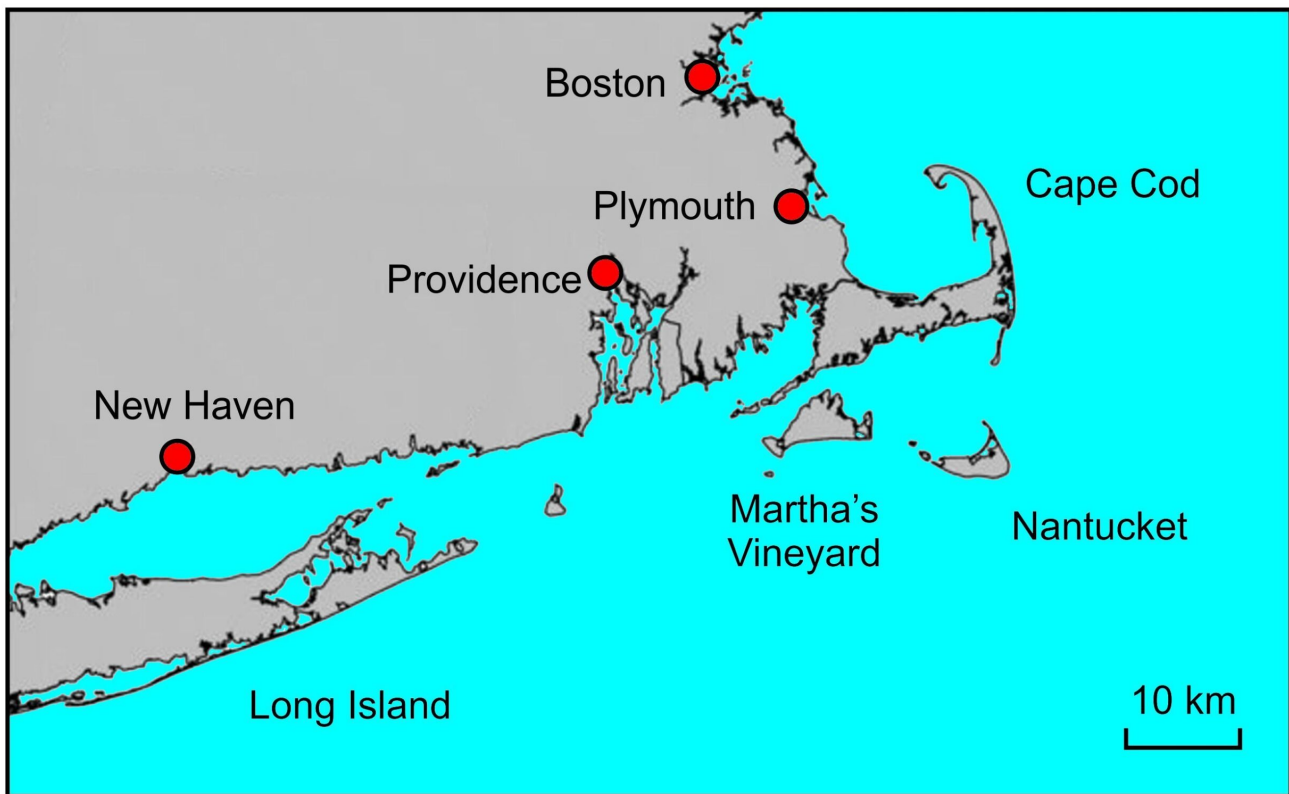
Charles Russell Lowell was considered one of the “fireside poets,” a group which included Longfellow, Whittier and Bryant. These were poets whose work was read aloud to the family at the fireside. Amy Lowell became fascinated by Chinese poetry, which she attempted to imitate in brief intensely visual 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 sitiēti. 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

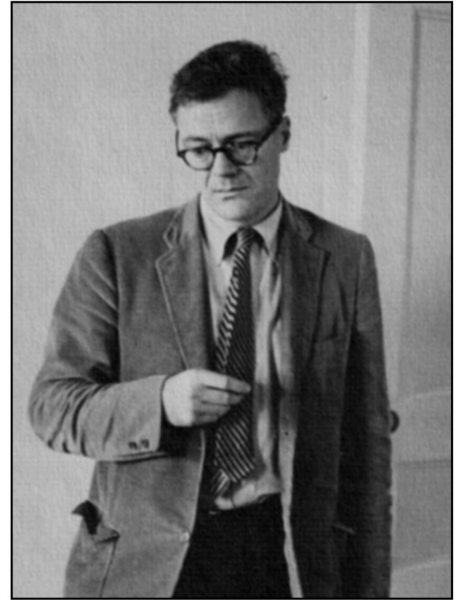
After *Lord Weary's Castle*, Lowell became famous. The following illustrations show photographs of him from youth to maturity:



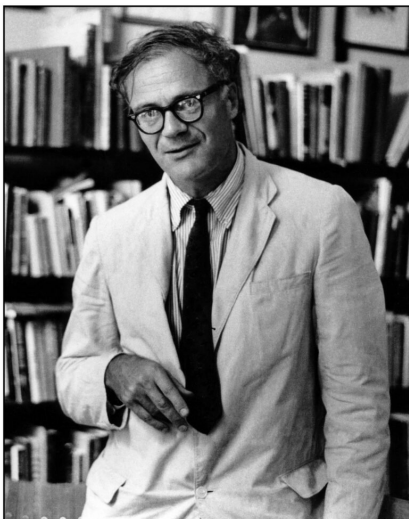
1930



1947



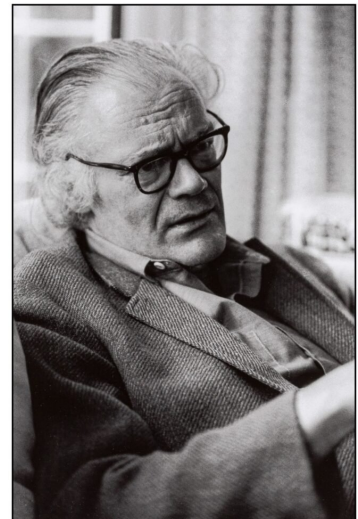
1961 (Henri  
Cartier-Bresson)



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.



## References

Andreasen, N. C., & Canter A. (1974). The creative writer: psychiatric symptoms and family history. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 15(2), 123-131.

Andreasen, N. C. (2008). The relationship between creativity

- and mood disorders. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 10 (2), 251-255.
- Axelrod, S. G. (2015). *Robert Lowell: Life and art*. Princeton University Press.
- Beam, A. (2003). *Gracefully insane: the rise and fall of America's premier mental hospital*. PublicAffairs Books.
- Fender, S. (1973). What really happened to Warren Winslow? *Journal of American Studies*, 7(2), 187–190.
- Greenwood, T. A. (2020). Creativity and bipolar disorder: a shared genetic vulnerability. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 16(1), 239–264.
- Hamilton, I. (1982). *Robert Lowell: a biography*. Random House
- Hass, R. (1977). Lowell's Graveyard. *Salmagundi*, 37(37), 56–72.
- Jamison, K. R. (2017). *Robert Lowell: setting the river on fire: a study of genius, mania, and character*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Lowell, R. (1946). *Lord Weary's castle*. Harcourt, Brace & Co.
- Lowell, R. (1977). *Day by day*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Lowell, R. (edited by Bidart, F., & Gewanter, D., 2003). *Collected poems*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Lowell, R. (edited by Axelrod, S. G., & Kosć, G., 2022). *Memoirs*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Ludwig, A. M. (1995). *The price of greatness: resolving the creativity and madness controversy*. Guilford Press.
- Mailer, N. (1968). *The armies of the night; history as a novel, the novel as history*. New American Library.

Mann, T. (translated by Neugroschel, J., 1998). *Death in Venice and other tales*. Viking.

McConahay, M. D. (1986). 'Heidelberry braids' and Yankee "politesse": Jean Stafford and Robert Lowell reconsidered. *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 62(2), 213-236.

Remaley, P. P. (1976). The quest for grace in Robert Lowell's "Lord Weary's Castle." *Renascence*, 28(3), 115-122.

Rosenthal, M. L. (1967). Robert Lowell and 'Confessional' Poetry. In Rosenthal, M. L. *The New Poets: American and British Poetry Since World War II*, Oxford University Press, pp. 25-78.

---

# Gauguin

## Gauguin

In 1891, Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) left his wife and five children and sailed for Tahiti, where he hoped

to immerse myself in virgin nature, to see no one but savages, live their life, with no other thought in mind but to render, the way a child would, the concepts formed in my brain and to do this with the aid of nothing but the primitive means of art, the only means that are good and true (letter quoted in Eisenman, 1997, p 77).

His decision to desert his family and follow his art has been considered by philosophers as a case study in ethics. Was his hope of artistic success adequate justification for his behavior? As luck would have it, Gauguin did become a famous artist, albeit posthumously. Can this retrospectively vindicate his flight to Tahiti? These issues are complex –

both in the abstract and in terms of Gauguin's actual life.

## **Life Before Art**

Gauguin was born in France but spent much of his childhood in Peru, where his mother's family had aristocratic connections. His grandmother Flora Tristan (1803-1844), a feminist and socialist, was the niece of Juan Pío Camilo de Tristán y Moscoso, who briefly served as president of South Peru.

Gauguin returned to France to finish his schooling and then spent three years as a merchant sailor and two years in the French Navy, during which time he travelled throughout the world. When he returned to France in 1871, Gauguin was taken in by a rich relative, Gustave Arosa, an avid collector of realist and impressionist paintings. Arosa got Gauguin a job on the stock exchange, and introduced him to Camille Pissarro.

Gauguin became a very successful broker, and took up painting as a hobby. He married a young Danish woman Mette-Sophie Gad (1850–1920), and had five children. Having made a fortune on the stock market, Gauguin became an art collector himself, buying paintings by Pissarro, Cézanne, Manet, Degas, and Sisley (Bretell & Fonsmark, 2005, p 56)

## **Impressionism**

Gauguin had talent and he quickly learned the new Impressionist style. His paintings were included in the Impressionist Exhibitions beginning with the fifth in 1880. Below is one of his paintings from this time – *Vaugirard Market Gardens*, 1879 – together with a self-portrait from 1885.





## **The Stock Market Crash**

In 1882 the Union Générale bank collapsed and the Paris Bourse crashed. By 1883 Gauguin was out of work. The family moved to Rouen where life was less expensive than in Paris. Gauguin decided to paint full time. However, he was not able to sell his paintings. Mette moved back to Denmark with most of the family in 1884, and Gauguin reluctantly followed in 1885. For a brief time, he was a salesman for French tarpaulins in Copenhagen, but he did not speak Danish and the endeavor came to nought. Mette supported the family by giving French lessons. Gauguin's paintings found no market among the Danes. He became depressed, and sometimes was sometimes physically violent with his wife (Mathews, 2001, p 62). Mette's family insisted that he leave.

In 1885 Gauguin returned alone to Paris. He submitted nineteen paintings to the Eighth and Final Exhibition of the Impressionist in 1886, but these were not well received by either critics or buyers. Gauguin fled Paris for Pont-Aven in Brittany, an artists' colony where living was cheap. There he worked with Emile Bernard and Louis Anquetin.

## **Vision after the Sermon (1888)**

Gauguin was fascinated by the deep religiosity of the Breton

peasants. He developed a new style of painting to portray their lives. He began using clearly outlined blocks of flat color in the manner of the Japanese prints that had become popular in Paris. He further decided that colors should be based as much upon the imagination as upon reality. This emphasis on the creative imagination derived from the Symbolist movement in literature. Gauguin named his new style of painting "Synthetism." This approach was also called "Cloisonnism" after the technique for decorating metalwork, whereby colored enamels are placed within spaces bordered by metal strips. A masterpiece of this approach was Gauguin's *The Vision after the Sermon*, which portrays Breton peasants experiencing a vision of Jacob wrestling with the angel after a sermon on this episode from Genesis 22: 22-32 (Herban, 1977):



The figure at the lower right is Gauguin. The young peasant at the lower left is likely a portrait of Bernard's sister Madeleine, with whom Gauguin was infatuated. The following is a description of the painting from Vargas Llosa's novel *The Way to Paradise*. Vargas Llosa used the second person narrative as though someone is talking to Gauguin (or Gauguin is talking to himself). "Koké" was the name that the Tahitians called him – their best approximation of his name:

The true miracle of the painting wasn't the apparition of biblical characters in real life, Paul, or in the minds of those humble peasants. It was the insolent colors, daringly antinaturalist: the vermillion of the earth, the bottle green of Jacob's clothing, the ultramarine blue of the angel, the Prussian black of the women's garments and the pink-, green- and blue-tinted white of the great row of caps and collars interposed between the spectator, the apple tree, and the grappling pair. What was miraculous was the weightlessness reigning at the center of the painting, the space in which the tree, the cow, and the fervent women seemed to levitate under the spell of their faith. The miracle was that you had managed to vanquish prosaic realism by creating a new reality on the canvas, where the objective and the subjective, the real and the supernatural, were mingled, indivisible. Well done, Paul! Your first masterpiece, Koké! (Vargas Llosa, 2003, pp 217-218)

Gauguin also created a striking version of the crucifixion based on his time in Pont-Aven – *The Yellow Christ* (1889):





## The Studio of the South

Back in Paris, Gauguin met the dealer Theo van Gogh and through him his brother Vincent. The two artists exchanged self-portraits. Van Gogh's saw himself as an austere Japanese monk; Gauguin's portrait is off-center against a floral wallpaper background includes a portrait of Emile Bernard:



Vincent invited Gauguin to stay with him in Arles in Provence. For nine weeks in late 1888 the two artists lived and worked together (Silverman, 2000; Druick et al, 2001). Although their relations were initially amicable, they disagreed on many things and the tension between them increased. If we are to believe what Gauguin later recalled in his journals (Gauguin, 2009, pp 12-14), one evening van Gogh threatened Gauguin with a razor and Gauguin decamped to stay the night in a hotel. Van Gogh then proceeded to cut off his right ear with the razor and presented the ear to one of the prostitutes in Arles. Gauguin fled to Paris and van Gogh was confined to an asylum.

## Manao Tupapau

Van Gogh and Gauguin had discussed the book *Rarahu* by Pierre Loti (1880), which described the author's marriage to a Tahitian girl, and the two artists considered the possibility of painting in the islands of the Pacific. Van Gogh committed suicide in 1890. Gauguin sailed to Tahiti in 1891.

In Tahiti Gauguin took a Tahitian girl aged thirteen, Tehemana (Tehura), as his mistress. One night when returning home late to his hut, he found her lying frightened on the bed:



Quickly, I struck a match, and I saw. . . . Tehura, immobile, naked, lying face downward flat on the bed with the eyes inordinately large with fear. She looked at me, and seemed not to recognize me. As for myself I stood for some moments strangely uncertain. A contagion emanated from the terror of Tehura. I had the illusion that a phosphorescent light was streaming from her staring eyes. Never had I seen her so beautiful, so tremulously beautiful. And then in this half-light which was surely peopled for her with dangerous apparitions and terrifying suggestions, I was afraid to make any movement which might increase the child's paroxysm of fright. How could I know what at that moment I might seem to her? Might she not with my frightened face take me for one of the demons and specters, one of the Tupapaus, with which the legends of her race people sleepless nights? Did I really know who in truth she was herself? The intensity of fright which had dominated her as the result of the physical and moral power of her superstitions had transformed her into a strange being, entirely different from anything I had known heretofore. (Gauguin, 1919/85, pp 33-34)

In Tahitian legends the Tupapaus were malignant demons. Over the next few days Gauguin painted the scene that he had witnessed, calling it *Manao Tupapau*, "Spirit of the Dead Watching" (1892):



Vargas Llosa imagines his thoughts about the painting:

Yes, this was truly the painting of a savage. He regarded it with satisfaction when it seemed to him that it was finished. In him, as in the savage mind, the everyday and the fantastic were united in a single reality, somber, forbidding, infused with religiosity and desire, life and death. The lower half of the painting was objective, realist; the upper half subjective and unreal but no less authentic. The naked girl would be obscene without the fear in her eyes and the incipient downturn of her mouth. But fear didn't diminish her beauty. It augmented it, tightening her buttocks in such an insinuating way, making them an altar of human flesh on which to celebrate a barbaric ceremony, in homage to a cruel and pagan god. And in the upper part of the canvas was the ghost, which was really

more yours than Tahitian, Koké. It bore no resemblance to those demons with claws and dragon teeth that Moerenhout described. It was an old woman in a hooded cloak, like the crones of Brittany forever fixed in your memory, time-less women who, when you lived in Pont-Aven or Le Pouldu, you would meet on the streets of Finistère. They seemed half dead already, ghosts in life. If a statistical analysis were deemed necessary, the items belonging to the objective world were these: the mattress, jet-black like the girl's hair; the yellow flowers; the greenish sheets of pounded bark; the pale green cushion; and the pink cushion, whose tint seemed to have been transferred to the girl's upper lip. This order of reality was counterbalanced by the painting's upper half: there the floating flowers were sparks, gleams, featherlight phosphorescent meteors aloft in a bluish mauve sky in which the colored brushstrokes suggested a cascade of pointed leaves. The ghost, in profile and very quiet, leaned against a cylindrical post, a totem of delicately colored abstract forms, reddish and glassy blue in tone. This upper half was a mutable, shifting, elusive substance, seeming as if it might evaporate at any minute. From up close, the ghost had a straight nose, swollen lips, and the large fixed eye of a parrot. You had managed to give the whole a flawless harmony, Koké. Funereal music emanated from it, and light shone from the greenish-yellow of the sheet and the orange-tinted yellow of the flowers. (Vargas Llosa, 2003, pp 22-23)

The painting is one of the most discussed of Gauguin's Tahitian pictures. The commentary is ambivalent:

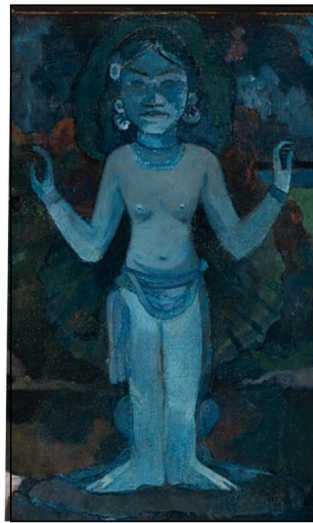
All this is to put the painting in the best possible light. But there is surely more to it than just a charming anecdote based on local folklore. In blunt terms what we actually see is the interior of a hut at night, with a large couch, covered in a boldly flowered cloth, partially overlaid by a plain white sheet on which lies a naked girl, face down, another of the child-like, yet distinctly erotic figures who

have appeared before in Gauguin's work – pert buttocks offered invitingly to the spectator. There is even something disturbing about the way the face is half-turned towards the viewer, or rather towards the artist, Gauguin, as if he and not the figure in the background is the spirit of which she is afraid. (Sweetman, 1995, pp 326-327).

### **Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?**

In 1893 Gauguin returned to Paris and arranged to sell some of his Tahitian paintings. He was not happy in Paris and in 1895 he returned to Tahiti. Over the next few years, Gauguin became severely depressed. He had suffered a broken ankle in a brawl in Concarneau near Pont Aven and the fracture had never really healed. He drank excessively – partly to relieve the pain and partly to improve his mood. He had sores on his legs, perhaps related to syphilis or perhaps related to the malnutrition that accompanies alcoholism. In 1897 he attempted to commit suicide with arsenic but failed. After this he worked on his last great painting, *D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?* (1898):





Gauguin described his work in a letter to Daniel de Monfried:

The canvas is 4.50 meters long and 1.70 meters high. The two upper corners are chrome yellow, with the inscription on the



left and my signature on the right, as if it were a fresco, painted on a gold-colored wall whose corners had worn away. In the bottom right, a sleeping baby, then three seated women. Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to one another; another figure, seated, and deliberately outsized despite the perspective, raises one arm in the air and looks with astonishment at these two people who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the middle picks fruit. Two cats near a child. A white she-goat. The idol, both its arms mysteriously and rhythmically uplifted, seems to point to the next world. The seated figure leaning on her right hand seems to be listening to the idol; and finally an old woman close to death seems to accept, to be resigned [to her fate]; . . . at her feet, a strange white bird holding a lizard in its claw represents the futility of vain words. All this takes place by the edge of a stream in the woods. In the background, the sea, then the mountains of the neighboring island. Although there are different shades of color, the landscape constantly has a blue and Veronese green hue from one end to the other. All of the nude figures stand out from it in a bold orangey tone. If the Beaux-Arts pupils competing for the Prix de Rome were told: "The painting you have to do will be on the theme, 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?' " what would they do? I have finished a philosophical treatise comparing that theme with the Gospel. I think it is good. (Gauguin, 1990, p. 160; original letter is illustrated in Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, p 168)

The philosophical treatise he mentioned was likely *The Catholic Church and Modern Times* (Gauguin, 1990, pp 161-173), in which Gauguin decries the hypocrisy of the modern church and urges his readers to return to a more natural theology. His painting is a testament to these ideas.

In a letter to Charles Morrice (Goddard, 2029, p 48) Gauguin describes his painting as proceeding from right to left, with

the answer to "Where do we come from?" on the right, the answer to "What are we?" in the center and the answer to "Where are we going?" on the left. Nevertheless, the painting has no simple interpretation (Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, pp 167-201). The man plucking fruit from a tree in the center perhaps refers to Adam in a modern version of Eden. The two women in purple may refer to the church and its interpretation of our origins. The idol on the left is the Tahitian Goddess Hina (Gauguin, 1953, pp 11-13). Hina represented the sky, moon, air, and spirit. From the union between Hina and Tefatou, God of matter and earth, came forth man. Hina wished that man might be reborn after death much like the moon returns each month. Tefatou insisted that, although that matter lasts forever, man must die.

The painting stands at the cusp between earlier paintings like that of the neo-classical *Between Art and Nature* (1895) of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, which Gauguin has seen on his visit back to Paris, and the Fauvist *La Bonheur de Vivre* (1905) of Henri Matisse. Both paintings are smaller than Gauguin's masterpiece.



## La Maison de Jouv

Gauguin decided that Tahiti was too tainted with Western civilization and decided in 1901 to move to the Marquesa Islands, about 1500 km northeast of Tahiti. There he again took a young Polynesian girl for his mistress and built himself a home that he called *La Maison de Jouv*. This is



usually translated as the “House of Pleasure” but more precisely means the “House of Orgasm.” He continued to paint and to write, and he created many striking woodcuts and drawings. One of his paintings from 1902 was the *Riders on the Beach*. The pink color of the beach is in the imagination of the artist and nowhere near reality.



In these last years, Gauguin was wracked by pain and became more and more depressed. His last *Self Portrait* (1903) from just before his death shows the ravages of alcohol and morphine. It is presented below together with two earlier portraits, one from 1889 alluding to his time in Pont-Aven, and one from 1893 referring to his first visit to Tahiti:



## Acclaim

Gauguin was never recognized in his lifetime as a painter of significance. His death in 1903 warranted only a few lines in the Paris newspapers. It was not until 1906 that his friends arranged a retrospective exhibition at the Salon d'Automne in Paris. His fame has grown since then. Art historians now consider Cézanne, van Gogh and Gauguin as the “guiding lights” (Hook, 2021, p. 21) of the modernist revolution in art that occurred in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This assessment is borne out by the high prices that Gauguin’s paintings now command at auction.

Isabelle Cahn (in Shackelford & Frèches-Thory, 2004, pp 300-1) writes

He was the one who had dared take all the liberties, sparking the most advanced research, particularly in the domain of color . . . Gauguin had perceived the decline of the West and revolted against the dictatorship of Greco-Roman culture. In his wake, other artists had tried to surpass the traditional boundaries of thought and, seeking regeneration, had taken an interest in primitive arts, children’s drawings, folk art and outsider art. An interest in the unconscious had also opened new vistas. By giving shape to his internal world, Gauguin exposed the anxiety of



the modern soul and its questions about its fate, leading us to edge of our own enigma, but not weighing it down with explanations.

Bretell (1988, p 396) remarks about the effects of Gauguin's work on later painters:

Picasso was clearly devastated by the power and raw, crude strength of the printed drawings. Matisse was overcome by the color and the apparently casual draftsmanship of the late paintings. Indeed, if one can measure the strength of an artist by that of his most brilliant followers, Gauguin would be among the very greatest from the late nineteenth century.

## **Moral Luck**

In 1976 Bernard Williams presented a paper on "Moral Luck," in which he dealt extensively with the

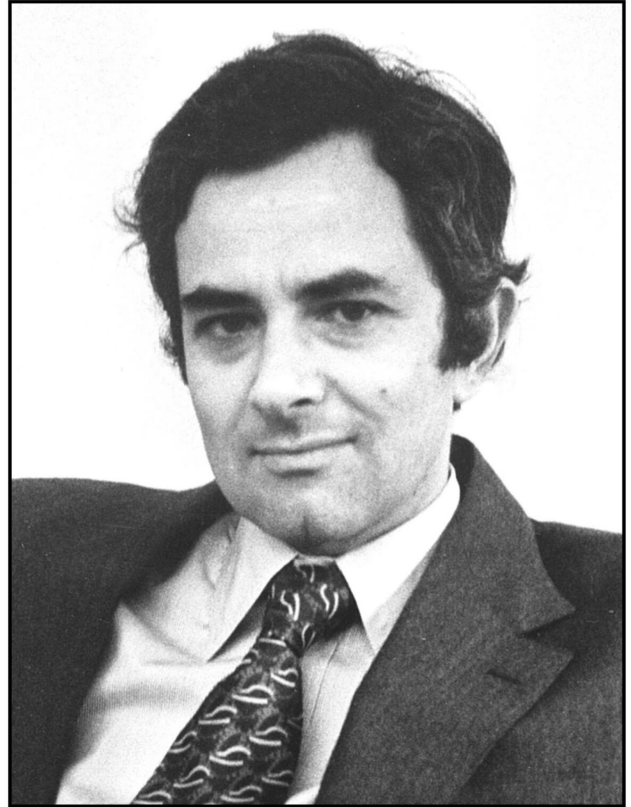
example of the creative artist who turns away from the definite and pressing human claims on him in order to live a life in which, as he supposes, he can pursue his art.

For simplicity he calls the artist Gauguin, but he considers the case abstractly without being limited by historical facts. The main issue is that when Gauguin decided to desert his family, the only justification for his action was his hope that he would fulfil his destiny (and become a great artist), and that his art would contribute significantly to human culture. The concept of moral luck is that we cannot predict the future with any certainty. Gauguin may have died in a shipwreck before he reached Tahiti. In this event, his actions would have no justification. As chance (or "luck") would have it, Gauguin did live to paint his greatest works in Tahiti, and did contribute significantly to the history of modern art. The problem is whether such an outcome can retrospectively justify the desertion of his family. Certainly not from the point of view of his family; probably not from the point of

view of those with little interest in modern art. A secondary issue is whether aesthetic values can be used as justification for behavior that is, in itself, unethical.

Thomas Nagel commented on Williams's ideas and discussed moral luck in a more general way. Both authors thereafter updated their papers (Nagel, 1979; Williams, 1981), and there has been much further discussion in the literature (e.g., Lang, 2019; Nelkin 2019). Nagel described moral luck as that which occurs between the intention to act and the outcome of the intended action. Though we might profess, like Kant, that moral guilt or acclaim depends upon the intension (or "will") rather than the outcome, in actuality, the outcome largely determines our sense of an action's moral worth. For example, a person who drives while impaired and winds up killing a pedestrian is considered much more blameworthy than one who was similarly impaired but, as luck would have it, did not kill anyone. Moral luck points to the issue that we do not completely control the outcomes of our actions.

The following illustrations shows Williams on the left and Nagel on the right.



## **The Crimes of a Colonist**

At the time of Gauguin's sojourn, Tahiti and the Marquesas were French colonies. The administrators of the colonies exploited the native Polynesians; the church taught them that their own culture was worthless and that they must convert to Christianity; whatever was worthwhile in their life was appropriated and made part of European culture. It was impossible for Gauguin not to be part of this process – he was a European and French Polynesia was a colony. However, he did not act in the same way as most of the Europeans. He lived with the natives, and tried to understand their language and their ideas. He was aware of the problems:

Circumstances exposed him to the effects of recent colonization; he saw the depredation and the irrecoverable loss first-hand. He also spoke out about colonization – and thereby earned the animus of the colonial and church authorities who hounded him until the end of his life (Maleuvre, 2018).

Gauguin called the Polynesians “savages.” However, for him this was a term of praise rather than contempt. As quoted in the opening paragraph of this post, Gauguin aspired to become a savage.

## **Sex Tourist**

Gauguin’s mistresses in Tahiti and in the Marquesas were young girls of 13 or 14 years. Although it was normal at that time for Polynesian girls of that age to have sexual relations with men, it is impossible not to deplore Gauguin’s taking advantage of them for his own sexual pleasure. Reading about these girls in his book *Noa Noa* (“Fragrance”) is terribly disconcerting:

Indeed, it is soon clear that he is not just the average Westerner exploring for the sake of broadening his understanding of the world—he is, more than anything, a sexual tourist. Even the title *Noa Noa*, which means “fragrance,” is used by Gauguin to indicate the aroma of a human body particularly in sexual situations. Although sexual liaisons similar to those described by Gauguin were regularly reported in other contemporary travel accounts, Gauguin makes them central to the story and, in doing so, transforms the normally pedestrian Tahitian sojourn into an erotic holiday. (Mathews, 2001, p 178).

Most historians believe that the sores on Gauguin’s legs and the heart problems that led to his death were caused by advanced syphilis. However, since the discovery of the causative agent (*Treponema pallidum*) and the definitive Wassermann test did not occur until after his death, we cannot be sure. A recent examination of Gauguin’s teeth did not show evidence that he had taken the mercurial compounds that normally were used to treat the disease at that time (Mueller & Turner, 2018). Nevertheless, the prevalence of syphilis then was high – about 10% in urban populations and likely much more in those who frequented prostitutes. If Gauguin did have

syphilis, he almost certainly gave the disease to his young mistresses.

The following is from a poem Guys like Gauguin (2009) by Selina Tusitala Marsh. Louis Antoine de Bougainville was a French naval captain who explored the Pacific Ocean in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century:

thanks Bougainville  
for desiring 'em young  
so guys like Gauguin could dream  
and dream  
then take his syphilitic body  
downstream to the tropics  
to test his artistic hypothesis  
about how the uncivilised  
ripen like pawpaw  
are best slightly raw  
delectably firm  
dangling like golden prepubescent buds  
seeding nymphomania  
for guys like Gauguin

### **The Artist as Monster**

Gauguin as a person was not easy to like. He was concerned only with his own presumed genius. He treated his family and his mistresses egregiously. Does this mean that we should not consider his paintings – that he should be, in our modern idiom, “cancelled” (e.g., Nayeri, 2019)? Many artists have done monstrous things (Dederer, 2003), and it is often difficult to consider their art independently of their immoral lives. We should not shy away from their sins. We should not call Gauguin’s Polynesian mistresses “young women” but clearly state that they were girls who were seduced by a sexual predator. Nevertheless, we must consider the art for its own sake. Gauguin’s paintings are powerful: they make us experience things differently.



## References

- Brettell, R. R. (1988). *The Art of Paul Gauguin*. National Gallery of Art.
- Brettell, R. R., & Fonsmark, A.-B. (2005). *Gauguin and Impressionism*. Yale University Press.
- Dederer, C. (2023). *Monsters: a fan's dilemma*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Druick, D. W., Zegers, P., Salvesen, B., Lister, K. H., & Weaver, M. C. (2001). *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the studio of the south*. Thames & Hudson.
- Eisenman, S. (1997). *Gauguin's skirt*. Thames & Hudson.
- Gauguin, P. (translated by O. F. Theis, 1919, reprinted 1985). *Noa Noa: the Tahitian journal*. Dover Publications.
- Gauguin, P. (edited and annotated by R. Huyghe, 1951). *Ancien culte mahorie*. La Palme
- Gauguin, P. (translated by E. Levieux and edited by D. Guérin, 1990). *The writings of a savage*. Paragon House.
- Gauguin, P. (edited K. O'Connor, 2009) *The intimate journals*. Routledge.
- Goddard, L. (2019). *Savage tales: the writings of Paul Gauguin*. Yale University Press.
- Herban, M. (1977). The origin of Paul Gauguin's Vision after the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel (1888). *The Art Bulletin*, 59(3), 415–420.
- Hook, P. (2021). *Art of the extreme, 1905-1914*. Profile Books.
- Lang, G. (2019). Gauguin's lucky escape: Moral luck and the morality system. In S. G. Chappell & M. van Ackeren (Eds.) *Ethics Beyond the Limits*. (pp. 129–147). Routledge.

- Maleuvre, D. (2018). The trial of Paul Gauguin. *Mosaic*, 51(1), 197–213.
- Marsh, S. T. (2009). *Fast talking PI*. Auckland University Press.
- Mathews, N. M. (2001). *Paul Gauguin: an erotic life*. Yale University Press.
- Mueller, W. A., & Turner, C. B. (2018). Gauguin's Teeth. *Anthropology*, 6: 198.
- Nagel, T. (1979). Moral Luck. In *Mortal Questions*. (pp. 24–38) Cambridge University Press.
- Nayeri, F. (November 18, 2019). Is it time Gauguin got canceled? *New York Times*.
- Nelkin, D. N. (2019) Moral Luck. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Van Gogh and Gauguin: the search for sacred art*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Shackleford, G. T. M., & Frèches-Thory, C. (2004). *Gauguin Tahiti: the studio of the South Seas*. Thames & Hudson.
- Sweetman, D. (1995). *Paul Gauguin: a life*. Simon & Schuster.
- Vargas Llosa, M. (translated by N. Wimmer, 2003). *The way to paradise*. Farrar Straus & Giroux.
- Williams, B. A. O. (1981). Moral Luck. In *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980*. (pp. 20–39) Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, B. A. O., & Nagel, T. (1976). Moral Luck. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume*, 50(1), 115–151.

---

# Robinson Jeffers

Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) was an American poet who celebrated the beauty of California's coast. In 1914 he and his wife Una settled in Carmel. In 1919 Jeffers and his family moved into Tor House, a home that he and a stone-mason had built on Carmel Point using rocks from the shore. From 1920 to 1924 he built by himself the adjacent Hawk Tower. Jeffers became famous soon after the publication of *Tamar and Other Poems* in 1924. This book and those that followed included both long narratives and shorter lyrics. His epics were bloody and tragic; his verse was free and passionate. Underlying his poems was an austere philosophy of "inhumanism." This compared the transience of humanity to the persistence of the natural world, and proposed that we should detach ourselves from the passions of mankind and simply celebrate the beauty of the universe. Over the next decade, Jeffers published extensively and in 1932 his photograph graced the cover of *Time*. After World War II, his outrage at the death and destruction that occurred during the war and the severity of his inhumanist philosophy led to controversy and obscurity. In more recent years, the environmental movement has found inspiration in his love of the natural world and his anger about how humanity has despoiled it.

## Early Life

John Robinson Jeffers was born in 1887 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. His father was a Presbyterian minister and a Professor of Ancient Languages at the Western Theological Seminary. It was his father's second marriage, and his son's middle name, which he preferred, was in honor of the first wife, who had died five years earlier. Robinson Jeffers attended private schools in Pittsburgh, and then in Germany

and Switzerland. He was a bright student and by the time he was 16 he was fluent in Latin, Greek, French and German. In 1903, his father turned 65 years old and retired to live in Los Angeles.

After graduating from Occidental College in 1905, Jeffers was unsure of what he wanted to do.. He studied languages at the University of Southern California for a year, but then switched to Medicine. After 3 years, he decided that he did not wish to be a physician and began studies in Forestry at the University of Seattle. He found the curriculum too business-oriented and quit, returning to Los Angeles in 1910.

While at the University of Southern California in 1906, Jeffers met Una Call Kuster (1884-1950) who was also studying languages (Greenan, 1988). At the age of 18 years, she had married Edward Kuster, a rich lawyer and socialite, but wished to complete her education before having a family. Over the years Robinson and Una become fast friends and then passionate lovers. By 1910, their affair became widely known, and divorce proceedings were initiated. These events may have contributed to Jeffers's moving to Seattle to study forestry. The following illustration shows photographs from 1911 (adapted from Karman, 1913).



After the divorce was finalized in 1913, Robinson and Una were married. Their first two years together were marked by grief. A daughter was born in early 1914 but only lived a day. The couple then moved to Carmel, a small village just south of the Monterey peninsula, to be alone together. Then Robinson's father died in December, 1914.

In 1912, Jeffers had published at his own expense a book of poems – *Flagons and Apples*. Of the 500 copies printed, 480 were remaindered and sold to a second-hand bookstore. Now in Carmel, inspired by the Big Sur country just south of the village, Jeffers put together a new book of poems – *The Californians* – that was published by Macmillan in 1916. This book contained poems of many forms and lengths, most using classical rhythms and rhyme-schemes.

Twin boys – Garth and Donnan – were born in 1916, and the Jeffers slowly settled into their life at Carmel. When the United States entered the war in 1917, Jeffers attempted to



join the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps but his application was rejected because he was already 30 years old and responsible for a new family. Jeffers attempted to write a long poem about the war but it came to nothing. In 1920 he submitted some new poems to Macmillan, but *The Californians* had not sold well and the publisher rejected his submission (Zaller, 1991).

### **Tor House and Hawk Tower**

In 1919 Jeffers purchased land out on Carmel Point, a raised area jutting out into the ocean just south of Carmel Beach. Here Jeffers helped a stonemason to build Tor House using the rocks and boulders on the point and the adjacent beach. The name comes from the Gaelic word for hill or rocky outcrop. After the house was finished, Jeffers built the adjacent Hawk Tower by himself over several years. The following photographs by Morley Baer show views of the house and tower (from the land and from the sea) as it was in 1964 (Jeffers, Baer & Karman, 2001) At that time everything was still open to the sea; now other houses encroach upon the site.



Working on the house and the tower freed up Jeffers's mind and released his creative impulses. Jeffers stopped using rhyme,

and decided to write with natural rhythms in the style of Walt Whitman. Line length became a structuring device for his new poems, which often used alternating long and short lines (Hymes, 1991). The long lines have a grandeur but make the poems difficult to print upon either page or screen. In the books he was to publish in this style, the longer lines are broken in two. For this posting some of the poems will be printed in a smaller font than the rest of the text. These new characteristics are present in his poem about *Tor House* (published in 1928):

If you should look for this place after a handful of lifetimes:

Perhaps of my planted forest a few

May stand yet, dark-leaved Australians or the coast cypress,  
haggard

With storm-drift; but fire and the axe are devils.

Look for foundations of sea-worn granite, my fingers had the art

To make stone love stone, you will find some remnant.

But if you should look in your idleness after ten thousand years:

It is the granite knoll on the granite

And lava tongue in the midst of the bay, by the mouth of the Carmel

River-valley, these four will remain

In the change of names. You will know it by the wild sea-fragrance of wind

Though the ocean may have climbed or retired a little;

You will know it by the valley inland that our sun and our moon were born from

Before the poles changed; and Orion in December

Evenings was strung in the throat of the valley like a lamp-lighted bridge.

Come in the morning you will see white gulls

Weaving a dance over blue water, the wane of the moon

Their dance-companion, a ghost walking

By daylight, but wider and whiter than any bird in the world.

My ghost you needn't look for; it is probably  
Here, but a dark one, deep in the granite, not dancing on  
wind

With the mad wings and the day moon. (CP I, 408)

(The references for this and for subsequent poems in this posting are to Jeffers's *Collected Poems* edited by Tim Hunt).

## **Tamar**

Jeffers's first collection of poems after moving to Tor House – *Tamar and Other Poems* (1924), published at his own expense – was written in his new free verse. The epic poem *Tamar* tells the tragedy of a family living at Point Lobos just south of Carmel. The tale has biblical echoes in the stories of Tamar who seduced her father-in-law Judah (*Genesis* 38), and of her namesake Tamar, the daughter of King David, who was raped by her step-brother Amnon (2 *Samuel* 13). The following is a summary of Jeffers's poem (from Karman, 2015, pp 55-56);

*Tamar* ... tells the story of the doomed Cauldwells who live in an isolated home on Point Lobos, south of Carmel. The head of the house is David Cauldwell, an old, broken-down man who frequently quotes the Bible. Two children, a son named Lee and a daughter Tamar, live with him, along with his demented sister Jinny, and Stella Moreland, the sister of his dead wife Lily. The action of the story, set around the time of America's entry into World War I, concerns Tamar's incestuous relationship with her brother, an ensuing pregnancy, and her seduction of an unloved suitor to snare a respectable father for the child. Through her Aunt Stella, a medium for the dead, Tamar learns that her father had an incestuous relationship with his sister Helen, which makes her behavior seem more like the simple repetition of a family pattern instead of the singular act of a bounds-breaking free spirit. In the process of coming to terms with

this knowledge, Tamar dances naked in a trance-induced frenzy on the seashore, where she is violated by the ghosts of Indians who once lived on Point Lobos, and where she speaks with the ghost of her Aunt Helen, her father's sister-lover. As Tamar's mind sickens, she thinks of ways to destroy her family, especially after learning that her brother, seeking adventure, plans to enlist and leave home. The end comes in a wild conflagration. On the eve of her brother's departure, with her benighted suitor at hand, Tamar orchestrates an explosion of jealous rage. As her brother pulls a knife and stabs her suitor, Tamar's Aunt Jinny sets the house on fire. Floors break, walls fall, and everyone perishes in the flames.

Jeffers tells his convoluted story of incest and murder in an epic style, and intersperses the events with quieter descriptions of the California Coast. This combination of the lurid and the lyrical makes for uneasy reading. Not a poem for the faint of heart, it was the first of many long narratives that Jeffers was to write over the next decades.

The book also contains many short poems describing the beauty of the California Coast, such as *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  
Stars 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.(CP I, 4)

Jeffers also began to consider the transience of humanity in a universe that lasts for ever in such poems as *To the Stone-Cutters* (recorded by Jeffers in 1941):

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated  
Challengers of oblivion  
Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall  
down,  
The square-limbed Roman letters  
Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well  
Builds his monument mockingly;  
For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave  
sun  
Die blind and blacken to the heart:  
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained  
thoughts found  
The honey of peace in old poems. (CP I, 5)

<https://creatureandcreator.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/To-The-Stone-Cutters-by-Robinson-Jeffers.mp3>

## **Big Sur**

The California coast south of Carmel and north of San Simeon is known as the Big Sur – a name deriving from the Spanish *el sur grande* (the big south), which is how the Spanish settlers on the Monterey Peninsula referred to the region. Here the Santa Lucia mountains rise directly from the sea. Edward Weston (1886-1958) took many striking photographs of this coastline, and in 1938 moved his studio to Carmel. Below are Weston's photographs from 1929 and 1938.





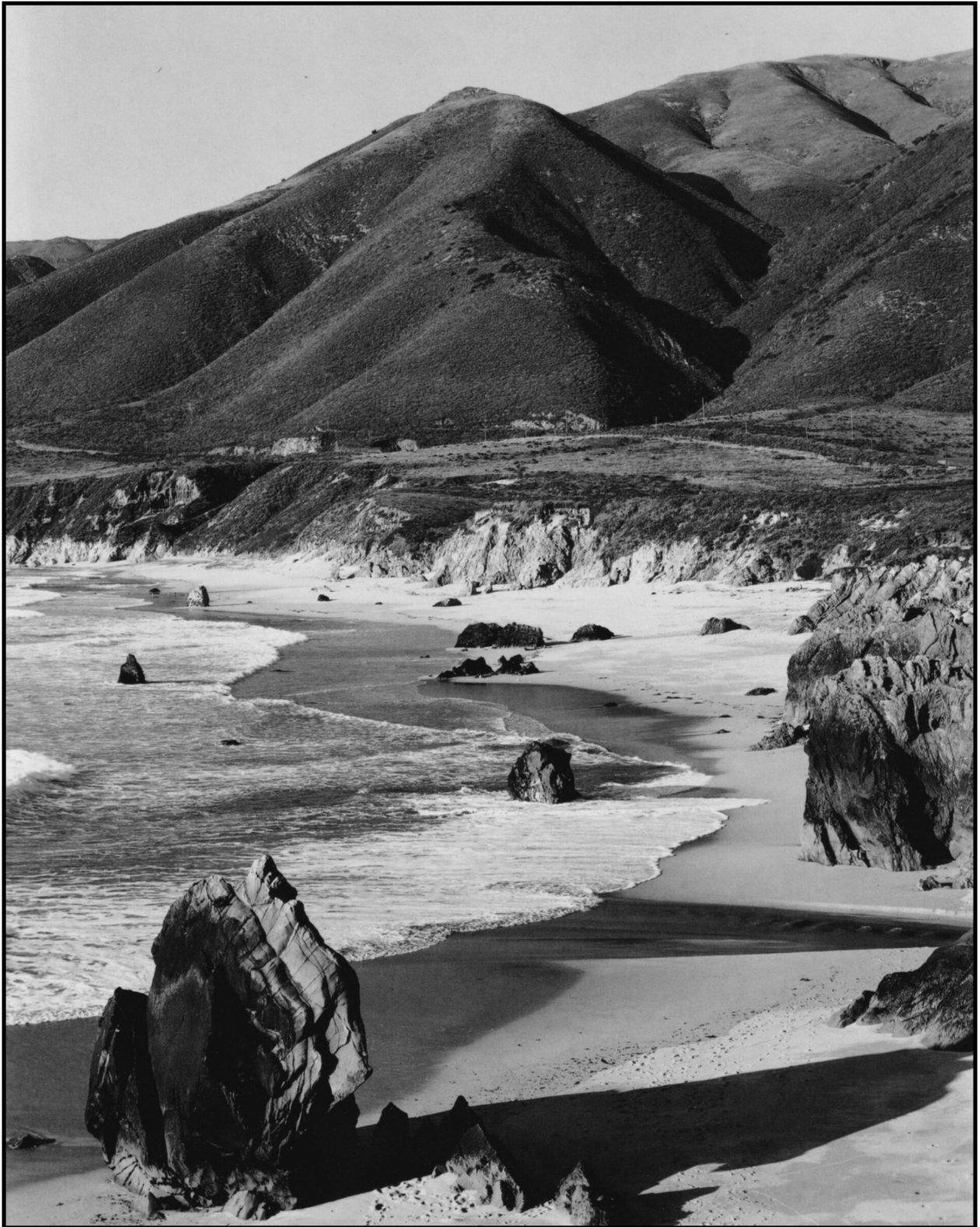
The poetry of Robinson Jeffers celebrated the beauty of Big Sur. The following is a poem about Garapata Beach where Soberanes (or Sovranes) Creek empties into the Pacific – *The Place for No Story* (1932). When introducing the poem in a reading in 1941 Jeffers remarked about the title:

These eleven lines are called “The Place for No Story,” because the coast here, its pure and simple grandeur, seemed to me too beautiful to be the scene of any narrative of mine. (Jeffers, 1956)

The coast hills at Sovranes Creek;  
No trees, but dark scant pasture drawn thin  
Over rock shaped like flame;  
The old ocean at the land’s foot, the vast  
Gray extension beyond the long white violence;  
A herd of cows and the bull  
Far distant, hardly apparent up the dark slope;  
And the gray air haunted with hawks:  
This place is the noblest thing I have ever seen. No  
imaginable  
Human presence here could do anything  
But dilute the lonely self-watchful passion. (CP II, 157)

The following it is a 1964 photograph of the beach by Morley Baer (Jeffers, Baer & Karman, 2001). Barely visible in the

photograph are hawks, haunting the sky above the further slopes:



The poem is “an evocation of the sublime” (Zaller, 2012, p 171). Yet it differs from Wordsworth’s sublime. It is not the

participation of the individual human consciousness in something universal:

...a sense sublime,  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

*(Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, 1798)*

For Jeffers, the sublime is totally independent of any human interaction. It is something to be wondered at but not participated in.

## **Fame**

After *Tamar*, Jeffers became very successful, publishing a book every year or two. Like *Tamar*, these books contained both long narratives and short lyrics. His poetic style – the long lines and the free rhythms – did not change. The narrative poems continued to be full of sex and violence – like penny-dreadfuls updated to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and translated into poetry. Jeffers, however, had tapped some current in the American soul.

The shorter poems continued to be more approachable. The following is *Hawk and Rock* (1935). Robert Hass (1987) was to use this as the title poem for a later collection of Jeffers's shorter lyrics.

Here is a symbol in which  
Many high tragic thoughts  
Watch their own eyes.

This gray rock, standing tall  
On the headland, where the sea-wind

Lets no tree grow,

Earthquake-proved, and signed  
By ages of storms: on its peak  
A falcon has perched.

I think, here is your emblem  
To hang in the future sky;  
Not the cross, not the hive,

But this; bright power, dark peace;  
Fierce consciousness joined with final  
Disinterestedness;

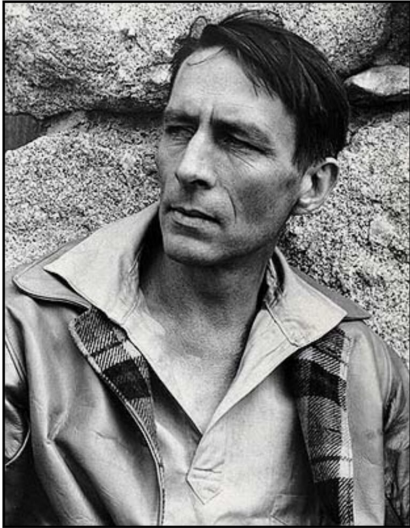
Life with calm death; the falcon's  
Realist eyes and act  
Married to the massive

Mysticism of stone,  
Which failure cannot cast down  
Nor success make proud. (CP II, 416)

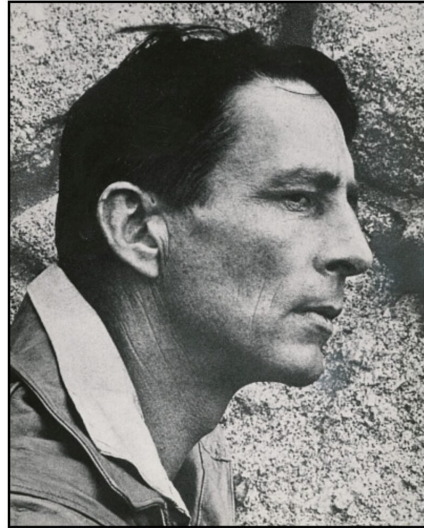
The poem proclaims Jeffers outlook on life – a combination of fierce consciousness and disinterestedness, bright power and dark peace. The following shows the final lines in Jeffers's handwriting (from an inscription in a book gifted to a friend).

— The massive  
Mysticism of stone,  
Which failure cannot cast down,  
Nor success make proud.

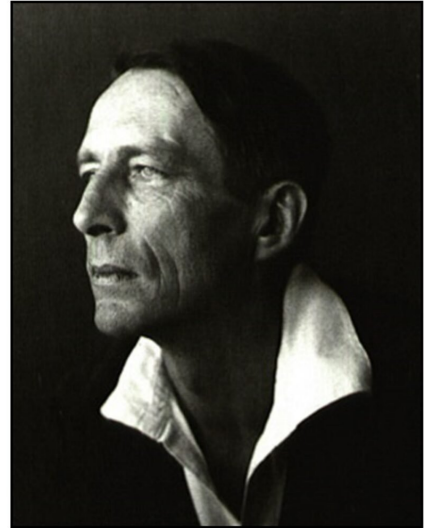
Jeffers's photograph made the cover of *Time* in 1932. (It was not until 1950 that the magazine awarded a cover portrait to either Robert Frost or T. S. Eliot.) In 1938, Random House published *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, a volume of over 600 pages. The following are photographs of Jeffers taken by Edward Weston during the height of his fame – the middle image is from the cover of *Time*:



1929



1932



1933

## Inhumanism

Jeffers had received a modern scientific education and understood the import of evolutionary theory and recent findings in astronomy upon our place in the world and in time. He realized that the human species might develop further, but would ultimately become extinct, the universe then continuing to exist without any further contribution from mankind. Nevertheless, he gloried in the heart-breaking beauty of the natural world. He described this “religious feeling” in his 1941 talk to the Library of Congress (Jeffers, 1956, pp 23-24):

It is the feeling ... I will say the certitude ... that the world, the universe is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be love and revered; and in



moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it.

But these moments are evanescent. The beauty of the world will outlast us. The following are the lines that end his 1926 poem *Credo*:

The beauty of things was born before eyes and sufficient to itself; the heart-breaking beauty  
Will remain when there is no heart to break for it. (CP I, 239)

Jeffers view of beauty was that it was part of nature and would outlast the perceiver. An opposing view is that beauty is in the mind, and that human beings have evolved to find the world they live in beautiful. Such a development facilitates human survival: if we cherish the world, we will reap its bounty.

Jeffers's philosophy was more specifically described in the preface to his 1947 book *The Double Axe* (the original version of which is included in his 2001 *Selected Poetry* edited by Tim Hunt):

It is based on a recognition of the astonishing beauty of things and their living wholeness, and on a rational acceptance of the fact that mankind is neither central nor important in the universe; our vices and blazing crimes are as insignificant as our happiness. We know this, of course, but it does not appear that any previous one of the ten thousand religions and philosophies has realized it. An infant feels himself to be central and of primary importance; an adult knows better; it seems time that the human race attained to an adult habit of thought in this regard. The attitude is neither misanthropic nor pessimist nor irreligious, though two or three people have said so, and may again; but it involves a certain detachment.

Jeffers contrasted his ideas to Renaissance Humanism, which, though he preferred it to the preceding Scholastic Theology, he felt improperly placed Man at the center of the universe. The Renaissance took to heart wisdom of philosophers such as

Protagoras of Abdera who proposed that "Man is the measure of all things" and doubted the existence of the gods: "Concerning the gods, I have no means of knowing whether they exist or not, nor of what sort they may be, because of the obscurity of the subject, and the brevity of human life." (Bonazzi, 2020). Renaissance philosophers like Pico della Mirandola focussed on the man rather than on God. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, he proclaimed that "There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than Man" (Forbes, 1942).

Jeffers called his philosophy "inhumanism" to distinguish it from the humanism of the Renaissance (Carpenter, 1981). As Nafis-Sahely (2016) has remarked, the philosophy "might have fared better under a different name." Perhaps, for example, "naturalism." The first meaning suggested by the word "inhumanism" is "brutality." Jeffers's inhumanism is an austere and detached view of the world. It has many similarities to stoicism (Lioi, 2025): we live our life as best we can; we pass away and the world persists. In his 1941 talk, Jeffers (1956, p 28) related his inhumanism to the main tenets of Christianity:

It seems to me, analogously, that the whole human race spends too much emotion on itself. The happiest and freest man is the scientist investigating nature, or the artist admiring it; the person who is interested in things that are not human. Or if he is interested in human things, let him regard them objectively, as a small part of the great music. Certainly humanity has claims, on all of us; we can best fulfill them by keeping our emotional sanity; and this by seeing beyond and around the human race. This is far from humanism; but it is, in fact, the Christian attitude: ... to love God with all one's heart and soul, and one's neighbor as one's self – as much as that, but as little as that.

Jeffers was enthusiastic in his love of nature, but far more detached in his love of neighbor. Although he wrote in the style of Walt Whitman, he lacked that poet's intense love of

his fellow man.

One of the clearest poetic descriptions of inhumanism is in final section of the late poem *De Rerum Virtute* or (On the Nature of Virtue) (1954, discussed extensively by Chapman, 2002):

One light is left us: the beauty of things, not men;  
The immense beauty of the world, not the human world.  
Look—and without imagination, desire nor dream—directly  
At the mountains and sea. Are they not beautiful?  
These plunging promontories and flame-shaped peaks  
Stopping the sombre stupendous glory, the storm-fed ocean?  
Look at the Lobos Rocks off the shore,  
With foam flying at their flanks, and the long sea-lions  
Couching on them. Look at the gulls on the cliff-wind,  
And the soaring hawk under the cloud-stream—  
But in the sage-brush desert, all one sun-stricken  
Color of dust, or in the reeking tropical rain-forest,  
Or in the intolerant north and high thrones of ice—is the  
earth not beautiful?  
Nor the great skies over the earth?  
The beauty of things means virtue and value in them.  
It is in the beholder's eye, not the world? Certainly.  
It is the human mind's translation of the transhuman  
Intrinsic glory. It means that the world is sound,  
Whatever the sick microbe does. But he too is part of it.  
(CP III, 403)

## **The Double Axe**

Jeffers was thoroughly dismayed by World War II and believed that the United States should never have entered the fighting. His pacifism was accentuated by the fact that his son Garth was serving in the US forces. Donnan had been excused because of a heart murmur. Jeffers could not see any difference between the sides – he thought that Churchill and Roosevelt were as guilty as Hitler and Mussolini.

In 1948 Jeffers published his first collection of poems since Pearl Harbor – *The Double Axe*. The title poem was composed of two parts: *The Love and the Hate* and *The Inhumanist*. In the first part a young soldier killed in the Pacific Campaign wills his decaying body to return home to the family ranch in the Big Sur and confront his father:

Did you  
And your old buddies decide what the war's about?  
I came to ask. You were all for it, you know;  
And keeping safe away from it, so to speak, maybe you see  
Reasons that we who only die in it can't, (CP III, 222)

The second part of the poem occurs years later on the same Big Sur ranch. Its caretaker (and possessor of the double-bit axe) looks after the homestead as various refugees from a nuclear war arrive. After a snowfall the old man addresses his axe to repudiate the humanism of the Renaissance:

Man is no measure of anything. Truly it is yours to hack, snow's to be white, mine to admire;  
Each cat mind her own kitten: that is our morals. But wait till the moon comes up the snow-tops,  
And you'll sing Holy. (CP III, 264)

Jeffers's politics and philosophy did not appeal to a people that considered the war they had just won as righteous. The publisher convinced Jeffers to withdraw some of his most virulent anti-war poems (Shebl, 1976) and added a disclaimer to the book in a "Publisher's Note":

Random House feels compelled to go on record with its disagreement over some of the political views pronounced by the poet in this volume.

The reviews were scathing. From then on, Jeffers was no longer an acclaimed poet. He lived out the rest of his life in Carmel in relative obscurity. He continued to publish occasionally but critics disparaged his work even while admitting its importance. The following is from a review of his posthumously published last poems:

Surely he provides us with plenty to carp about: his oracular moralizing, his cruel and thoroughly repellent sexuality, his dreadful lapses of taste when he seems simply to throw back his head and howl, his slovenly diction, the eternal sameness of his themes, the amorphous sprawl of his poems on the page. The sheer power and drama of some of Jeffers' writing, however, still carries the day despite everything, and this is not so much because of the presence of the Truth that Jeffers believes he has got hold of but because of what might be called the embodiment of that Truth: Jeffers' gorgeous panorama of big imagery, his galaxies, suns, seas, cliffs, continents, mountains, rivers, flocks of birds, gigantic schools of fish, and so on. His Truth is hard to swallow try looking at your children and drawing comfort from Jeffers' "inhumanism"—but one cannot shake off Jeffers' vision as one can the carefully prepared surprises of many of the neatly packaged stanzas we call "good poems"; it is too deeply disturbing and too powerfully stated. (Dickey, 1964).

In the late 60s the escalation of the Vietnam War led to the involvement and death of US troops. Jeffers's passionate pacificism became more understandable, and his poetry underwent some rehabilitation and republication (Nolte, 1978).

### **The Environmental Movement**

Another important development affecting the reputation of Robinson Jeffers was the birth of the modern environmental movement with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962. As well as pointing out the severe problems that result from our misuse of the environment, the movement also published books showing the beauty of unspoiled nature. A major example of this was the book *Not Man Apart* (Adams et al, 1964) which combined photographs of the Big Sur Coast with lines from Robinson Jeffers.

Karman (2015) remarks about Jeffers attitude to man's place in



nature:

Jeffers' experience of deep time added a vatic amplitude to his verse, and a sharp moral edge. He spoke repeatedly about the destruction of Earth's environment, warning, shrilly at times, of the effects of overpopulation, pollution, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Quigley (2002) places Jeffers in a direct line between Thoreau (1817-1862) and later authors such as Edward Abbey (1927-1989) and Gary Snyder (1930- ) in the development of modern environmentalism. Of these writers, Jeffers was the most critical of how man has misused the world, and perhaps the most pessimistic. However, Abbey, Snyder and other writers have taken to heart his criticisms and tried to formulate new and better ways for man and nature to interact. Wyatt (1986) has written of the affinity between Jeffers and Snyder, both of whom spent much time building homes to fit in with the natural world. John Elder (1985) discussed Jeffers and nature in the context of how nature and humanity must interact – a process that he terms “culture:”

In learning to find equivalence between mountains, grass, and man, we gain the composure of a larger design. It is not a fixed, symmetrical rose, like Dante's covering order, but rather a process of tidal exchange, of decay and renewal. Only as we learn to see it in a natural order beyond man's civilized system may the human waste-land be redeemed and the individual made whole. Conversely, unless the city is restored and human life brought back into physical and spiritual balance, the wilderness beloved of fierce solitaires like Jeffers will inevitably be destroyed. The circuit of mutual dependence between nature and civilization defines my understanding of the word culture: it is a process rather than a product, something that grows rather than being manufactured. And only in poetry is culture fully realized.</p>

## In Retrospect

Jeffers wrote some powerful but difficult longer poems and some fine shorter lyrics. I would like to end the posting with one of his early poems – *The Excesses of God* (1924) – together with the engraving by Malette Dean that accompanies the poem in his 1956 book:

Is it not by his high superfluousness we know  
Our God? For to equal a need  
Is natural, animal, mineral: but to fling  
Rainbows over the rain  
And beauty above the moon, and secret rainbows  
On the domes of deep sea-shells,  
And make the necessary embrace of breeding  
Beautiful also as fire,  
Not even the weeds to multiply without blossom  
Nor the birds without music:  
There is the great humaneness at the heart of things,  
The extravagant kindness, the fountain  
Humanity can understand, and would flow likewise  
If power and desire were perch-mates.(CP I, 4)



## Resources

The website of the Robinson Jeffers Association provides links to many different resources about the poet, including an archive of most of the issues of the journal *Jeffers Studies*.

## References

Adams, A., Jeffers, R., & Brower, D. (1965). *Not man apart: Lines from Robinson Jeffers with photographs of the Big Sur Coast*. Sierra Club.

Bonazzi, M. (2020). Protagoras. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

- Carpenter, F. I. (1981). The inhumanism of Robinson Jeffers. *Western American Literature*, 16(1), 19-25
- Chapman, S. (2002). *De Rerum Virtute: a critical anatomy. Jeffers Studies*, 6(4), 22-35.
- Dickey, J. (1964). Review of *The Beginning and the End and Other Poems*. *Poetry*, 103(5), 316-324.
- Elder, J. (1985). *Imagining the Earth: poetry and the vision of nature*. University of Illinois Press.
- Forbes, E. L. (1942). Of the Dignity of Man: Oration of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Count of Concordia. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3(3), 347-354.
- Greenan, E. (1998). *Of Una Jeffers*. Story Line Press.
- Hass, R. (1987). Robinson Jeffers: the poetry and the life. *The American Poetry Review*. 16(6), 33-41. (a reprint of the introduction to *Rock and Hawk: A Selection of Shorter Poems by Robinson Jeffers*)
- Hymes, D. (1991). Jeffers' artistry of line. In Zaller, R. (Ed.) *Centennial essays for Robinson Jeffers*. (pp. 226-267). University of Delaware Press.
- Jeffers, R. (1938). *The selected poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Random House.
- Jeffers, R. (1956). *Themes in my poems*. Book Club of California.
- Jeffers, R. (Ed. Hunt, T., 2001). *The selected poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. Stanford University Press.
- Jeffers, R. (Ed. Hunt, T., 1988-2002). *The collected poetry of Robinson Jeffers*. (5 volumes). Stanford University Press.
- Jeffers, R. (Ed. Karman, J., 2009-2015). *The collected letters of Robinson Jeffers: with selected letters of Una Jeffers*. (3

volumes) Stanford University Press.

Jeffers, R., Baer, M., & Karman, J. (2001). *Stones of the Sur*. Stanford University Press.

Karman, J. (2015). *Robinson Jeffers: poet and prophet*. Stanford University Press.

Lioi, A. (2016). Knocking our heads to pieces against the night: going cosmic with Robinson Jeffers. In Tangney, S. (Ed.) *The wild that attracts us: new critical essays on Robinson Jeffers*. (pp 117-140). University of New Mexico Press.

Nafis-Sahely, A. (2016). If you believe that you'll believe anything – Robinson Jeffers: Poet and Prophet. Wild Court.

Nolte, W. H. (1978). Robinson Jeffers redivivus. *The Georgia Review*, 32(2), 429-434.

Quigley, P. (2002) Carrying the weight: Jeffers's Role in preparing the way for ecocriticism. *Jeffers Studies*, 6(4), 46-68.

Shebl, J. M. (1976). *In this wild water: the suppressed poems of Robinson Jeffers*. Ward Ritchie Press.

Wyatt, D. (1986). Jeffers, Snyder, and the ended world. In *The Fall into Eden*. (pp. 174–205). Cambridge University Press.

Zaller, R. (1991). Robinson Jeffers, American poetry and a thousand years. In Zaller, R. (Ed.) *Centennial essays for Robinson Jeffers*. (pp. 29-43). University of Delaware Press.

Zaller, R. (2012). *Robinson Jeffers and the American sublime*. Stanford University Press.

</pstyle="padding-left:100px;">



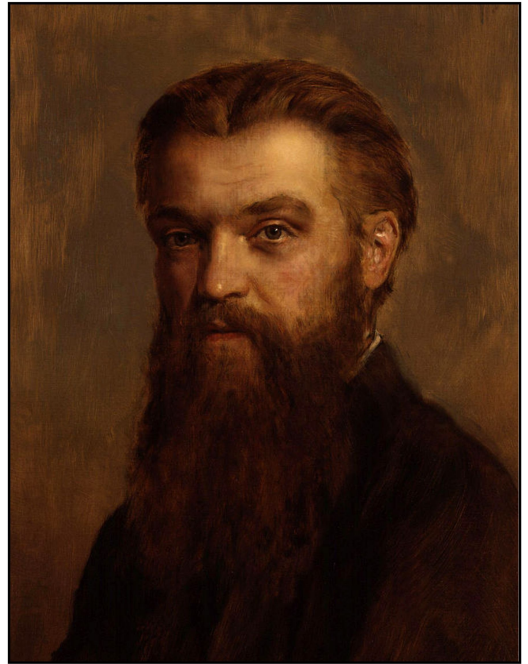
---

# The Ethics of Belief

In the 19<sup>th</sup>-Century religious belief came under scientific scrutiny. In 1877, William Kingdon Clifford, an English mathematician and philosopher, proposed that

it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

Without good supporting evidence, one should refrain from believing: it is wrong to take anything on faith. This proposal was disputed by the American philosopher and psychologist William James in an 1896 lecture entitled *The Will to Believe*. James argued that under certain conditions we must form beliefs and act on them, even though the evidence is insufficient. The main requirements were that the believer must choose between two “genuine” possibilities, and that the choice must be sufficiently “momentous” that not choosing would entail significant risk. The latter condition harkens back to the “wager” of Blaise Pascal, wherein a person decides what to believe based on the consequences of these beliefs rather than the evidence for them.



### **William Kingdon Clifford (1845-79)**

William Clifford, a professor of mathematics and mechanics at the University of London, made significant contributions to algebra and to geometry, his ideas in the latter foreshadowing Einstein's *Theory of General Relativity*. He was also interested in the philosophical implications of science, publishing essays on *The Scientific Basis of Morals* and *The Ethics of Belief*.

Clifford begins the latter essay with a story about a shipwreck:

A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant-ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely

through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance-money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

Clifford insisted that the ship-owner was responsible for the deaths of all who drowned. He may have sincerely believed in the soundness of his ship, but he had no right to so believe on the basis of the evidence before him. Clifford insisted further that had the ship not foundered, its owner was still guilty. From such examples he proposed the principle ("later known as Clifford's principle") that

it is wrong always, everywhere and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

He expounded:

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterward, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it – the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.

Chignell (2018) noted that this approach to belief is similar to that of John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

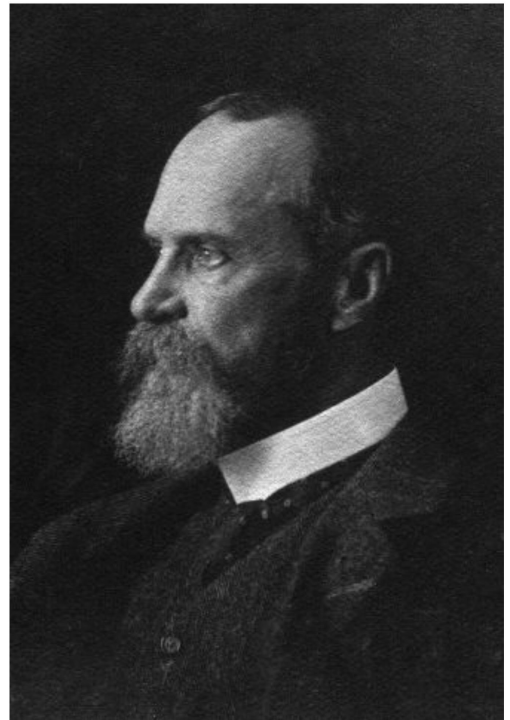
He that believes without having any Reason for believing, may be in love with his own Fancies; but neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays the Obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning Faculties he has given him, to keep him out of Mistake and Error.

Clifford realized that a single person cannot sift through all the evidence for everything she needs to believe. Some beliefs must be based on the *authority* of others. However, the believer should make some rational assessment of that authority. The proposers of the beliefs must be honest; the beliefs must be such that they can be or have been verified by those who have the time and experience to verify them; their acceptance should be independent of any personal profit to those that propose the beliefs.

Clifford also considered the *limits of inference*. Most of what we know is inferred from what we and others have experienced. The fact that the sun has risen daily throughout our lives and throughout all the lives of others leads us to believe that it will continue to do so. Clifford proposed

We may believe what goes beyond our experience, only when it is inferred from that experience by the assumption that what we do not know is like what we know.

In passing Clifford noted that we have no *a priori* right to believe that nature is universally uniform – that the future will always follow the rules of the past. This is itself a belief – one that has worked so far. Some beliefs we need to accept.



### **William James (1842-1910)**

William James trained as a physician but never practised medicine. Rather he pursued his interests in psychology, religion, and philosophy. In each of these fields he published books that have become essential to their respective disciplines: *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), and *Pragmatism* (1907).

In a talk to the Philosophical Clubs of Yale and Brown Universities –later published as *The Will to Believe* (1896) – James proposed that there are situations in which we should believe even when the evidence is insufficient. He describes three necessary conditions. First, the belief should involve a choice between two *live* options, i.e. ones that personally meaningful. Choosing between theosophy or Islam was likely not meaningful to his audience. Second, the choice must be *unavoidable*. Deciding to love or hate someone is easily avoidable – we can just be indifferent. However, accepting or denying the truth of a statement is unavoidable – the



statement must be either true or false. Third and most importantly, the choice must be *momentous*. James used the example of joining Nansen's expedition to the North Pole. To do so could lead to fame and glory; not to do so leaves one with nothing:

He who refuses to embrace a unique opportunity loses the prize as surely as if he tried and failed. Per contra, the option is trivial when the opportunity is not unique, when the stake is insignificant, or when the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise.

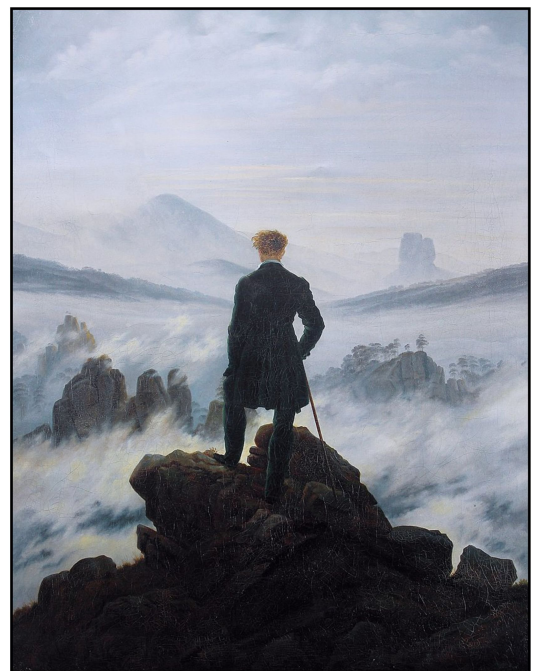
James assumed that deciding to believe is much like deciding to act. However, choosing to believe in God is not the same as choosing to join Nansen's polar expedition. One can (and does) choose to act in certain ways. However, one does not usually choose between beliefs if there is no evidence preferring one over the other (see the criticisms of Bertrand Russell, below).

James noted that his idea of the "momentousness" of a belief is related to Pascal's famous wager. Pascal proposed that it is better to believe in God than to remain an agnostic: if we are right, we are granted "eternal beatitude," and, if we are wrong, we lose nothing. James did not enjoy considering religious belief in the "language of the gaming-table." Nevertheless, he was apparently convinced by Pascal's logic. When things are that important, we must believe one way or another or risk losing all. James therefore proposed that

Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision, □ just like deciding yes or no, □ and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.

James concludes his lecture with a rousing quotation from the English Jurist, James Fitzjames Stephens (1829-1894):

In all important transactions of life we have to take a leap in the dark... If we decide to leave the riddles unanswered, that is a choice; if we waver in our answer, that, too, is a choice: but whatever choice we make, we make it at our peril. If a man chooses to turn his back altogether on God and the future, no one can prevent him; no one can show beyond reasonable doubt that he is mistaken. If a man thinks otherwise and acts as he thinks, I do not see that any one can prove that he is mistaken. Each must act as he thinks best; and if he is wrong, so much the worse for him. We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? Be strong and of a good courage. Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes. . . .



The image is wildly romantic. It brings to mind Casper David

Friedreich's *Wanderer over a Sea of Fog* (1812). The concept of the "leap of faith" – the act of believing something despite the lack of convincing evidence – was commonly used in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to counter the objections of religious skeptics. The term is often attributed to Kierkegaard though he never used it (McKinnon, 1983).

James had used the image of the Alpine Climber in an earlier essay written in French on the "subjective method" (1877, discussed in Wernham, 1987, Chapter 2):

I find myself in a difficult place from which I can only escape by making a bold and dangerous leap. Though I wish to make the leap, I have never done so before, and I do not know if I have the ability. Let us suppose I use the subjective method: I believe what I desire. My confidence gives me strength and makes possible something which otherwise might not have been. I leap across the space and find myself out of danger. But suppose I doubt my ability because it has never before been demonstrated in such a situation: then I waver; I hesitate; at last, weak and trembling, I am compelled to an attempt by sheer despair; I miss my goal; I fall into the abyss. (my translation).

It is not clear whether James was proclaiming a right to believe when there is insufficient evidence, or whether he was asserting a duty to believe. Most people would support a general right to believe with the proviso that the belief does not harm others. Few, however, would say that we ought to believe something even though the evidence is not convincing.

James has been criticized for indulging in wishful thinking (reviewed in Koopman, 2017). When we decide to believe without any evidence, we run the clear risk of entering a fantasy world. On the other hand, perhaps we should try out new world-views. Provided they cause no harm. Crusades are not allowed.



## **Blaise Pascal (1623-1662)**

Blaise Pascal was a French mathematician, physicist, and philosopher. He is most famous for his studies of probability, his experiments on atmospheric pressure and his proposal that beliefs might be determined based on what they entail rather than on the empirical evidence – Pascal's wager.

In the posthumously published *Pensées* (1670 Section III), Pascal points out that believing in God leads to a promise of Heaven whereas not believing in God has no long-term benefit. We must either believe or not. So

Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is.

The following illustration presents the premises that lead to Pascal's wager, and the decision matrix that urges us to believe in God. The estimated benefit of believing or not is

the sum (along the row in the decision matrix) of the probability-weighted benefits when God exists or not. The infinite rewards of belief in God completely outweigh the minor inconvenience of living life as a believer ( $C_g$  – a negative value). Similarly, the infinite penalties of not believing are far worse than the transient benefit of a life of indulgence ( $B_n$  – a positive value).

## Pascal's Wager

### A. Premises

1. The probability ( $P_g$ ) that God exists is not zero
2. Either God exists or God does not exist: the probability of the latter is therefore  $1-P_g$
3. The benefit for believing that God exists is infinite - eternal life in Heaven.
4. The cost ( $C_g$ ) of believing in God is finite - a life of being good and abstaining from sin.
5. The benefit ( $B_n$ ) of not believing in God is finite - a lifetime of indulgence.
6. The cost of not believing in God is infinite - death and damnation.

### B. Decision Table

	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
Believe in God	$P_g * \infty$	$(1-P_g) * C_g$
Not Believe	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$(1-P_g) * B_n$

Pascal's logic falls apart in two ways (Bartha & Pasternack, 2018; Hájek, 2003, 2022). First, it does not discriminate among which of many possible Gods one should believe in. If there is a non-zero possibility of an Islamic God who rewards his followers with heaven and casts infidel Christians into hell, the infinite rewards and penalties associated with the Christian God are cancelled out. This is illustrated in the below. The astute observer will note that while the infinite



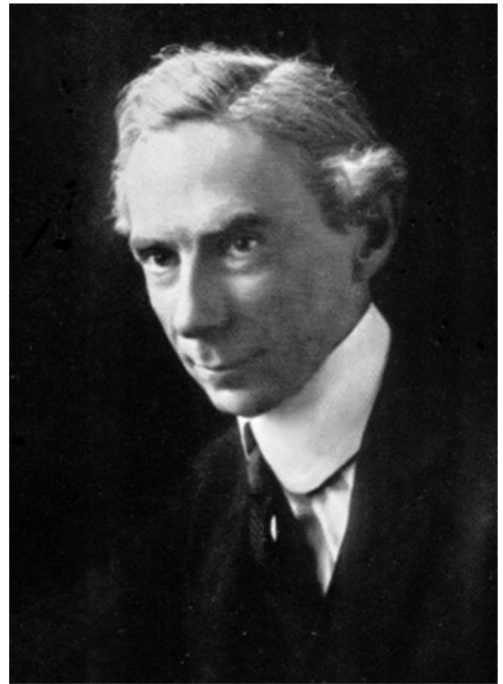
benefits and costs of believing in a particular God are cancelled out, the atheist is still stuck with probabilities of death and damnation regardless of which God exists. Perhaps, this is the human lot. The atheist, however, simply assumes that both  $P_g$  and  $P_a$  are zero.

Pascal's Wager with more than one God, e.g. there is a non-zero probability ( $P_a$ ) of the Islamic God Allah as well as a non-zero probability ( $P_g$ ) of the Christian God:

### Decision Table

	Christian God Exists	Islamic God Exists	No God Exists
Christian Belief	$P_g * \infty$	$P_a * (-\infty)$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*C_g$
Islamic Belief	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$P_a * \infty$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*C_a$
Atheism	$P_g * (-\infty)$	$P_a * (-\infty)$	$(1-P_g-P_a)*B_n$

A second objection to Pascal's wager is that it presupposes not only that God might exist but also that God would reward the believer with heaven and damn the non-believer to hell. Among the credible possibilities are a benevolent God who would forgive the non-believer, and a strict God who would damn those that professed belief simply to get to heaven as hypocrites who did not "truly" believe in their hearts.



### **Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)**

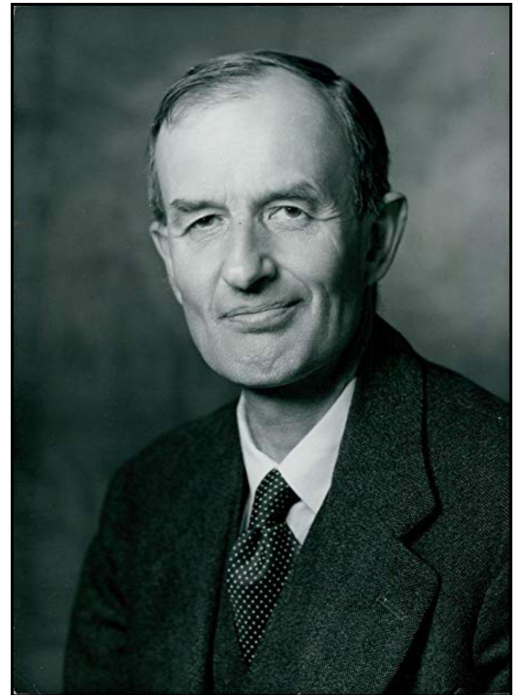
Bertrand Russell was an English philosopher, mathematician, and logician. He is most famous for the *Principia Mathematica* (1913) written together with A. N. Whitehead. This attempted to describe the basic axioms and rules underlying human logic and mathematics. Russell was also known for his pacifism and his agnosticism.

Russell was one of the first major critics of James' *The Will to Believe*. In an essay on *Pragmatism* (1910), he pointed out the James' arguments are appropriate to actions but have no real relevance to belief. He uses the example of a traveler at a fork in the road:

I come to a fork where there is no signpost and no passer-by, I have, from the point of view of action, a 'forced' option. I must take one road or other if I am to have any chance of reaching my destination; and I may have no evidence whatever as to which is the right road. I then *act* on one or other of the two possible hypotheses, until I find someone of whom I can ask the way. But I do not *believe* either hypothesis. My action is either right or wrong, but

my belief is neither, since I do not entertain either of the two possible beliefs. The pragmatist assumption that I believe the road I have chosen to be the right one is erroneous.

However, belief can mean different things to different people. Religious thinkers do not consider belief in the same way as a scientist or logician. In a religious context, one can decide to believe based upon the consequents that the belief will have – salvation, heaven, etc. – rather than on the evidence for the belief.



### **Henry Habberley Price (1899-1984)**

H. H. Price was a Welsh philosopher with a major interest in perception and belief, and a minor interest in parapsychology. His 1961 Gifford lectures on *Belief* (published in 1969) analyzed the many ways in which we can believe.

He proposed that belief can be considered in two main ways – as an occurrence (a mental event) and as an attitude (a mental

state). The occurrence of belief is the moment when a person decides that something is true (based on evidence or on desire) or assents to consider it true. With respect to Russell's criticism that belief is not usually chosen, Price noted that we often come to a belief ("make up our minds") in much the same way as we decide to act. He uses as an example:

After waiting for him for over  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours I decided that John had missed the train.

Belief can also be considered as an attitude: to believe a proposition is to be disposed to act as if that proposition were true. Other attitudes are hoping, desiring, and knowing. Having an attitude may be either conscious or not. An attitude is not necessarily associated with any overt behavior: it simply represents a tendency to respond in a certain way.

As I discussed in a previous post on Belief and Heresy, Price also pointed out that "believing that" differs from "believing in" (Price, 1965). Believing-that is used with a proposition: it considers that a proposition is true based on the evidence. Believing-in is used with things, persons, or ideas: it not only claims that these exist (existed or will exist) but also affirms many other related propositions. Christ stated

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.  
(*John* 11: 25-26)

Simply asserting that Christ existed is clearly not sufficient for a person to "believe in" Christ. One must also believe that he is divine, that he died so that those who believe in him do not have to die, that he was resurrected from death, and that he lives forever. Challenging requirements for one of a skeptical disposition. However, the reward is invaluable: eternal life.



### **Peter van Inwagen (1942- )**

Peter van Inwagen is an American Christian philosopher who has written extensively on the philosophy of religion: *An Essay on Free Will* (1983), *The Problem of Evil* (2006), *Metaphysics* (2002).

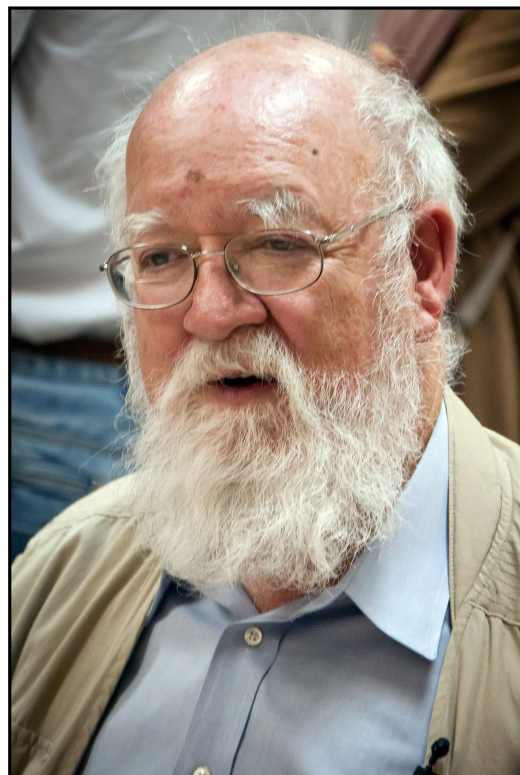
In 1996 van Inwagen published a paper commenting Clifford's principle that we should not believe anything based upon insufficient evidence. He initially remarks that although all beliefs need to be based on evidence

a strict adherence to the terms of the principle would lead to a chain of requests for further evidence that would terminate only in such presumably unanswerable questions as What evidence have you for supposing that your sensory apparatus is reliable? or Yes, but what considerations can you adduce in support of the hypothesis that the future will resemble the past?

More importantly, he points out that Clifford's principle has mainly been applied in criticizing religious beliefs. He notes that for complicated issues in philosophy, politics, economics, and psychiatry, the available evidence even when



properly scrutinised often leads to a diversity of opinion. Each of us may have our own insight or intuition as to what is true. Just as we do not consider it morally wrong to have these individual beliefs in philosophy, politics, etc., so we should allow religious beliefs even when the evidence for them is (necessarily) incomplete.



### **Daniel C. Dennett (1942- )**

Daniel Dennett is an American philosopher and cognitive scientist. He has written extensively on psychology (*Consciousness Explained*, 1992), evolution (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, 1996) and religion (*Breaking the Spell*, 2006). Together with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, he is considered one of "The Four Horsemen of the New Atheism."

One way to consider belief is as an interpretation of reality. Dennett has proposed that our brains are continually modelling what is going on in the world. What we are conscious of at any moment is as the "best draft" of our interpretive model

(Dennett, 1992). Our consciousness of our selves is an abstract “center of narrative gravity” that we use to interpret our experience.

Some philosophers and psychologists have denied the existence of beliefs (see Schwitzgel, 2019, for a review of “eliminativism”). Dennett considers beliefs (and other mental states) as helpful in interpreting the behavior of others who might have mental states similar to our own. He describes this mode of interpreting and predicting behavior as the “intentional stance:”

Here is how it works: first you decide to treat the object whose behavior is to be predicted as a rational agent; then you figure out what beliefs that agent ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose. Then you figure out what desires it ought to have, on the same considerations, and finally you predict that this rational agent will act to further its goals in the light of its beliefs. A little practical reasoning from the chosen set of beliefs and desires will in most instances yield a decision about what the agent ought to do; that is what you predict the agent will do. (Dennett, 1987, p 17)

## **Whatever Gets You Thru the Night**

We have touched on what various philosophers have thought about belief. What can we conclude?

To survive, human beings must understand what they can about the world in which they find themselves. In some contexts, our understanding has become highly accurate. Our perceptions tell us what things are and predict what they will do; our actions manipulate the world. In other contexts – in philosophy, politics and psychiatry, for example – we often have little understanding. We do not know whether the world has a purpose, how society could be optimally organized, or why our thinking

can become disordered. Rather than just accept these uncertainties, we try out possibilities – to see whether they both fit the world and give us comfort. Often these ideas are just hunches; sometimes they become considered opinions; occasionally they become beliefs. Our beliefs are the way we make sense of the world.

Are there ethical principles that determine what we can believe (Chignell, 2018; Schmidt & Ernst, 2020)? We should base our beliefs as much as possible on the evidence available to us. However, we should not retire to an attitude of universal skepticism. We must try out hypotheses about the what we do not know about world. We remain responsible for the consequences of our actions, even if we sincerely believed those actions appropriate.

Contemplating the smallness of humanity in the immensity of the universe is frightening. Our beliefs provide us with some way to handle this fear. In the words of John Lennon's 1974 song, they are "Whatever gets you thru the night."

## References

Schmidt, S., & Ernst, G. (2020). *The ethics of belief and beyond: understanding mental normativity*. Routledge.

Bartha, P. F. A. & Pasternack, L (Eds) (2018). *Pascal's wager* Cambridge University Press.

Chignell, A. (2018) The ethics of belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Clifford, W. K. (1877). The ethics of belief. *The Contemporary Review* 29, 289-309. Reprinted in Clifford, W. K. (1884). *The scientific basis of morals and other essays*. (pp. 25–36). J. Fitzgerald (New York).

Dennett, D. C. (1987). *The intentional stance*. MIT Press.

Dennett, D. C. (1991). *Consciousness explained*. Little, Brown.

James, W. (1877). Quelques considérations sur la méthode subjective. *Critique philosophique*, 2, 407-413. Reprinted in James W. (1978; Ed. Burkhardt, F., Bowers, F., & Skrupskelis, I. K.) *Essays in Philosophy*. Harvard University Press.

James, W. (1896) The will to believe. *The New World*, 5, 327-347. Reprinted in W. James (1897) The will to believe and other essays in popular philosophy. (pp. 1-31). Longmans Green.

Hájek, A. (2003). Waging war on Pascal's wager. *Philosophical Review*, 112: 27–56.

Hájek, A. (2022). Pascal's Wager. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Koopman, C. (2017). The Will, the Will to Believe, and William James: an ethics of freedom as self-transformation. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 55(3), 491–512.

McKinnon, A. (1993). Kierkegaard and "The Leap of Faith." *Kierkegaardiana* 16.

Pascal, B. (1670, translated by W. F. Trotter, 1958) *Pensées/Thoughts*. Dutton

Price, H. H. (1965). Belief 'in' and belief 'that.' *Religious Studies*, 1, 5-27

Price, H. H., 1969, *Belief*. Allen & Unwin.

Russell, B. (1910). *Philosophical essays*. Longmans, Green, and Co.

Schwitzgel, E. (2019). Belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

van Inwagen, P. (1996). "It is wrong, everywhere, always, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" In

J. Jordan & D. Howard-Snyder (eds.), *Faith, freedom and rationality* (pp 137–153). Rowman and Littlefield. Available online.

Wernham, J. C. S. (1987). *James's will-to-believe doctrine: a heretical view*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

---

# The Cathars

## The Cathars

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries groups of people called the Cathars lived quietly in various regions of Western Europe – Northern Italy, the Rhineland and, most especially, Southern France. They followed the moral teachings of Jesus, forsaking worldly goods and loving one another, but they did not believe in the basic theology of Christianity. They considered that the world was evil, that human beings were spirits imprisoned in the flesh, and that the soul could only be set free at death if one had lived a life of purity. The Catholic Church considered these beliefs heretical, and in 1208 Pope Innocent III called for a crusade to eradicate the heresy. Named after the inhabitants of the city of Albi which had a flourishing Cathar population, the Albigensian Crusade lasted from 1209 until 1229. After years of terrible violence and cruelty, most of those who professed Cathar beliefs were dead. All that now remains of these peaceful people are the ruins of the hilltop castles in which they sought refuge.

## Heresy and Dissent in the Middle Ages

The increasing secular power and the ostentatious luxury the Catholic Church were far from the life of poverty and compassion taught by Jesus. This contrast triggered dissent in



various forms (Moore, 1985). In 1098 a group of monks left the Benedictine monastery and founded the order of the Cistercians. In 1135, Henry of Lausanne, who had taught throughout the South of France that the individual believer was more important than the church, was condemned as heretical. In 1143 and again in 1163, small groups of heretics who denied the authority of the Catholic Church were burned at the stake in Cologne. In 1173 in Lyons, a merchant named Valdes (also known as Waldo) began preaching a life of apostolic poverty as the way to salvation. His followers, who became known as the Waldensians, were initially tolerated but later considered heretics.

The monk Eberwin of Steinfeld Abbey near Cologne wrote to Bernard of Clairvaux about the heretics of 1143. He was astounded by their fortitude in accepting death rather than disavowing their beliefs, and he tried to understand them:

This is their heresy: They say that the Church exists among them only, since they alone follow closely in the footsteps of Christ, and remain the true followers of the manner of life observed by the Apostles, inasmuch as they possess neither houses, nor fields, nor property of any kind. They declare that, as Christ did not possess any of these Himself, so He did not permit His disciples to possess them. 'But you,' they say to us, 'add house to house, and field to field, and seek the things of this world. So completely is this the case, that even those among you who are considered most perfect, such as the monks and regular canons, possess these things, if not as their private property, yet as belonging to their community.' Of themselves they say: 'We are the poor of Christ; we have no settled dwelling-place; we flee from city to city, as sheep in the midst of wolves; we endure persecution, as did the Apostles and the martyrs: yet we lead a holy and austere life in fasting and abstinence, continuing day and night in labours and prayers, and seeking from these only what is necessary to sustain

life. We endure all this,' they say, 'because we are not of this world.' (Mabillon & Eales, 1896, p 390).

Bernard considered the danger of these apparently innocent heretics, and in his series of sermons on the *Song of Songs* (also known as the *Song of Solomon*), he expounded upon the verse

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines:  
for our vines have tender grapes. (*Song of Solomon* 2:15)

He proposed that the vines are those of the Church and the little foxes are the heretics. He described the ways of their deceit:

They study, then, to appear good in order to do injury to the good, and shrink from appearing evil that they may thus give their evil designs fuller scope. For they do not care to cultivate virtues, but only to colour their vices with a delusive tinge of virtues. Under the veil of religion, they conceal an impious superstition; they regard the mere refraining from doing wrong openly as innocence, and thus take for themselves an outward appearance of goodness only. For a cloak to their infamy they make a vow of continence. (Mabillon & Eales, 1896, p 390)

In 1145 Bernard journeyed to Toulouse to challenge the teachings of the Henricians and to bring them heretics back to the teachings of the Church. The heretics refused to listen to him.

In 1184, Pope Lucius III, dismayed by the prevalence of heresy, issued the bull *Ad abolendam diversam haeresium pravitatem* (To abolish diverse malignant heresies). This initiated (or formalized) the Episcopal Inquisition: local bishops were empowered to try suspected heretics. Once convicted, heretics were handed over to secular authorities for appropriate punishment. The church did not wish to sully itself with their death.



Heretics were executed in various ways. However, the most common sentence was burning. The first such sentence to be carried out since ancient times was at Orleans in 1022 under Robert II (also known as the “pious”), King of the Franks. The fire gave the heretics a foretaste of hell “enacting in miniature the fate that awaited all those who failed to take their place within a united Christian society” (Barbezat, 2014; see also Barbezat 2018). An illumination from the *Chroniques de France* (1487) in the British Library shows the burning of the heretics. Noteworthy is the idyllic landscape in the background, and the complacency of the king and his followers.

## **Catharism**

Many of the heretics, such as those in Cologne and in the

South of France, were called “Cathars.” The name perhaps derives from the Greek *katharoi* (pure ones), but the word may also have described the worship of Satan in the form of a cat. The heretics did not use the term; rather, they considered themselves “good men” (*bons omes* in the Occitan language of the South of France).

Most of what we know about the Cathars comes from the writings of the Inquisitors. The books and manuals that the heretics may have followed were burned. In recent years there has been much discussion and dispute (e.g., Frassetto, 2006; Sennis, 2016) about whether the Cathars were a linked group of believers (in essence a church) or whether that idea was a paranoid construct of the Inquisition used to establish terror and maintain the power of the established Church. Skeptics thus believe that a Cathar was anyone who disagreed with the teachings of the Catholic Church (Moore, 1987, 2012; Pegg, 2001). The more traditional view, followed in this posting, is that the Cathars were a specific congregation of believers linked to other sects such as the Bogomils in Bulgaria (e.g. Hamilton, 2006; Frassetto, 2008).

The Cathars were dualists, both ontologically – spirit and matter were distinct and antithetical – and theologically – one god created the spiritual world and a separate god created the material universe. In these beliefs they followed a long line of Christian heretics. The Gnostics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE often considered the world in these terms. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE the Parthian prophet Mani taught that the spiritual world of light was separate from the material world of darkness. His followers believed that he was the reincarnation of earlier teachers such as Zoroaster, Buddha and Jesus. Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) was a Manichaean before he converted to orthodox Christianity. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Centuries CE, a group of dualists called the Paulicians flourished in Armenia. In the 10<sup>th</sup> Century CE, followers of the priest Bogomil (“dear to

God" in Slavic) established in Bulgaria a sect of dualist believers that called themselves by the name of their leader (or vice versa). The Bogomils (Frassetto, 2007, Chapter 1) were condemned as heretics by both the Roman and the Eastern Churches but they persisted in their beliefs, and some of them travelled to Italy, Germany and France. A lost manuscript purportedly describes a meeting in 1167 between a Bogomil priest named Nicetas from Constantinople and several Cathar believers in Saint Félix near Toulouse (Frassetto, 2007, p 78). The authenticity of the document has been questioned, but the idea rings true.

The main beliefs of the Cathars were described by the Cistercian monk Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay who was with the army of Simon de Montfort during the Albigensian Crusade (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 235-241), and are detailed in the 1245 testimony of Rainerius Sacconi, an Italian Cathar who converted and became a Dominican (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 329-346) and in *The Book of Two Principles* written by an Italian Cathar, John of Lugio in the mid 13<sup>th</sup> Century CE (Wakefield & Evans, 1991, pp 522-591). Oldenbourg (1961), Roquebert (1999), O'Shea (2000), Smith (2015) and McDonald (2017) provide modern summaries:

(i) **Dualism:** The Cathars believed that there were two worlds – spiritual and material – and that each world had its own god. Human beings were spiritual entities imprisoned in the flesh. The spiritual world was the “Kingdom of Heaven” that Jesus described in his beatitudes and parables. In answer to Pilate’s asking him whether he was King of the Jews, Jesus had stated “My kingdom is not of the world.” (*John* 18:26)

(ii) **Reincarnation.** At death the soul migrated in another body. Such an idea is widespread in the religions of the East. There is no separate afterlife, no heaven or hell. Although the life of the flesh may itself be considered hell.





(iii) **Consolamentum.** If a believer wished to escape the eternal cycle of reincarnation, he or she could decide to live a pure life, abstaining completely from material goods and desires. Such people were called Perfects. The decision to become a Perfect was enacted through the ceremony of *consolamentum*, wherein one already a Perfect laid hands on the head of a believer who aspired to the life of purity. This was the baptism of fire. The illustration at the right shows an illumination from a 13<sup>th</sup> Century Bible in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: two Franciscan monks stand aghast at witnessing a ceremony of *consolamentum*.

If the Perfects maintained their state of purity, at death they would be released from reincarnation and united with the spirit of the good God. However, any lapse from the pure life – eating meat or any of the products of procreation (milk, eggs), indulging in sexual intercourse – would render them (and whomever they had provided *consolamentum*) no longer Perfect.

(iv) **Apostolic Life:** The Cathars followed in the basic teachings of Jesus. They used the Lord's prayer. They believed a compassionate life dedicated to the benefit of their fellows and in the rejection of all worldly possessions. In the latter they followed the injunctions of Jesus:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.  
(*Matthew 6: 19-21*)

(v) **Denial of Church Dogma:** Although they believed in the ethical teachings of Jesus, the Cathars rejected most of the teachings and sacraments of the Catholic Church. They denied the baptism by water, preferring the true baptism by fire. They refused the sacrament of marriage since they thought that procreation only served to maintain the endless cycle of reincarnation. They had no patience with the Trinity, and were uncertain about whether Jesus was God incarnate. Many of the Cathars in the South of France believed that Jesus was human and was married to Mary Magdalene.

(vi) **Oaths:** The Cathars refused to take oaths. In this they were following the instructions of Jesus

But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. (*Matthew 5: 34-37*)

This was a severe problem in a feudal society, wherein all relations depended upon oaths of fealty.

(vii) **Role of women:** The Cathars denied that women should be subordinate to men. Many Cathar Perfects were women.

## Languedoc

By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century the Cathar heresy had become widespread in the South of France. The language spoken in this region was Occitan or the *langue d'oc*. This Romance language used *oc* to mean "yes," unlike French or *langue d'oïl* which used *oïl* (later *oui*) or Spanish which used *si*. Each region spoke its own dialect of Occitan, the most prominent of these being Provençal in the east and Gascon in the west.

At that time, the Languedoc region, named after the language, was a patchwork of different political entities. The most prominent leader was Raymond VI of the Saint-Gilles family which controlled Toulouse and regions in Provence. Raymond-Roger II Trencavel governed the region of Carcassonne and Bézier. Raymond-Roger of Foix in the foothills of the Pyrenees was an important ally of Toulouse. His wife and sister had both become Cathar Perfects. All these leaders had feudal ties to Pedro II, King of Aragon in Northern Spain. The illustration below shows a map of the region:



Languedoc was flourishing. The land produced a bounty of wine, olive oil, and wool. Weavers abounded and cloth merchants became rich. The region was a major trading crossroads linking Spain and the Mediterranean to the North and West of France. Its leaders fostered tolerance. A large Jewish society fostered both trade and new learning. Much of the medieval development of the Kabbalah occurred in Provence and in Northern Spain (Boboc, 2009).

Life was to be enjoyed. Time was available for chivalry and courtly love. The poetry of the troubadours (Chaytor, 1912; Paterson, 1993) brought the rhymes and rhythms of Arabic poetry into the literature of romance languages. Dante called the Occitan poet Arnaut Daniel *il miglior fabbro* (the best [word]smith), and Petrarch called him the *gran maestro*

*d'amore*. The following are a few lines with translation by Ezra Pound:

Tot quant es gela	Though all
things freeze here	
Mas ieu non puesc frezir	I can naught
feel the cold	
C'amors novela	For new
love sees here	
Mi fal cor reverdir	My
heart's new leaf unfold.	

### **Pope Innocent III**

In 1198 Lotario dei Conti di Segni became Pope Innocent III. He was aware of the dissension in the church and initially sympathetic to those who criticized priestly affluence. During his reign (1198-1216), he founded two new mendicant orders: the Franciscans led by Francis of Assisi in 1209 and the Dominicans led by Domingo Félix de Guzman in 1216. The illustration below shows frescoes of Saint Francis (by a follower of Giotto c. 1300; Innocent III by an anonymous artist, c. 1225 and Saint Dominic by Fra Angelico, c. 1440).



In 1202 Innocent III initiated the disastrous Fourth Crusade to the Holy Land. The crusaders, attracted by the hope of

plunder and egged on by the Venetians, sacked Constantinople instead of freeing the Holy Land. Only a few crusaders refused to participate in the sack and travelled on to Palestine, among them Simon de Montfort.

Innocent III was particularly concerned by the Cathars in Languedoc and urged Raymond VI of Toulouse to contain their heresy. He sent many priests, among them Saint Dominic, to dispute with the heretics and to urge them to return to the church. Their efforts were to no avail. The following illustration shows two paintings by Pedro Berruguete from about 1495. The left represents a legendary meeting between Dominic and the Cathars. Books of Cathar and Catholic teachings were submitted to trial by fire. Only the teachings of the Catholic Church were miraculously preserved and rose above the assembled disputants. On the right Dominic presides over an *auto-da-fé* (Portuguese, act of faith) for the burning of heretics. However, there is no evidence that the saint participated in any trials of the heretics: he died in 1221 long before the Papal Inquisition was established in 1231. Berruguete's paintings were commissioned by the Spanish Inquisition founded in 1475. That institution with its frequent autos-da-fé was sorely in need of a founding saint, and was more concerned with terror than with truth.

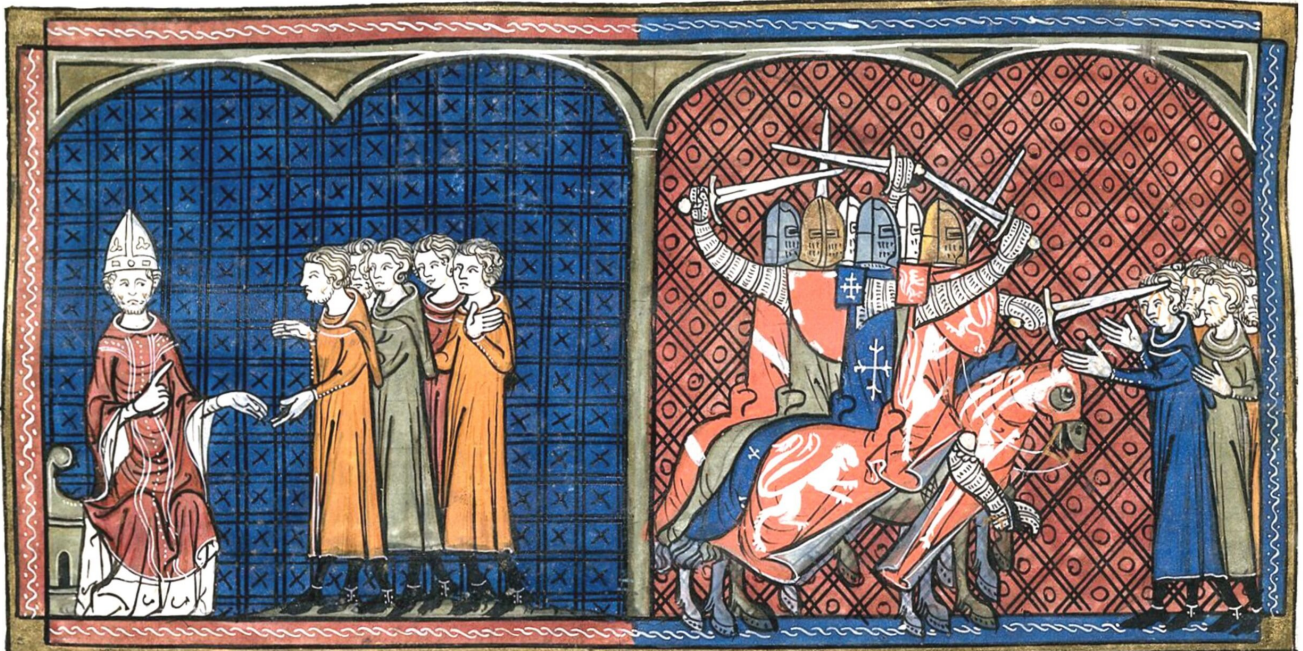




In 1207 the papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau, excommunicated Raymond VI of Toulouse. In January of 1208 Pierre negotiated with Raymond at Saint-Gilles but refused to absolve him. Pierre was then murdered at the Rhône River as he travelled back to Rome. No one knows who ordered his assassination but Raymond was held responsible. Raymond submitted to being scourged as penance for the death in June of 1209. However, by then the Pope had already called for a Crusade against the Cathars (or Albigensians) and Christian knights from the North of France had rallied to the cause, driven as much in hope for power and plunder as by desire to defend the faith. The Crusaders were led by the knight Simon IV de Montfort and by Arnaud Amaury (or Almaric), the 17<sup>th</sup> abbot of Cîteaux, mother house of the Cistercians. The following illustration from the

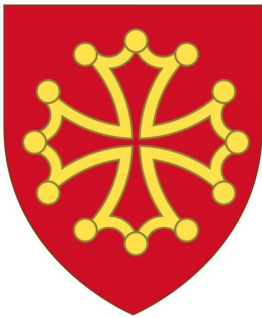


Les Grandes chroniques de France (14<sup>th</sup> Century, folio 374) now in the British Library shows Innocent III excommunicating the Cathars and the subsequent Albigensian Crusade.



Below are shown the coats of arms for the participants in the Albigensian Crusade. The upper line shows the powers of Languedoc and Aragon; the lower line the crusaders. The Pope's arms would have added a papal tiara and the keys of Saint Peter to the basic arms of the house of Segni. The kings of the Franks were from the house of Capet.

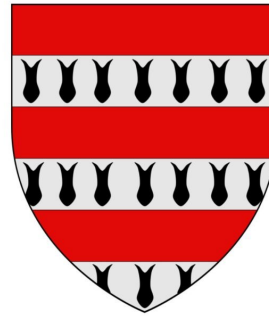
Toulouse



Aragon



Trencavel



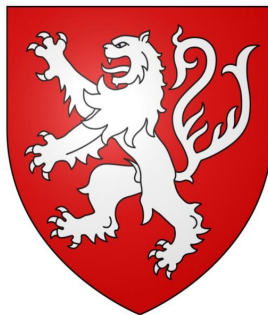
Foix



Segni



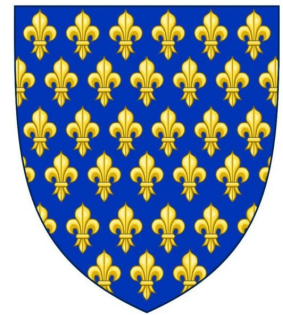
Montfort



Burgundy



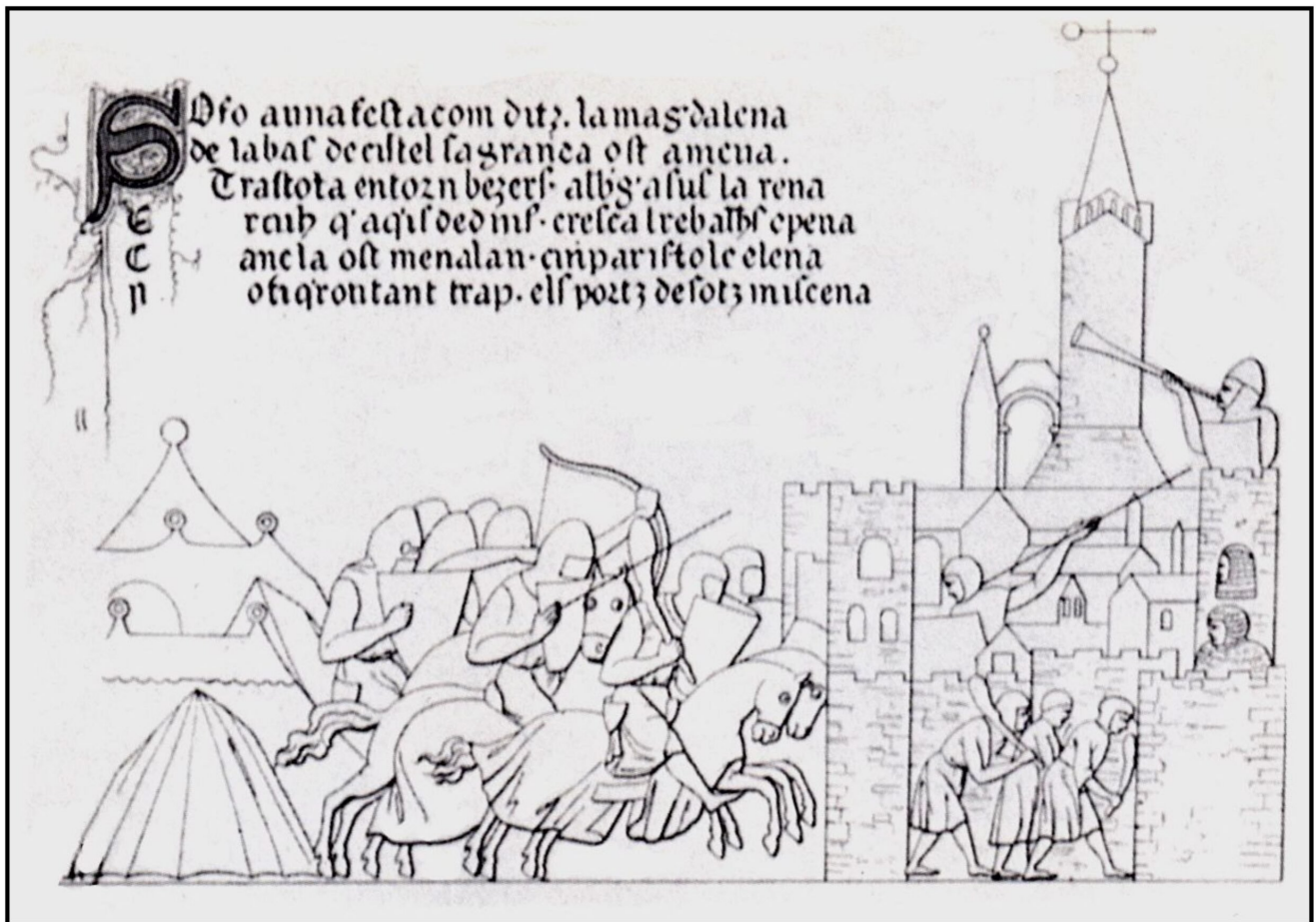
Capet



## Béziers

The first engagement of the Crusaders was the siege of Béziers, whose citizens were Catholic Cathar and Jew. The huge army encamped outside the city walls on July 22, 1209, the feast day of Mary Magdalene. The following picture is from the manuscript of the *Canso de la Crozada* (Shirley 2016). This epic poem was begun by Guillaume de Tudela and completed by another anonymous troubadour. The writing was likely finished by 1219 (the date of the last event it records), but the only extant manuscript comes from 1275. The illustrations were outlined in preparation for painting but, although the decorated initials beginning each section (or *laisse*) were illuminated, the outlines never were. (The actual illustration is from an engraving based on the drawing – the manuscript drawing is very faint):





The text in Occitan can be translated as:

On the feast of St Mary Magdalen, the abbot of Cîteaux brought his huge army to Béziers and encamped it on the sandy plains around the city. Great, I am sure, was the terror inside the walls, for never in the host of Menelaus, from whom Paris stole Helena, were so many tents set up on the plains below Mycenae (Shirley, 2016, laisse 18)

A minor skirmish between the defenders and the besiegers led to the gates of the city being left open. The camp followers and mercenaries stormed through and began looting the city. The knights followed. The result was a massacre. Various reports numbered the dead as anywhere between 10,000 and 20,000 people. No distinction was made between Catholic and Cathar. Everyone died.

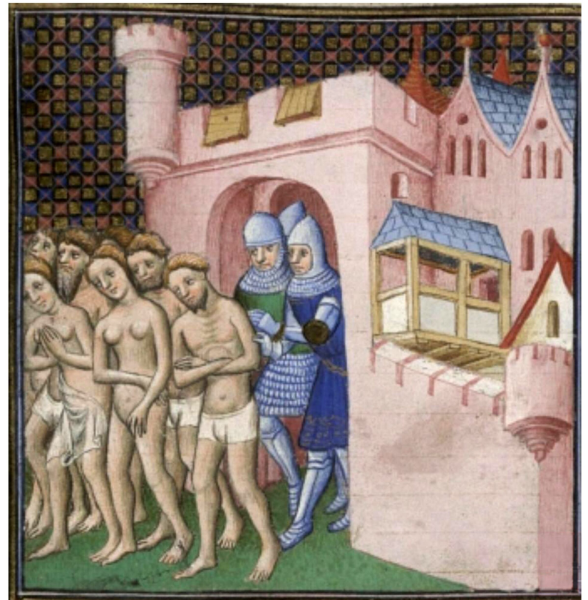
A Cistercian chronicler later reported that Arnaud Amaury was

afraid that the Cathars in the city would falsely claim to be pious Catholics and escape to spread their heresy. When asked how to distinguish between believer and heretic, he is reported to have said *Caedite eos. Novit Dominus qui sunt eius* (Kill them all. The lord knows those that are his own). This may not be true, but he would have been familiar with the words, which derive from a verse in the New Testament describing how only true believers go to heaven.

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (II Timothy 2:19)

## Carcassonne





The Crusaders then moved on and laid siege to Carcassonne on the banks of the Aude River. The city lacked its own supply of water and could not hold out for long. Under promise of safe conduct Raymond-Roger Trencavel therefore negotiated the surrender of the city. All the citizens of the city were spared but they were forced to leave without taking anything with them. The illustration on the right from *Les Grandes chroniques de France* shows them leaving the city without even the clothes on their back. Simon de Montfort was granted dominion over Carcassonne and Béziers. Raymond-Roger was imprisoned in his own dungeon in Carcassonne and died there within a few months.

## Mass Burnings

After Carcassonne, the army moved on to besiege other Languedoc towns and cities. After a month of siege in 1210, Simon de Montfort accepted the surrender of Minerve, and agreed to spare its inhabitants. However, Arnaud Amaury insisted that they should all be asked to swear allegiance to the Catholic Church. One hundred and forty Cathar Perfects refused and were burned at the stake outside the town. This was the first of the many mass immolations that would recur throughout the crusade. Among the most heinous of these executions, four hundred Cathar Perfects were burned at Lavaur



in 1211.

## The Battle of Muret

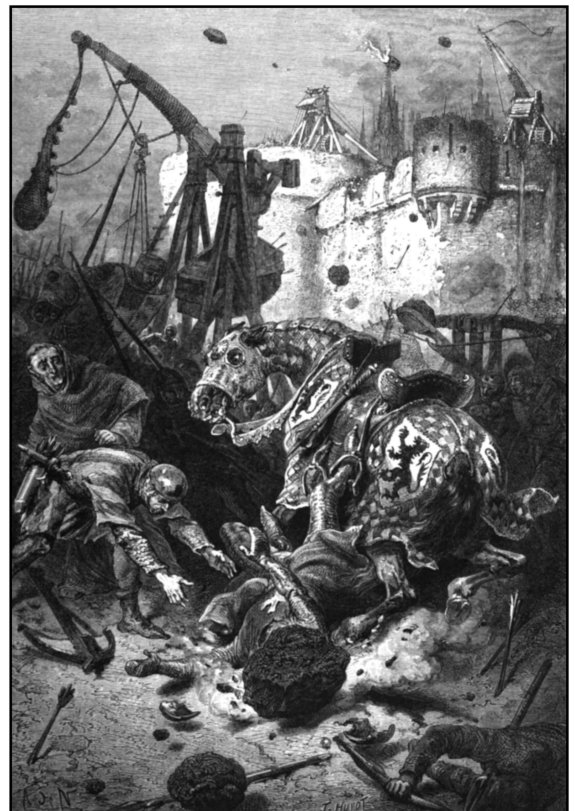
Simon de Montfort continued to take various towns and cities in Languedoc, but stayed away from Toulouse, which was large and well defended. Raymond VI of Toulouse negotiated support from Pedro II of Aragon and from Raymond-Roger of Foix and in 1213 a large army assembled on the plain outside the city walls of Muret just south of Toulouse, where the forces of Simon de Montfort were garrisoned. The crusaders were vastly outnumbered. Some reported a ratio of 10 to 1 although it was more likely 3 to 1.



Early in the morning of September 12, 1213, Simon de Montfort said his prayers and led his knights out along the Garonne River away from the encampment of the besiegers. After a while he turned and led a ferocious charge against the besiegers (see illustration on the right from *Les Grandes chroniques de France*). The southerners turned toward them but the knights of the Crusaders hit the besiegers at full speed shattering their defenses and breaking through their lines (O'Shea, 2000, pp 141-149). The result was a complete rout. Among the thousands of Toulousian and Aragonese dead was Pedro II. Less than one hundred Crusaders died.

## Toulouse

Toulouse remained unconquered. In 1215, the Pope convened the Fourth Lateran Council to broker disputes within the Christian lands. Raymond VI journeyed to Rome to plead the case for an independent Toulouse, but the council ultimately granted Simon de Montfort dominion over all of Languedoc. The crusaders, recently reinforced by prince Louis of France (later to become King Louis VIII), came to take up residence in Toulouse. In 1216, Raymond VI returned to regain his patrimony. Over the next two years the city changed hands several times.



On June 25, 1218, Simon de Montfort coming to the aid of his brother Guy who had been wounded in an assault on the city walls, was struck by a boulder launched by a catapult from within the city walls (illustration on the right from a 19<sup>th</sup>-Century engraving):

This was worked by noblewomen, by little girls and men's wives, and now a stone arrived just where it was needed and struck Count Simon on his steel helmet, shattering his eyes,

brains back teeth, forehead and jaw. Bleeding and black the count dropped dead on the ground (Shirley 2016, p 172)

The poet who wrote the latter parts of the *Canso de la Crozada* (Shirley, 2016) did not grieve the death of Simon. He reported that the crusaders took Simon's body to Carcassonne for burial, and imagined a fitting epitaph. The original version in Occitan gives a flavor of the rhyming of troubadour poetry:

Tot dreit a Carcassona l'en portan sebelhir  
El moster S. Nazari celebrar et ufrir,  
E ditz el epictafi, cel quil sab ben legir :  
Qu'el es sans ez es martirs, e que deu resperir,  
E dins el gaug mirable heretar e florir,  
E portar la corona e el regne sezir;  
Ez ieu ai auzit dire c'aisis deu avenir:  
Si per homes aucirre ni per sanc expandir,  
Ni per esperitz perdre ni per mortz cosentir,  
E per mals cosselhs creire, e per focs abrandir,  
E per baros destruire, e per Paratge aunir,  
E per las terras toldre, e per orgolh suffrir,  
E per los mals escendre, e pel[s] bes escantir,  
E per donas aucirre e per efans delir,  
Pot hom en aquest segle Jhesu Crist comquerir,  
El deu portar corona e el cel resplandir!

[Straight to Carcassonne they carried it and buried it with masses and offerings in the church of St Nazaire. The epitaph says, for those who can read it, that he is a saint and martyr who shall breathe again and shall in wondrous joy inherit and flourish, shall wear a crown and be seated in the kingdom. And I have heard it said that this must be so – if by killing men and shedding blood, by damning souls and causing deaths, by trusting evil counsels, by setting fires, destroying men, dishonouring *paratge*, seizing lands and encouraging pride, by kindling evil and quenching good, by killing women and slaughtering children, a man can in this world win Jesus Christ, certainly Count Simon wears a crown

and shines in heaven above. (Shirley, 2016, laisse 208)]

The word *paratge* in Occitan is difficult to translate. It derives from the Latin *par* (equal) and is thus similar to the English word “peerage.” However, it had come to mean all that was good in Occitan society: equality, honor, chivalry, hospitality, *joie de vivre*.

## **The End of the Crusade**

After the death of Simon de Montfort, the crusade continued intermittently. Various strongholds in the domain of Toulouse were conquered by the crusaders. Louis VIII of France became the main leader of the crusade. He conquered the city of Marmande in 1219 but was unable to take Toulouse. Many of the Cathars retreated to mountain strongholds. Raymond VI died in 1222; Raymond-Roger of Foix died in 1223. Their heirs lacked their strength and charisma. Most historians date the end of the Crusade to 1229 when the Treaty of Paris was signed in Meaux, granting the Kingdom of France dominion over all the lands previously held by Toulouse.

In order to root out the remaining Cathars in Languedoc, Pope Gregory IX established the Papal Inquisition in 1231. Instead of allowing local bishops investigate heretics, the pope appointed itinerant inquisitors from among the ranks of the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Accompanied by clerks and lawyers, these inquisitors travelled throughout the region of Languedoc, seeking out heretics, bringing them to trial, and handing them over to the secular authorities for burning (Deane, 2011, Chapter 3) For their faithful service the Dominicans became known as the Dogs of God (*Domini canes*).

One of the last Cathar refuges to fall was Montségur (Occitan for “safe hill”) a castle built on top of a steep and isolated peak known in Occitan as a *puog* (illustrated below). The castle was 170 m above the plain and the stronghold was virtually impregnable. In 1242 two inquisitors were murdered

by Cathars from Montségur. The French forces (now under Louis IX) began the siege of the isolated mountain stronghold in May 1243. Slowly and inexorably the French came closer to city until it was within range of their catapults. The castle finally surrendered in March 1244. About 220 Cathar Perfects were burned to death on the field below the puog. This became known as the *Plat dels Cremats* (field of the burned).



## **Saint Peter Martyr**

The Inquisition moved on from Languedoc to the Northern Italy. In 1852, Peter of Verona, a Dominican friar, was appointed Inquisitor in Lombardy. When returning from Como to Milan, Peter and his companion Domenic were assassinated by assassins hired by the Milanese Cathars. This is illustrated in a 1507 painting by Giovanni Bellini (see below). Despite the foreground violence one can see in the distance a countryside of peace and beauty. The woodsmen go about their work. The light from the harvest shines through the trees.





## **Albi**

In 1282 work was begun on the new Cathedral Basilica of Saint Cecilia in Albi, which was to become the largest brick building in the world. With its narrow windows and huge tower, it dominates the city like a fortress, a true bastion against heresy (see below). Above the high altar a vast fresco of the Last Judgement reminds the people of Languedoc of the torments that await those that do not follow the true teachings.



## **Peyrepertuse**

The history of the Cathars should not end with the formidable Cathedral of Albi. More fitting is the Cathar castle of Peyrepertuse (from Occitan *pèirapertusa*, pierced rock). It was finally surrendered to the French in 1240, and later became part of the French border defences.





## References

Barbezat, M. D. (2014) The fires of hell and the burning of heretics in the accounts of the executions at Orleans in 1022. *Journal of Medieval History*, 40(4), 399-420,

Barbezat, M. D. (2018). *Burning Bodies: Communities, Eschatology, and the Punishment of Heresy in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press

Boboc, R. (2009). Kabbalists, Cathars and Ismailis: Forms of Gnosis in the 11th–13th Century. *Studia Hebraica*, 9-10, 267–293.

Chaytor, H. J. (1912). *The troubadours*. Cambridge University Press.

- Deane, J. K. (2022). *A history of medieval heresy and inquisition*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Frassetto, M. (Ed.) (2006). *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: Essays on the Work of R. I. Moore*. Brill.
- Frassetto, M. (2008). *The great medieval heretics: five centuries of religious dissent*. BlueBridge.
- Hamilton, B. (2006). Bogomil influences on Western heresy. In Frassetto, M. (ed.) *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: Essays on the Work of R. I. Moore*. (pp 93-114) Brill.
- Leglu, C., Rist, R., & Taylor, C. (2014). *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade: a sourcebook*. Routledge.
- Mabillon, J., & Eales, S.J. (1896) Collected works of Bernard of Clairvaux. Volume IV. *Cantica canticorum*. Eighty-six sermons on the Song of Songs. John Hodges
- Marvin, L. W. (2008). *The Occitan War: a military and political history of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218*. Cambridge University Press.
- McDonald, J. (2017). Cathars and Cathar Beliefs in the Languedoc (Informative website).
- Moore, R. I. (1985). *The origins of European dissent*. Blackwell.
- Moore, R. I. (1987, revised 2007). *The formation of a persecuting society authority and deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. Blackwell.
- Moore, R. I. (2012). *The war on heresy*. Belknap Press
- Oldenbourg, Z. (1959, translated by P. Green, 1961). *Massacre at Montségur: a history of the Albigensian Crusade*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

- O'Shea, S. (2000). *The perfect heresy: the revolutionary life and death of the medieval Cathars*. Walker
- Paterson, L. M. (1993). *The world of the troubadours: medieval Occitan society, c. 1100-c. 1300*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pegg, M. G. (2001). On Cathars, Albigenses, and good men of Languedoc. *Journal of Medieval History*, 27(2), 181–195.
- Roquebert, M. (1999). *Histoire des cathares: hérésie, croisade, Inquisition du XIe au XIVE siècle*. Perrin.
- Sennis, A. C. (Ed.) (2016). *Cathars in question*. York Medieval Press.
- Shirley, J. (2016). *The song of the Cathar wars: a history of the Albigensian Crusade*. Routledge.
- Sioen, G. & Roquebert, M. (2001). *Cathares: la terre et les hommes*. Place des Victoires.
- Smith, A. P. (2015). *The lost teachings of the Cathars: their beliefs and practices*. Watkins.
- Wakefield, W. L., & Evans, A. P. (1991). *Heresies of the high Middle Ages*. Columbia University Press.
- Wakefield, W. L. (1974). *Heresy, Crusade, and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100–1250*. University of California Press
- 

# 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**

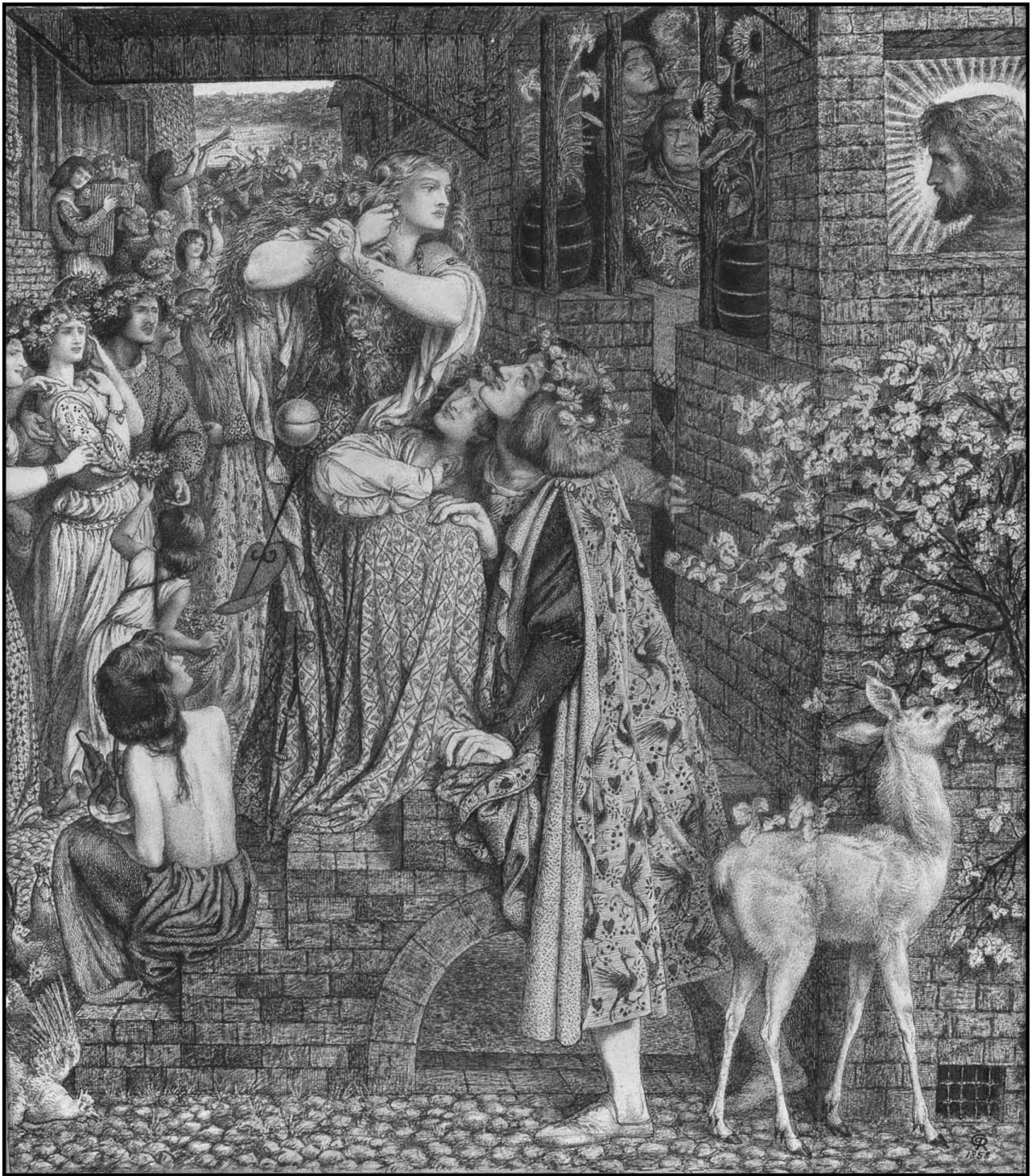
Mary, deriving from the Hebrew “Miriam,” the sister of Moses, was a common name in Palestine at the time of Jesus. The many women named Mary in the gospels are difficult to distinguish and are often conflated into one person. In 591 CE, Pope

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.

## **References**

Apostolos-Cappadona, D. (2005). "Pray with tears and your request will find a hearing": On the iconology of the

Magdalene's tears. In Hawley, J. S., & Patton, K. C. (Eds.) *Holy tears: weeping in the religious imagination*. (pp. 201-228). Princeton University Press,

Baigent, M., Leigh, R.; & Lincoln, H. (1982). *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Jonathan Cape.

Bradfield, B. (2002). The hair of the Desert Magdalen: its use and meaning in Donatello's *Mary Magdalen* and Tuscan art of the late Fifteenth Century. *York Medieval Yearbook* 1

Brown, D. (2003). *The Da Vinci Code*. Doubleday.

Carrasco, M. E. (1999). The imagery of the Magdalen in Christina of Markyate's Psalter (St. Albans Psalter). *Gesta*, 38 (1), 67-80.

Chapuis, J. (1999). *Tilman Riemenschneider: master sculptor of the late Middle Ages*. Yale University Press.

Ehrman, B. D. (2006). *Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: the followers of Jesus in history and legend*. Oxford University Press.

Haskins, S. (1993). *Mary Magdalen: myth and metaphor*. HarperCollins.

Huggins, R. V. (2016). A brief guide to the iconography of the anonymous Mary Magdalen Cycle Panel in Florence's Galleria dell'Accademia

Hunt, P. (2012). Irony and realism in the iconography of Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene*. In Erhardt, M. A., & Morris, A. M. (eds.) *Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*. (pp. 161-186). Brill.

Kalden-Rosenfeld, I. (2004). *Tilman Riemenschneider: the Sculptor and his workshop*. Langewiesche.

King, K. L. (2003). *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and*



*the first woman apostle*. Polebridge Press.

Jansen, (1998). *Maria Magdalena: Apostolorum Apostola*. In Kienzle, B. M., & Walker, P. J. (Eds). *Women preachers and prophets through two millennia of Christianity*. (pp. 57-96). University of California Press.

Lupieri, E. F. (2019). The earliest Magdalene: Varied portrayals in early gospel narratives. In Lupieri, E. F.(ed.) *Mary Magdalene from the New Testament to the New Age and Beyond*. (pp. 11-25). Brill.

Meyer, M. W., & de Boer, E. (2004). *The Gospels of Mary: the secret tradition of Mary Magdalene, the companion of Jesus*. HarperSanFrancisco.

Meyer, M. (2008). *The Gnostic Gospels*. Folio Society.

Mignozzi, M. (2019). Suspended between sacred and profane: the iconography of Mary Magdalene from its origins to the Fifteenth Century. In Lupieri, E. F.(ed.) *Mary Magdalene from the New Testament to the New Age and Beyond*. (pp 189-252). Brill.

Renan, E. (1863). *La vie de Jésus*. Michel Lévy. (English translation by C. E. Wilbour, 1891)

Sabar, A. (2020). *Veritas: a Harvard professor, a con man and the Gospel of Jesus's Wife*. New York: Doubleday.

Saramago, J. (1991, translated by Pontiero, G., 1994). *The Gospel according to Jesus Christ*. Harcourt Brace.

Starbird, M. (1993). *The woman with the alabaster jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*, Bear & Company,

Valerio, A. (translated W. Wheatley, 2021). *Mary Magdalene*. Europa Editions.

Yourcenar, M. (1935, republished 1974, translated by D. Katz,

1981) *Fires*. Farrar, Strauss, Giroux.

---

# Belief and Heresy

Religious belief differs from everyday belief. Since it cannot be tested or independently confirmed, religious belief must be accepted on faith. Religious belief generally starts with a few powerful and attractive ideas. For example: would it not be wonderful if we did not have to die? As time passes these foundational principles are elaborated and bolstered by other equally untestable beliefs to form a relatively coherent set of teachings. These “doctrines” can then organize communities of the faithful, govern the behavior of believers, and attract new converts. Some believers may choose to interpret the foundational ideas of a faith differently from the system of beliefs that are considered “orthodox” (Greek: *ortho* straight, correct + *doxa*, opinion). Beliefs that differ from the orthodox are termed heretical (Greek: *hairesis*, choice). Heresies are usually considered dangerous since they can easily disrupt the accepted doctrine and question the power of those who promote orthodoxy. Heresy occurs in the history of all the world’s religions (Henderson, 1988) This post limits itself to the early Christian beliefs and heresies about the nature of God, particularly those concerning the Trinity.

## Belief and Belief-In

In philosophy and psychology belief is considered the “attitude” we take when we regard something as true (Schwitzgebel, 2021). Beliefs are for the most part unconscious. They come to consciousness when the belief requires action. Simple beliefs are typically expressed using

a proposition: I believe that ... Most would propose that there are degrees of belief. I am more certain (or confident) that the sun will come up tomorrow than that I shall win the lottery. The confidence I have in a belief comes from how much supporting evidence I have amassed for it. When fully justified, my belief can be considered "knowledge."

When belief is used with a direct object, it typically means having confidence in the truth or accuracy of someone or something. Thus, I can believe the witness when she describes what happened to her. Or I can believe the newspaper's account of the event.

Saying that I "believe in" something has various meanings (Price, 1965; Williams, 1992; MacIntosh, 1994). In the simplest case, believing in something just means believing that it exists. When I say that I believe in fairies, I am just asserting that fairies exist. Typically, such statements have little in the way of justification. If the belief were justified, one would not need to state it in this way.

"Believe-in" often implies a positive evaluation. When I state that I believe in my doctor, I am claiming that she not only exists but that she is good at what she does. This evaluative usage extends to more abstract ideas: when assert that I believe in democracy I mean that I consider it better than other types of government.

In the religious sense, the phrase "believe in" includes beliefs in both the existence and the goodness of the object of belief, but also requires belief in a wealth of associated ideas (Luhrman, 2018). One of the foundational ideas of Christianity is expressed in Christ's comments to Martha just before raising her brother Lazarus from the dead.

I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:  
And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

(John 11: 25-26)

Simply asserting that Christ existed and that he was a force for good is clearly not sufficient for the requirement that a person “believe in” Christ. One must also believe that he is divine, that he died so that those who believe in him do not have to die, that he was resurrected from death, and that he lives forever. Challenging requirements for one of a skeptical disposition. Such beliefs are not easy. However, the reward is invaluable: eternal life.

## **A Life of Jesus**

For many years scholars have sought to determine which of the episodes in the life of Jesus reported in the gospels happened, and which were invented after the fact. This search for the “historical Jesus” (e.g. Schweitzer, 1910; Crossan, 1991; Meier, 1991; Wilson, 1992; Robinson, 2011) is controversial and highly subjective.

Jesus was a Galilean. He was likely born and grew up in Nazareth. There is no historical evidence for a Roman census, and the story of Bethlehem was probably invented to link the birth of Jesus to the line of David. Jesus likely interacted with John the Baptist, whose life and execution are noted in non-scriptural histories.

Jesus then became a preacher. He attracted a small group of disciples and large crowds of followers. He championed the poor and the dispossessed. He proposed that all the commandments could be subsumed in the simple instructions to love God and to love one’s neighbor. He promoted the idea of forgiveness instead of vengeance.

He considered himself a simple human being – a “Son of Man;” yet, he also felt that he had been specially chosen by God to teach or lead his people – a “Son of God.” The Greek word *christos* (Christ) means the “appointed one,” and is equivalent to the Hebrew word *masiah* (Messiah). Jesus preached the coming

of a "Kingdom of Heaven" but it is not clear what this meant: perhaps an independent Jewish state, or perhaps simply a community of people working together for the common good.

His simplification of the commandments and his criticism of the temple antagonized the priests; his call for a new Kingdom of Heaven alarmed the Roman powers that occupied the land. He was tried by both the Jews and the Romans. He was found guilty of blasphemy and of sedition. He was crucified and died upon a cross. His disciples were devastated.

Jesus was likely buried in the tomb of one of his followers. Nothing that happened after this is clear. Perhaps the tomb was found empty. This could then have triggered the hope that Jesus had been resurrected.

The preceding paragraphs have presented my personal idea of the historical Jesus. The following is from Ehrman's 2012 book *Did Jesus exist?*

Jesus was a Jew who came from northern Palestine (Nazareth) and lived as an adult in the 20s of the Common Era. He was at one point of his life a follower of John the Baptist and then became a preacher and teacher to the Jews in the rural areas of Galilee. He preached a message about the "kingdom of God" and did so by telling parables. He gathered disciples and developed a reputation for being able to heal the sick and cast out demons. At the very end of his life, probably around 30 CE, he made a trip to Jerusalem during a Passover feast and roused opposition among the local Jewish leaders, who arranged to have him put on trial before Pontius Pilate, who ordered him to be crucified for calling himself the king of the Jews. (p 269)

## **Jesus as God**

The empty tomb could have easily led to ideas that Jesus had



risen from the dead. Any such resurrection would have entailed supernatural intervention. Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah. Could he perhaps have been even more special? Perhaps Jesus was himself divine. From such thinking came John's idea of Jesus as the Word (Greek, *logos* – the order underlying the universe):

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men. (*John* 1:1-4)

Yet Jesus had been so terribly human in his suffering. From such thoughts came the idea of the incarnation. Though divine, Jesus was born as a human being:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (*John* 1: 14)

The first person to recognize the divinity of Jesus was John the Baptist, who noted that as Jesus was being baptized

I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. (*John* 1:32)

From these ideas of Father, Son and Spirit came the idea of a triune God, and a new religion based on the resurrection of Christ, who died to save us from our sins.

After the crucifixion the disciples saw the resurrected Jesus upon on a mountain in Galilee:

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (*Matthew*, 28: 18-20).

This is the only acknowledgement of the Trinity in the gospels. Translations more modern than the King James Version use the name “Holy Spirit” for the third member of the Trinity. These verses may be a later addition to the original gospel (see discussion by Schaberg, 1980; Funk et al, 1996; Thellman, 2019). However, the same baptismal formula is used in the *Didache* (Teachings of the Apostles: O’Loughlin, 2010; Jefford, 2013), which was written soon after Matthew’s gospel (now dated to about 80 CE). Christians were clearly aware of the Trinity before the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE.

### **Trinitarian Doctrines**

Although it occasionally mentions the Trinity, the New Testament does not describe the nature of a three-part God (Wainwright, 2011; Young, 2006). Rather, the doctrine of the Trinity was proposed by theologians during the second and third Centuries CE (Evans, 2003; Dünzl, 2007; Hillar, 2012; Phan, 2011; Tuggy 2020b). Despite twenty centuries of study, it remains an idea impossible to understand: a stumbling block to belief. Buzzard and Hunting (1999) called it “Christianity’s self-inflicted wound.”

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE), an early Christian convert from Palestine, taught in Rome during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and was beheaded for his beliefs. He was the first to propose that God the Father and God the Son were of the same substance (Greek: *homoousios*). However, this idea made no claim as to whether God the Father preceded the Son or were they both coequal and coeternal.

Sabellius (who taught around 200 CE) was North African

Christian who came to Rome to preach the gospel. His ideas are only known from those who condemned them as heretical. He appears to have believed that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were but three “aspects” or “modes” of the one God. He purportedly used an analogy to the Sun, which has a circular form (Father), gives forth light (Son), and provides warmth (Spirit).

Tertullian (155-220 CE) from Carthage was the first Christian theologian to use the word “trinity” (Latin *trinitas*) to describe Godhead. He argued against Christians like Sabellius who proposed that there was only one God – the monarchians (Greek *mono*, one + *arkhia*, rule). Tertullian claimed that God is three separate persons each of the same substance: three entities with one essence.

This concept of the Trinity could not easily explain the nature Christ – how could he be human if his essence was divine? This controversy persists to this day, the Western churches considering Christ to be one person with two natures (diaphysitism), and the Eastern churches believing Christ to have only one nature that somehow combines both the human and the divine (miaphysitism).

Tertullian’s version of the Trinity also did not clarify whether all three persons had existed for ever. Arius (256-336 CE), a charismatic Libyan preacher, taught that God was composed of three persons but believed the Father created both the Son and the Spirit when he created the universe. The Father alone was infinite, eternal, and almighty. Before the creation only the Father existed. Arius was vigorously opposed by Athanasius (298-373 CE), the bishop of Alexandria, who taught that all three persons of the Trinity were coequal and coeternal.

These theologians vehemently argued that those who disagreed with them should be condemned as heretics and excommunicated from the Church. Many early Christian thinkers were far more

concerned with the nature of a God they could not understand than with the moral teachings of Christ. Compassion and forgiveness were not in their nature.

## Constantine

At the age of 34 years, Constantine (272-337 CE) was initially acclaimed Roman Emperor after the death of his father Constantius in 306 CE. However, the empire was then governed by 5 co-rulers, all of whom desired to be the sole emperor. Over the next 18 years, these co-rulers battled for supremacy.



In the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 CE, Maxentius, who had just proclaimed himself emperor, attempted to prevent Constantine's entry into Rome. Just before the battle, Constantine saw in the sky a vision of a cross and the words *En touto nika* (Greek: With this sign you shall conquer). He therefore used as his military standard (Latin, *labarum*) the *Chi-Rho* symbol (a combinations of the first two letters of Christ's name in Greek  $\chi$  *chi* and  $\rho$  *rho*). Illustrated on the right is a 4<sup>th</sup> Century Roman sculpture with the Chi-rho symbol



depicting the resurrection of Christ leaving the Roman soldiers to guard an empty tomb. Constantine was victorious. Thenceforth, Christianity was the religion of his army. Illustrated below is Bernini's sculptural representation Constantine's vision:





Ultimately, Constantine became sole emperor in 324 CE. He established his imperial capital at Constantinople, and made Christianity the imperial religion. History is not clear about Constantine's personal relationship to Christianity. His mother Helena may have been a Christian when she married his father Constantius, and may have influenced her son's thinking. She certainly was a fervent believer at the time that Constantine became emperor. From 326 to 328 CE, she made a pilgrimage to Palestine. Legend has it that she discovered in Jerusalem the cross on which Jesus had been crucified.

Constantine was not baptized until just before his death in 337 CE. He may have delayed because of personal doubts about the Christian religion, or he may have wished to absolve himself of as much sin as possible before dying. Constantine was baptized by Eusebius (Greek: pious) of Nicomedia, a priest who followed the teachings of Arius. By then, however, the emperor had promoted an orthodoxy that therefore made him a heretic.

### **The Nicene Creed**

After becoming sole emperor, Constantine quickly realized that, if he wished to unify the empire through one religion, he would have to bring together the many feuding factions of Christianity. In 325 CE, he therefore convened the First Ecumenical (Greek: "concerning the whole inhabited earth") Council at Nicaea a few miles south of Constantinople (in the modern city of Iznik). Theologians from all the reaches of the empire gathered to decide what it meant to be a Christian. They produced a statement of faith that became known as the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things, visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father; God of God; Light of light; very God of very God; begotten, not made; being of

one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made, both things in heaven and things in earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down, and was incarnate, and was made man; who suffered, and rose again the third day; and ascended into heaven; and shall come again to judge the quick and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost, etc. (Plaff, 1885)

The “etc” likely means some formula known to all, such as

. . . in one baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and in one Holy Catholic Church; and in the resurrection of the flesh; and in eternal life

Appended to the creed was a statement specifically condemning the ideas of Arius:

And those who say There was a time when He was not, or that Before He was begotten He was not, or that He was made out of nothing; or who say that The Son of God is of any other substance, or that He is changeable or unstable,—these the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes.



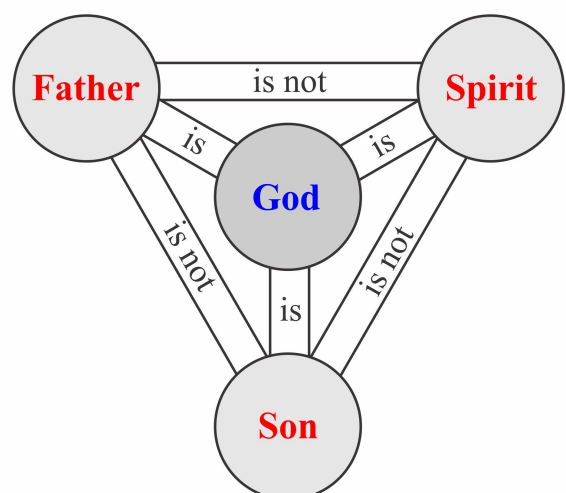
The Nicene Creed did not unify the Christian believers. Those

that believed in Arius' concept of the Trinity were formally damned as heretics. However, by that time Arianism had become the version of Christianity accepted through much of Northern Europe, and these ideas soon came to Italy with the barbarian invasions. Theodoric the Great, the Arian King of the Ostrogoths, built the great church now called the Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna in 504 CE. Mosaics showing the king and his court were later replaced with images of curtains, as Rome later re-exerted the orthodox views of the Trinity. However, the hands of the heretics remain on the columns (illustration on the right)

The Nicene Creed said little about the Holy Spirit. A revised creed, proclaimed by the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, described

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Encyclopedia\\_\(1913\)/Nicene\\_and\\_Niceno-Constantinopolitan\\_Creed](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia_(1913)/Nicene_and_Niceno-Constantinopolitan_Creed)

the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is to be adored and glorified, who spoke by the Prophets.



Christians were then left with the orthodox view of a Trinitarian God composed of three separate but consubstantial persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the early Middle Ages this concept of the Godhead came to be represented by the

shield of faith (*scutum fidei*), illustrated on the right. Three is one and one is three. An incomprehensible doctrine was thus promulgated by theologians at the behest of an emperor in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to unite and prolong his empire.

The Latin Churches in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire later added the words “and the Son” (*filioque*) to describe the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. To state that the Spirit proceeded only from the Father alone suggested an Arian heresy, i.e. that the Father was before the Son. The Eastern Church felt that this addition to the creed undervalued the importance of the Holy Spirit and subverted the authority of the Councils that wrote the original creed. The *filioque* controversy became one of the causes leading to the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches in 1054.

The creeds revised and proposed by the Ecumenical Councils were all focused on the nature of the Trinity. They also included the necessity of baptism, the remission of sins, the foundation of the church, the resurrection of the body and the life eternal. However, they failed to mention the main teachings of Jesus: the necessity to love one’s neighbors and to forgive them their trespasses.

### ***The Triumph of Thomas Aquinas over the Heretics***

This post will conclude with a description of a Renaissance fresco by Filippino Lippi in the Carafa Chapel of the Church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome. The fresco illustrates the early heresies of Christianity. This fresco was also described by Charles Freeman in the introduction to his 2002 book *The Closing of the Western Mind*. However, he used it not so much to illustrate the triumph of orthodoxy over heresy as to acclaim the ascent of reason, as represented by Aquinas and his Aristotelian logic, over the blind faith that had after the Council of Nicaea impeded rational thought.



In 1280 the Dominicans began building a gothic church on the site of a Roman Temple to Minerva near the Pantheon. The interior of the church Santa Maria Sopra Minerva was finished by 1475, though the façade (designed by Carlo Moderno) was not completed until 1725. Cardinal Oliviero Carafa funded a chapel in the southern transept to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). From 1488 until 1493, Filippino Lippi (1457-1504), the illegitimate son of Fra Filippo Lippi and the nun Lucrezia Buti, painted a series of frescos in this chapel. These have been definitively described by Gail Geiger (1986), from whom most of the following comments derive. On the western wall of the chapel is *The Triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over the Heretics*:



At the top of the fresco, two putti display banners quoting *Psalms* 119:130 (118:130 in the Vulgate) guaranteeing the truth of the fresco.



*Declaratio sermonum tuorum illuminat, et intellectum dat parvulis.* [The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.]

In the upper center of the fresco above the seated saint an opened book shows the quotation from *Proverbs 8:7* with which Aquinas opened his *Summa Contra Gentiles* also known as *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium* [The book of the truth of the Catholic faith as against the errors of the infidels.]

*Veritatem meditabitur guttur meum, et labia mea detestabuntur impium.* [For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips.]



Thomas holds in his hands a book that quotes *I Corinthians 1:19*

*Sapientiam sapientum perdam.* [I will destroy the wisdom of the wise. (Paul is being ironic: he means to disprove the

conclusions of those who foolishly pretend to wisdom, and replace them with the truth.))]

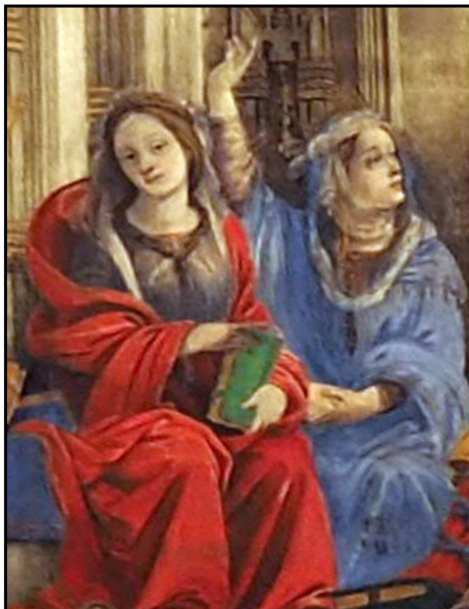
At his feet is an old man who is the personification of evil. He has been subdued by a banner quoting from the apocryphal *Book of Wisdom* 7:30:

*Sapientia vincit malitiam.* [Wisdom conquers evil]

Inscribed on the plaque below the saint's throne are the words

*Divo Thomae ob prastratam impietatem* [To the divine Thomas for overthrowing heresy.]

Sitting beside Thomas are personifications of his knowledge and ability. On the left are Philosophy holding a book and Theology pointing heavenward. The face of Theology is illuminated with the serenity of her mystic vision. On the right are two of the liberal arts: Logic (*Dialectica*) controlling a snake as symbol of the syllogism, and Language (*Grammatica*) holding a pointer and instructing a young child.



In the distant background on the left side of the fresco is the Statue of Marcus Aurelius. At the time the fresco was painted, this statue was considered to represent the Emperor

Constantine the Great, who convened the Council of Nicaea in 325CE to settle the basic tenets of the Christian faith – as expressed in the Nicene Creed. This demonstrates the establishment of Church doctrine

In the background to the right can be seen the Porta di Ripa Grande on the Tiber. The papal fleet under the direction of Cardinal Carafa had left from this port in 1472 to wage war with the Venetians against the Turks, an expedition that briefly freed the city of Smyrna. This detail indicates the ongoing defense of doctrine against the infidels.



In the lower left of the fresco, a severe character identified by Geiger (1986) as Niccoli Orsini, the general of the papal army, brings forth a group of heretics to witness the end of their heresies. The most prominent of these is the bearded Arius. He believed that God the Father preceded God the Son and that there must have been a time then when Christ was not. His heresy is shown in the downcast papers:

*Si Filius natus est, erat quando non erat Filius.* [If the

Son was born there was a time when the son was not.]



In the lower right of the fresco, a friar in black and white, identified by Geiger (1986) as Joachim Torriani, the Master General of the Dominican order, ushers to the front another group of heretics. The first of these is Sabellius, dressed in a red Roman toga, who believed that the three parts of the Trinity were simply modes of one God. The discarded papers show his error:

*Pater a Filio non est alius nec spiritu sancto* [The father is not different from the Son nor from the Holy Spirit].

Did Aquinas really triumph over heresy? He certainly provided the logical underpinnings for what was considered orthodoxy. But his logic was strained. And sometimes it was completely wrong. Aquinas used Aristotle's metaphysics to explain the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation: that the substance of the bread and the wine were changed during the Eucharist into the actual body and blood of Christ. This ceremony of the Eucharist (also known as Holy Communion)

derives from Christ's instructions to his disciples at the Last Supper:

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (*Luke 22: 19-20*)

Thomas Aquinas proposed that, since objects have both a "substance" (which defines what they are) and "accidents" or "appearances" (which determines how we perceive them), during the Eucharist, the substances of the bread and wine are changed even though they appear the same (Pruss, 2011). Aristotle's ideas about substance and accidents have no basis in our modern understanding of nature. Protestants consider the Eucharist to be a symbolic ceremony: the bread and wine does not actually change to the body and blood of Christ.

## **Concluding Comments**

When one does not have evidence for what one believes, one can gain some confidence that one is right if others believe the same way. This is the main force behind proselytism: the drive of the religious to convince others to join them in their belief. Furthermore, those that believe differently must be condemned as heretics or the confidence of the orthodox believers might falter. Religious organizations often propose that spiritual rewards – for example, forgiveness of sins and life everlasting – only come to those who believe in the orthodox doctrines. Priests who determine what is orthodox, reward the believers and excommunicate the heretics have tremendous power. Being human, they may often use this power for selfish reasons. Jesus preached compassion and forgiveness. He argued against the codification of belief and would be saddened by those who endlessly dispute about what they cannot understand, and who condemn those that choose to



believe differently.

## References

Buzzard, A., & Hunting, C. F. (1999). *The doctrine of Trinity: Christianity's self-inflicted wound*. Christian Universities Press.

Crossan, J. D. (1991). *The historical Jesus: the life of a Mediterranean Jewish peasant*. HarperCollins.

Dünzl, F. (2007). *A brief history of the doctrine of the Trinity in the early church*. T & T Clark.

Ehrman, B. D. (2012). *Did Jesus exist? the historical argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. HarperOne.

Evans, G. R. (2003). *A brief history of heresy*. Blackwell Publishing.

Freeman, C. (2002). *The closing of the Western mind: the rise of faith and the fall of reason*. Heinemann.

Funk, R. W., Hoover, R. W., & Jesus Seminar. (1996). *The five Gospels: the search for the authentic words of Jesus, a new translation and commentary*. Scribner

Geiger, G. L. (1986). *Filippino Lippi's Carafa Chapel: Renaissance art in Rome*. Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers.

Henderson, J. B. (1998). *The construction of orthodoxy and heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and early Christian patterns*. State University of New York Press.

Hillar, M. (2012). *From Logos to Trinity: the evolution of religious beliefs from Pythagoras to Tertullian*. Cambridge University Press.

Jefford, C. N. (2013). *Didache: The teaching of the twelve*

*apostles*. Polebridge Press.

Luhrmann, T. (2018). The faith frame: or, belief is easy, faith is hard. *Contemporary Pragmatism*, 15(3), 302–318.

MacIntosh J.J. (1994). Belief-in revisited: a reply to Williams. *Religious Studies*, 30, 487-503.

Meier, J. P. (1991). *A marginal Jew: rethinking the historical Jesus*. Doubleday.

O'Loughlin, T. (2010). *The Didache: a window on the earliest Christians*. Baker Academic.

Phan, P. C. (2011). Developments of the doctrine of the Trinity. In Phan, P. C. (Ed). *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity*. (pp 3-120). Cambridge University Press.

Price, H. H. (1965). Belief 'in' and belief 'that.' *Religious Studies*, 1, 5-27

Pruss, A. R. (2011). The Eucharist: real presence and real absence. In T. P. Flint & M. C. Rea (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (pp 512-538). Oxford University Press.

Robinson, J. (2011). The gospel of the historical Jesus. In T. Holmén & S. E. Porter, (Eds) *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus Volume I* (pp 447-474). Brill

Schaberg, J. (1980). *The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit: an investigation of the origin and meaning of the triadic phrase in Matt 28: 19b*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Schweitzer, A. (1906, translated by Montgomery, W., 1910). *The quest of the historical Jesus: a critical study of its progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. A& C Black

Schwitzgel, E. Belief. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Thellman, G. S. (2019). The narrative-theological function of Matthew's baptism command (Matthew 28:19b). *Anafora*, 6(1), 81-106.

Tuggy, D. (2020a). Trinity. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Tuggy, D. (2020b). History of Trinitarian Doctrines. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Wainwright, E. (2011). Like a finger pointing to the moon: Exploring the Trinity in/and the New Testament. In P. C. Phan (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (pp 33-48). Cambridge University Press

Williams, J. N. (1992). Belief-in and belief in God. *Religious Studies*, 28, 401-406.

Wilson, A. N. (1992). *Jesus*. W.W. Norton.

Young, F. (2006). The Trinity and the New Testament. In C. Rowland, C., & C. M. Tuckett, (Eds). *The Nature of New Testament Theology* (pp 286–305). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.