Welcome to this issue of TANGENTS, the journal of the Master of Liberal Arts program at Stanford University. This issue features essays by Jennifer Swanton Brown, Jennifer Burton, John Devine, Nancy Krajewski, Denise Osborne, Loren Szper, and Bryon Williams, fiction by Andy Grose, and poems by Jennifer Swanton Brown, Tamara Tinker, and Mason Tobak. Enjoy exploring the diverse talents and perspectives of our contributors.
This is a publication featuring the work of students and alumni of the Master of Liberal Arts Program at Stanford University.

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The Burghers of Calais photos by Ken Burton.
Wyoming horseback photo by Nancy Krajewski.

We are proud to present this issue of Tangents, the journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For the fifth edition we have chosen a diverse group of works by students and alumni, including:

- A story about two brothers and a powerful horse
- Three quite varied poems
- To celebrate the centenary, William James’s observations about the San Francisco earthquake
- Some thoughts about marriage in The Odyssey
- A discussion of the 1832 Parisian Cholera epidemic
- An analysis of the effects of technology on society
- And—for the first time—personal essays: one on Kierkegaard, and one on Rodin’s statue set The Burghers of Calais.

We are indebted to Theda Firschein for her contributions as a reviewer and proofreader.

Be sure to read about this issue’s contributors on the last page. We hope that our choices will give you hours of enjoyable reading—and that they will inspire future contributions.
Then there were two short, cracking sounds, like a double-barreled shotgun blast, followed by a most God-awful, almost human scream…

The half-blind horse and the terrorized boys faced each other.

by Andy Grove

“Today’s the day,” Toad announced to his brother, Pete, who was still buried deep under the covers of the bed they shared.

“For what?” Pete asked, sleepily.

“You know what for,” Toad said. “For my tooth.”

“Today’s the day,” Toad announced to his brother, Pete, who was still buried deep under the covers. “You promised you’d help, Pete."

Toad had been trying all week to make his first loose tooth come out. He tried biting into apples, and chewing a whole pack of gum at once. The tooth was too loose to stick in the apples, and chewing gum made it hurt. It wiggled but held fast.

“Give it time,” his mother had said. “It’s a baby tooth, you know. Babies don’t come out until they’re ready!”

“Try these,” his father had laughed, offering him some old pliers. But Toad didn’t want to break the tooth. He was going to leave it for the tooth fairy.

Toad dug his toes in harder, rocking his brother back and forth. “You promised you’d help, Pete.”

Pete yawned as he swung his feet into the patch of sunlight dancing through the lace window curtains onto their battered brass bed. His toes were almost all awake.

“Well, Pete said, “did you get the silk thread?”

One of their classmates had told the boy others you could pull a loose tooth out with a silk thread.

“Scout’s honor,” the boy had said, “silk. A silk thread will do it every time.”

After breakfast, the boys looked all over the house for something silk. They pulled at the hem of their mother’s petticoats, but all the strands broke. They found an old necktie—one their father wouldn’t miss—but its threads were too short.

Finally they discovered a spool of black button thread in their mother’s sewing basket. It shimmered like the neckties. It felt strong. Pete looped one end carefully around his little brother’s front tooth and tied the other end to the glass knob of the bed room door.

“Shut your eyes, Toad,” Pete said.

“Okay,” Pete said, bracing himself on the lumpy mattress with both hands. But when Pete slammed the door, it only jerked Toad onto the floor.

“Not silk, I guess,” Pete said.

Toad sat on the floor with his upper gum bleeding, the tooth still in place. His eyes filled with tears as he looked up at Pete, whose first tooth had come out all by itself, while they ate chili. Just landing on the table, sitting there like a white bean.

As Pete worked on the thread, his square white front teeth filled Toad’s eyes. Toad studied the fine lines running down the front of them, admiring their perfect bottom edges, each one crowned with its own row of neat pearly bumps. Even teeth had teeth, Toad thought, sadly, to himself.

But when the string was finally off, he frowned at Pete and said, “Who wants horse teeth anyway?”

Pete was quiet getting dressed, and while the two of them tossed the bedding from the floor back onto the old four-poster.

“Horse tails are made of silk, I think,” Pete said.

“The saints made shirts and stuff with horsehair,” Toad pondered on that for a while. Then with a broad, bloody smile, he said, “I almost forgot about horse silk.”

The only horse the brothers knew, Patsuras, belonged to Gus Ludokus, who lived across the street. Last summer, their father had hired the horse to harrow their field, before seeding it with the fresh-plowed clods into soft soil. Jumping off to rake, sometimes digging them from between the larger stones unearthed by the giant square harrow to weigh it down as it bounced along, chewing at the harness straps when they cut in.

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The only horse the brothers knew, Patsuras, belonged to Gus Ludokus, who lived across the street, beyond Rex McAdams. Last summer, their father had hired the horse to harrow their field, before seeding it with alfalfa. The boys rode on the steel-toothed harrow to weigh it down as it bounced along, chewing the fresh-plowed clods into soft soil. Jumping off to clear the larger stones unearthed by the giant square rake, sometimes digging them from between the harrow’s nasty fangs with a small crowbar.

Their father paid them a penny a stone. Better yet, they got to keep the rocks, which they piled at the far end of the field, saving them to build a fort. They earned over a dollar. But the money was soon gone.

A nickel for gum, another for candy. A whole quarter lost somewhere riding their bikes. The last dime went into the church collection.

“We still have the stones,” they agreed, with satisfaction.

In the boys’ eyes, the rocks were buried treasure. They were beautiful, one was speckled with quartz diamonds that glittered in the sun, another was flecked with what might be gold. But best, they were full of mystery, with marks that could only be writing in a secret code.

Even the name Patusras sounded magic, fit for an ancient pirate, though the boys knew the horse had been named after a small town in Grece. Mrs. Ludokus talked about it all the time. The beautiful, mountain town where she grew up as tiny Angeliki Xenopoulos. She left home at thirteen, to become a bride in America. The bride of a man she had never met, who chose her from a handful of smudged photographs on the same day he picked up his first pay check as a mine helper.

Mrs. Ludokus, Angie to her friends, preferred to talk about her past.

The boys loved her stories. She made her hometown sound like Troy, fabulous with kings and feasts, as she told them of her childhood on its rocky slopes.

Her stories filled the boys’ imagination as they played in the hills outside their own small town, where they could be the pirates and Greek kings.

Patusras, the place, would always belong to Angie. But Patusras the horse belonged to Gus, whose rule with wivens and workhorses was clear; “Obey or else.”

The boys and even the neighbors tried to avoid Gus. But Patusras was a horse for hire, and she got hired for the hardest jobs, those that required power. Like pulling stumps, or dragging harrows through stony earth. Gus got top dollar for her.

They knew from their parents that Angie never saw a cent of the horse money.

“She probably never asks,” their father said. “Afraid to,” their mother said.

“Strongest horse I ever saw,” their father said. Other horses, he told them, would back and kick, biting at the harness straps when they cut in.

Patusras only flexed, and pushed with her great haunches, never breaking stride, the skin rippling over her powerful shoulders. When the horses on the nearby farms would kick and bite, Gus the horse only flexed her mighty hind legs, never breaking stride.

“Shame he didn’t answer,” their father said.

“Horse is only as good as his rider,” he told them.

As Patsuras trotted down the road to the small town sound like Troy, fabulous with kings and feasts, Angie talked about her past.

She left home at thirteen, to become a bride in America. The bride of a man she had never met, who chose her from a handful of smudged photographs on the same day he picked up his first pay check as a mine helper.

Angeliki Xenopoulos. She left home at thirteen, to become a bride in America. The bride of a man she had never met, who chose her from a handful of smudged photographs on the same day he picked up his first pay check as a mine helper.

She married Gus Ludokus, who lived across the street, beyond Rex McAdams. Last summer, their father had hired the horse to harrow their field, before seeding it with the fresh-plowed clods into soft soil. Jumping off to rake, sometimes digging them from between the larger stones unearthed by the giant square harrow to weigh it down as it bounced along, chewing at the harness straps when they cut in.

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the reins from her collar, she stood calmly smelling them. With her neck flexed and her head rolled back, she would let the boys rub her ears. Soft fur on the back, with fine featherly edges. Warm and silky smooth inside. Her shoulders glistered, but the boys could see a cobwebwork of scars across her haunches, where she had been whipped. They ran their fingers over the tangled pattern that half obscured the crude brand, “G.L.”

The boys brought the boys their hidden treasure. She brought Gus his beer money. And a stake in the card games he played. Sometimes he would be gone for days drinking and gambling.

Patsuras’s corral was shut, but the boys untwirled the gate to get in.

“Dad says she’s twenty hands high,” Pete said, studying the horse.

Toad held his hand at arm’s length, measuring it against the horse. She seemed to fit in his open palm. Patsuras cocked her head to smell the boys, recognizing them. Her broad chest widened over them. As she snorted, her silver mane fell across her dusty-gray eyes, the right one long since clouded by an injury.

Their plan was to distract the horse, and steal a tail hair. A horse-silk tail hair.

Pete climbed atop the hay trough against one side of the stall, standing on his toe tips to hold an apple to Patsuras’s lips. She took it after one quick sniff, snapping it in two with a most god-awful, almost human scream, unlike anything they’d ever heard before. It had come from the direction of the orchard.

Both boys jumped to their feet, looking for the source of the sound.

“Where’s Patsuras?” Toad asked.

Pete shrugged. The horse had vanished.

Then Pete and Toad heard faint splashing sounds. The boys crept into the orchard cautiously, moving from apple tree to apple tree. Far off, they saw someone running toward them.

“McAdams,” Toad said, relieved that it was not Ludokus.

“Probably drunk,” Pete said. As they got closer, they could see the ends of several rotten planks poking at odd angles into the air, ringing a large hole. The planks plunged down into the hole itself. One was creased with deep gouges, where the moldy wood had been ripped away. A long nail was visible half way to the murkiness below. Hanging on it was what looked like a long strand of silvery hair.

“Patsuras?” Toad whispered into the darkness.

The horse, hearing his voice, snorted back softly.

McAdams, staggering only slightly, held each boy by the belt as they took a turn leaning out to squint into the hole. It narrowed as it deepened. At the bottom, about twelve feet below, Patsuras was struggling to keep her head above a greenish scum. Her kicking had stirred up a slimy foam. A shower of fine soil settled onto her, coating her with a double layer of dirt and clay. Her kicking had stirred up a slimy foam. The stench from wrestling with the firebell rope, rushed up the boys’ noses.


“Hurry!” Pete said, “before I lose a finger.”

As Pete fumbled with the other half, the horse shifted her weight, shaking her massive head impatiently, and nudging Pete, who twisted trying to regain his balance. But his foot slipped, and he pitched forward into the stable. Pete lit with a muffled splash, sliding across the fresh pee-soaked manure. As they got closer, they could see the ends of several rotten planks poking at odd angles into the air, ringing a large hole. The planks plunged down into the hole itself. One was creased with deep gouges, where the moldy wood had been ripped away. A long nail was visible half way to the murkiness below. Hanging on it was what looked like a long strand of silvery hair.

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“Big beams.”

“Damn strange duck,” another said, laughing as if something had been funny. “Maybe all that brown stuff is horsefeathers?” he added, bringing a few chuckles.

The boys had never heard of horsefeathers.

“We’re going to need a scaffold,” someone said.

“To get out over her.”

“Hurry!”

Two men jumped into the tow truck with their father, and sped off to get material for the scaffold. Others pulled away the broken planks. When Toad could finally glimpse into the hole, he saw that Patsuras had trod the sand and stones into the bottom of the tank. She stood silently, still deep in the ground, all but her head and neck submerg ed.

After the fire department arrived with its army of captains, Rex McAdams had been watching things from the comfort of a rusty lawn chair he had drawn up, sipping slowly on can after can of beer. One can remained from a sixpack, resting on a second chair.

From time to time, Pete saw McAdams turn his head as if there were someone sitting beside him. Rex would laugh and make comments, too soft to be heard by the men working to save the horse.
As the tow truck left, the priest arrived, still in his cassock. He walked directly to the septic tank. Standing on the very edge, nodding rhythmically, he sprinkled holy water down into the hole, mumbling to himself something that the boys took for Latin.

"Holy shit!" McAdams shouted out, when the priest finished. Everyone turned, but the priest just smiled and came over to stand by McAdams, who offered him the last beer. To the boys' amazement, the priest took it, and settled onto the other lawn chair.

"What a circus," McAdams said to the priest. "It's only a damned horse.

"Not anymore," the priest smiled, sipping on his beer. "Just fill the hole; McAdams yelled to the firemen. "Alive?" the priest asked.

"Of course, alive," McAdams said. "If they hurry." By this time, several of the men began to talk among themselves, standing off to one side. A few others had drifted away. No one was making jokes.

"Does anybody have a gun?" one finally asked out loud.

Through it all, Mabel Stoddlemier had been standing on her porch alongside a pale Angie Ludokus, chatting with the boys' mother. Watching. Waiting.

"Well, Mabel," one of the men finally said, "She's on your land. It's up to you."

"I don't know about horse angels," Pete said. "We haven't studied them."

"Oh," Toad said, somberly. "Noah had two horses on the aisle. Pete said.

"Yea," Toad said, closing his eyes. "Does that mean there's a horse heaven?"

But Pete had to admit he didn't know. Finally the boys fell asleep, their window open to the troubled night.

About four in the morning, the irrigation water that had been seeping from the ditch suddenly became a steady flow, running across the orchard. The thirsty water, was still lumpy.

The water level rose steadily. As it did, the horse rose with it. When the hole was full, the water again flowed off silently across the sleeping orchard. Patusras could finally rest her front hooves again, this time on the crumbly lip of the tank itself, to support her quivering body.

Several times she tried to pull herself out, but she was too tired, her skinned front legs too weak to drag her massive body. The horse's nostrils flared with the scent of the fresh night air, sweet with the fragrance of the apples still hanging on the tree all around her, out of reach.

She whimpered softly before letting her head drop onto her forelegs. Pete and Toad both sat up, hearing something.

"What was that ons?" Pete said, throwing back the covers.

"No way," Toad said.

The lantern light gave a flickering green glow, making long shadows everywhere. They saw the cat high in one tree. Then they saw something rising from the hole. It was one of the horse's ears, white and still, above the rim of her death trap.

"Is she... Toad whispered... dead?"

"Only one way to find out," Pete whispered back.

The ground, soaked black with irrigation water, gripped their feet, making a sucking sound with each step. Pete tied a rope the firemen had left to Toad's waist and wrapped it around an apple tree, to keep him from falling in. Toad eased toward the lip of the hole. The muck in it, even diluted by the irrigation water, was still lumpy.

Toad reached out to touch the horse's neck, but his foot slipped in the mud and his hand bounced off the horse's battered nose, slaming into the loose teeth. Patusras, seized by sudden pain, whipped her head wildly. Her front legs caved in a new section of the edge and her weary body sank back down under the slime. The horse thrashed frantically, trying to regain the surface, banging hard against the walls, until at last one massive hind leg caught on the side of the pit, where the water had softened it.

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Then, after several clawing kicks, her other hind leg caught on the muddly wall, and her head emerged. The half-blind horse and the terrified boys faced each other.

The scum streaked surface calmed, rippled only by the horse's panting. Then Patusras shut her eyes, covering her neck, and slipping beneath the mire, leaving only a slow, shallow swirl.

But ten minutes later, to everyone's surprise, McAdams was back, waving an old long-handled shovel.

"This is all you need," he shouted at the men working on the scaffold. He stuck the shovel into ground, but seeing Pete and Toad, McAdams whispered almost apologetically, as he staggering off for good, "I'd do it myself, but I'm a little drunk.

Everybody went to bed to wait. Some for morning light to get back to work. Some for Ludokus to come home. Most for what now seemed inevitable.

The priest left the church open, in case anyone wanted to pray. Their father left a lantern hanging from an apple tree. The boys sat up, hearing something.

"Oh," Toad said, somberly.

Angie, who seemed not to hear, just looked away. But Pete had to admit he didn't know. Finally the boys fell asleep, their window open to the troubled night.

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"Don't," Toad said. "Please don't." The swirf came to a stop.

Pete pulled his brother back toward him with the rope. Just in time. The scum shattered, then exploded.

Patusras erupted from the water, scurrying up the rocky side of the eroded hole, falling to one knee, and finally lumbering out into the lantern-lit orchard.

She shook herself like an enormous dog, spouting two huge arching wings as it wet muck flew from her sides, sparking silver feathers in the lantern light, swarms of falling stars floating back from the sky to tinkle through the apple trees.

Patusras snorted dirty water from her nose, and she began to cough.

One of her loose front teeth flew free, striking Pete in the chest.

She sneezed a few times, her nostrils flaring, her head rolling to sniff the air. Catching the smell she sought, she looked once more at them with her good eye, then she limped off, wingless once more, toward her stall.

Pete handed the tooth to Toad.

As the brothers turned to go inside, Pete caught a faint light off beyond the irrigation ditch. A tiny red glow flickering through the black night sky.

Like when McAdams flapped his cigarette.

But by the time Pete poked Toad to look, nothing was there.

Back in bed. Toad slipped the Patusras tooth under his pillow. For the tooth fairy.

He checked the horse silk looped around his own front tooth. He rolled the rest of the tail hair carefully into a ball, tucking it inside his cheek like gum, safe for the night.

"Tomorrow, Pete," he muttered, sleepily.

"Tomorrow for sure?"

But Pete didn't hear him.

He was staring through the lace curtains, wide awake, watching the apple trees sway in the lantern light, studying the long shadows, thinking about the light he had seen fluttering away.

Wondering why horse angels were red. And if they had silk feathers.
Perhaps no text has been more influential on the Western mind’s understanding of the origins and nature of divine punishment for human transgression than the opening chapters of Genesis. The Hebrew Bible’s stories of the expulsion from Eden and of the flood have codified the idea that disastrous punishments, and even total destruction, are the judgments of a righteous God upon a wicked and disobedient humankind. Genesis is not the West’s earliest account of creation and divine anger, however; as it has its own origins in older accounts from ancient Mesopotamia. Atrahasis is a poem that served as a source for Gilgamesh’s flood narrative and for Genesis’s creation and flood stories; the poem’s title hero (whose name means “extra-wise”) is a Noah prototype, the sole human selected to survive a destructive flood sent to wipe out all of humanity for offending the gods. Placing the central episodes of the poem back into their original contexts—and thereby removing them from the highly moral and ethical sensibilities of the Hebrew framework for which they were borrowed—allows us to examine with fresh eyes the essential nature of the behavior for which humans are punished. Such an examination reveals that the humans’ offense that draws divine wrath in Atrahasis is not primarily one of sin or disobedience; rather, humans are too successful at fulfilling the very purposes for which they were created. Unlike its Biblical counterpart, the Atrahasis poem presents a humanistic conception of a fundamentally innocent humankind with an essential role in the operations of the world.

The Atrahasis epic is unique in being at once among the most recent and ancient of texts. In terms of exposure to modern readers and scholars, it is a latecomer on the scene of ancient Near Eastern texts. Although one of the three tablets was discovered in the mid-19th century, the first and third tablets were not recovered until the mid-20th century, and no complete edition of the poem was published until 1969. While late in this regard, the poem is one of the oldest and perhaps most influential of all literate texts; composed in the 17th century BCE, it predates by far both the canonical sections of the book of Genesis that begins with the Garden of Eden, the creation of Adam and Eve, and ends with the story of Noah and the Ark (Kilmer 169–70). The older narrative nonetheless reveals a conception of divine punishment that is in crucial ways startlingly different from that of the Genesis authors.

The poem’s opening lines—“When the gods like men/ Bore the work and suffered the toil” (Lambert 43, lines 1–2)—thrust us into the epic’s distinctive context. The narrative opens in the distant days before humankind, when gods were required to do the work necessary for the operation of the world. This divine world, in both structure and activity, reflects the thoroughly agricultural concerns of the human culture that produced the myth. We find out immediately (lines 5–6)—that a managerial class of gods (the Anunnaki) forces a laboring class of gods (the Igigi) to do the backbreaking irrigation work that is required to feed them all. Such an organization mirrors that of Mesopotamian society; extensive irrigation systems and surpluses of food meant that certain people were freed from the need to work in the fields. Soon came the stratification of society into powerful classes that controlled water-supplying canals and laboring classes that “suffered the toil” of producing and maintaining the food supply. After forty years of such toil, the Igigi declare a strike (setting fire to their tools, spades, and hoes) and storm the dwelling of the powerful god Enlil, creating a great clamor. The account of their disturbance introduces the crucial term—the Akkadian rigmu, “noise”—that later lies at the very center of the human offense that elicits devastating responses from the gods.

In response to the strike, the gods decide to create humans with a sole purpose in mind: “If [let man bear the toil of the gods]” (57.191). The gods’ project is successful; they not only create the new laboring beings but introduce marriage and reproduction so that humans may multiply. Of the new humans it is said, “With picks and spades they built the shrines/ They built the big canal banks/ For food for the peoples, for the sustenance of the gods” (66–67.338–339). All goes well for a while, but trouble eventually arises:

Twelve hundred years had not yet passed
When the land-extended and the peoples multiplied.
The land was bellowing like a bull,
The god got disturbed with their uproar.
Enlil heard their noise
And addressed the great gods,
“What noise of mankind has become too intense for me,
With their uproar I am deprived of sleep.
...let there be plague” (67.332–360)

So it is that Enlil sends a plague (and, since the trickster god Enki helps, Atrahasis frustrate Enlil at every turn, subsequently a drought and famine before the final solution of the flood) to quiet the human noise that disturbs him. Rigmu, the term for noise used here, occurs in multiple instances in the poem, more frequently referring to gods than to humans. The term occurs most often to variously characterize elements of the divine storm sent to destroy humankind (93.50, 93.10, 95.23, 95.43). Rigmu is used to describe human noise in only two contexts: the aforementioned noise that keeps Enlil awake (67.336, 73.7), and the cry of heralds following Enki’s orders to announce changes to ritual practice in an effort to end the series of plagues (69.392, 75.25).

In light of these various instances, can we discern the nature of the offensive noise for which the humans are punished? One school of thought, perhaps hopelessly influenced by the Biblical flood account, simply assumes that the noise is a transgression: “There can be little doubt that the noise of mankind which disturbs Enlil’s repose is only the metaphorical or mythological guise for what is clearly meant to be the wicked beha vior of man” (Finkelstein 363). G. Pettinato maintains that the human noise is essentially one of rebellion, and for this reason also treats rigmu as “sin” against the gods. Such a view, while supported by the use of rigmu to characterize the initial strike of the lower gods, does not hold up in light of the poem as a whole. Nowhere does the text state anything about human rebellion against the gods (and the poem’s conclusion, as we shall later see, points to a...
The gods' helplessness and lack of foresight is in ways darkly comic (conjuring the image of a bunch of spoiled royals who in a fit destroy the pantry and fire the staff only to end up hungry at teatime), two important insights come from the scene. First, the picture of the divine that emerges is of perhaps powerful but none too wise deities; the gods clearly have made a serious tactical mistake. Second, the only act referred to as evil in the entire poem is the act of a god, as Enlil’s total destruction of humankind through the flood is characterized as a moral mistake. The birth goddess, bitterly distraught at the sight of her offspring annihilated, indicts Enil in direct terms: “Enil has had enough of bringing about an evil command; / ... he utter abominable evil” (95.39-40) in ordering the flood. In a subsequent passage, an angry Enil discovers Atahhasis’s ark and accurately charges Enki with helping the man survive. Enki proudly acknowledges his assistance and levels his own charge against Enil in return, claiming that Enil committed evil by failing to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent. If you send punishment, Enki urges, “Impose your penalty on the criminal / And whosoever disregards your command” (101.25-26), not on those who have done nothing to deserve punishment! Thus the accepted moral framework of the Bible’s derivative flood narrative—a righteous god sends a deserved destruction upon an unrepentantly wicked humankind—invets the ethical order of the older deluge story: in Atrahasis, “[there is not a single mention of sin, a subject for which Akkadian has a rich lexical stock, until after the Deluge, when Enki... bitterly reproaches Enil for a wanton destruction that ignored all distinction between innocent and guilty” (Morgan, 40). It seems that divine noise, not human noise, may carry the designation of sin. Enil, convinced by the charges against him (and, no doubt, by his own imminent starvation), orders his accusers, the birth goddess and Enki, to come up with a solution that will allow humans to live and work but not raise the extreme noise that so disturbs him, and their proposal highlights the essential problem that led to right in the first place: they introduce population controls. The three specific measures mentioned in the text—the existence of barren women (95.2), infant mortality in the form of a demon (95.3-4), and three classes of celibate priestesses (95.6-8)—not only serve a narrative function in the poem but also serve to explain these conditions that were evident in the world of the poem’s composition. Still, the conclusion that population is the crucial factor is not without its dissenters. Bernard Banno interprets the poem’s solution as follows: “In Atrahasis the gods reorder the divine creative pair, Enki and Nintu, and have them adjust ‘human nature’ by imposing... additional regulations [that] were not so much population control measures... as the imposition of mortality as a natural condition upon humankind. With this adjustment the final definition of humankind was apparently achieved” (Batto 53-54). Batto’s reading depends upon a restoration of the broken Atrahasis tablet based on a key Gilgamesh passage in which Enki urges Nintu to create death, i.e., mortality and a limited natural lifespan. That a mortal lifespan is introduced at this point in Atrahasis is plausible, although, in contrast to Batto’s reading, it would appear to complement, not supplant, the other measures that are clearly there to limit numbers. Even if we grant Batto’s central point—that the key purpose of the text is that humankind at last achieve a final form—we can still conclude what is in, my eyes, a more essential point: that this delay in the remedy results because the gods’ understanding of the cosmic order is not yet fully in final form. In other words, the gods are still learning through trial and error. Yes, the test presents human beings as a work in progress, but what is not clearly acknowledged in such a reading is the more important point that the gods are a work in progress. The gods are responsible at every juncture by making humans active and procreative but not mortal, they create the conditions for the ritual that offends them. Blind to their mistake, they send complete destruction upon the humans and only compound their initial errors by destroying their own means of sustenance. The test presents their punishment as not only a tactical error but an ethical wrong; by ignoring the ethical dimension in the devastating deluge, Enil and the other gods are the only party charged as guilty of anything suggesting sin or evil in the entire poem. Such a myth seems a strange candidate as a source for the Biblical flood story that seemingly codifies the righteousness of God’s devastating punishment upon a depraved humankind. The Genesis account has traditionally been seen as a text of superior moral content; a representative comparison of Gilgamesh and Genesis...
states, “The ethical motive, which is but feebly developed in the Babylonian account, obtains clear recognition in the hands of the Hebrew writers, the Flood is a divine judgement on human corruption.” carried out by an “almighty and righteous God —a Being capable of anger and pity... but holy and just in His dealings with men” (John Skinner, quoted in Finkelstein 364). Any argument that Genesis is a greater ethical account than its Mesopotamian counterparts faces difficulty standing against two types of counterargument. One type of response negates the grounds for such a comparison by holding that the Mesopotamian poems were not primarily ethical accounts —in Atrahasis, “the solution to the problem of man is completely a-ethical” (Moran 71), says one commentator. While Atrahasis is certainly not directly a story of human sin, close attention to the concluding section of the poem, however, reveals that ethical culpability—the guilt of the gods in punishing a guiltless humankind—is not completely irrelevant. No, a more compelling reason to reject the claim of Biblical supremacy is that the Genesis flood story, in terms of ethical and even narrative coherence on key points, simply does not make sense in ways that its Near Eastern forbears do.

Even a cursory comparative reading of the deluge stories in Atrahasis and in Genesis finds the Biblical account puzzling in fundamental ways. We have seen that the flood in Atrahasis is sent in response to the extreme noise caused by the activity of too-numerous people. The reason for God’s distress in the Genesis flood narrative is straightforward but vague. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). God’s response to human corruption is the complete destruction of life: “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them” (6:7). One wonders what Enki would have to say about God’s indiscriminate decision to “make an end of all flesh” (6:13)—including the ostensibly innocent animals—for the crimes of only humans. In any case, both stories describe floods that do indeed destroy all of life except for the divinely chosen survivors, Atrahasis and Noah (and his selected animals). After the flood, the divine powers decide that human life is worth having upon the earth again. In Atrahasis, the reason is apparent: the gods would starve without the offerings of human produce. The Hebrew God, too, is seemingly influenced by the “pleasing odors” of Noah’s “burnt offerings on the altar” (8:21, 20), although, through the preservation of mating pairs on the ark, God presumably had already planned to repopulate the world. Finally, in the Mesopotamian poem, the gods put into place population controls by which to temper the overall magnitude of human activity by controlling numbers—that is, they learn from mistakes and solve their central problem. In the Biblical narrative, God responds to Noah’s postdiluvian offerings by stating, “I will never again curse the ground because of mankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done” (9:21). God acknowledges that humans will do evil just as Enil and the other gods accept that humans “must” be active), but instead of seeking to limit numbers, God follows his acknowledgment by saying to Noah and his sons, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (9:1), a command given twice more in the Noah narrative (8:17 and 9:7) and a verbatim reiteration of the initial charge given the first human pair created by God (1:28). The Atrahasis solution makes sense in that the gods adjust the conditions that led them to destroy humankind in the first place, but God’s decision to repopulate the earth makes little sense when we note that he does nothing to address the problem of human evil that initially prompted the deluge: “From the Biblical text alone it would appear that the behavior of mankind was no worse before the Flood than after it” (Finkelstein 366). The logical consequence to this combination of factors is a world teeming once again with human wickedness. This lack of internal logic robs the Biblical flood narrative, especially when seen beside the Mesopotamian versions, of considerable explanatory power. In Atrahasis, the complete destruction of humankind by the gods can’t happen again, the gods depend on humans for their own very survival and must find other means of controlling offensive conditions. In the Genesis account, complete destruction won’t happen again according to God’s promise—but what is actually different after the flood? All that appears to be different is God himself: “God reconciles himself to his flawed creation and accepts an imperfect humankind on its own terms... after the flood the deity commits himself under solemn oath to wrk with this imperfect creation, no matter how evil the impulse which beats within the human breast” (Barto 55). Such a reading has its merits; it is perfectly legitimate, and probably accurate, to see God’s character as evolving in dynamic ways throughout the course of the Biblical epic, and his reconciliation to his “flawed creation” after the flood is a crucial juncture in that progression. Accepting such an interpretation however—and here is the crux of this comparative reading’s purpose—means reconciling ourselves to the conclusion that the Genesis flood narrative is consequently stripped of any conceivable ethical power. In this story championed and invoked to the very present for its moral power, what, if any, is the ethical lesson? If there is one, it apparently has little to say about human culpability for sin. In this seminal story, as in Atrahasis, the need for repentance belongs not to humans, but to the divine.

The heaviest judgment, however, falls not on the Genesis flood account itself—it is a crucial episode in the grand story of the Israelites—but on the orthodox interpretation of the story that has been constructed to support a larger theology of human sin. The Biblical adaptation of the older deluge myths from Mesopotamia is full of problems—the most salient being that the punished humans are e, in the final analysis, essentially innocent—but has nonetheless managed to codify something that does not belong: the dogma that humans are inherently wicked and thereby deserve heavy punishment from a just and righteous God. The opening chapters of Genesis are perhaps the foundational text of Western ethics and theology, and the flood narrative contained there has helped lay down a template for acrippling understanding of sin and punishment to this very day.

Thus the Biblical appropriation and manipulation of the ancient Near Eastern deluge myths have perpetuated misplaced ideas about sin. There are problems, however, not only with what we have inherited from the Genesis flood story but with what we have not managed to inherit from the older poem. Atrahasis proposes a refreshingly dignified conception of human beings and their place in the w oild. The poem’s humans are guilty not of sin but of nothing more than failing to fulfill the mandate of their creator too well, and the narrative relays the divine adjustments that allow for the essential activity of humans within a overall balance of tensions in
the cosmos. While the “stress in the Old Testament [is] on man’s depravity as the cause of the Deluge” (Moran 45), the flood in the Mesopotamian account signifies a completely different valuation of humanity: the deluge there “is a supremely important event, for it revealed to the gods their need of man…” (Pettinato 7). The Atrahasis Epic is an assertion of man’s importance in the final order of things (Moran 43). In this oldest of texts, the energy of life that is not rooted in theology stands on its own terms as a humanist account of a cosmic balance that emerges only when human beings hold a rightful—and uniquely essential—position in the order of the world.

WORKS CITED


Machinist, Peter. “Babylonian and Mesopotamian Literature: The Atrahasis Epic” (the section borrowed directly from Atrahasis) includes a more thorough and forceful indictment of Enlil’s decision.


NOTES

1 Pettinato’s article (written in German) is referred to in articles by Kramer, Machinist, and Moran.

2 Compare the materials used and the origins of spirit here to those in the Genesis account of the creation of the first human, in which “the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).

3 “The worshipers in Mesopotamia considered… ‘sacrifices’ purely and simply as the gods’ ‘meals’;” barley beer was a staple of ritual cult offerings (Bottom 225).

4 Although the broken Atrahasis tablet makes other parts of this passage understandable, Eriki’s speech in Gilgamesh XI (the section borrowed directly from Atrahasis) includes a more thorough and forceful indictment of Enlil’s decision.

5 William Moran holds out the intriguing possibility that the charge to multiply in Genesis 9 is “a conscious rejection of the Atrahasis Epic” (Moran 45).

6 As a result, Jewish rabbis had to resort to extensive midrash (rabbinic interpretation of Torah) in attempts “to supply appropriate grounds for such an extreme measure” as the flood (Finkelstein 366).

7 God’s covenant with Noah and his descendants (one in a series of such divine-human pacts) is often in voked as a “solution” to the problem of human evil that precipitated the flood. While a full examination of the covenant is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that God’s provisioning proposal, while a start, actually solves little in any lasting way. According to Genesis, God acknowledges that humans are as evil as ever (Genesis 8:23), and then issues a prohibition against murder before promising to never again send a “flood to destroy all flesh” (Genesis 9:15). Before too long, however, before we read that “suffer and fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Genesis 19:24) ran down upon the descendants of Noah in Sodom and Gomorah—another kind of destructive punishment for another kind of wickedness.

8 A recent illustrative example: in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Alabama State Senator Hank Erwin issued a statement in which he called the storm God’s judgment for human sin. “New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast have always been known for gambling, sin and wickedness. It is the kind of behavior that ultimately brings the judgment of God…” As harsh as it may sound, those hurricanes do say that God is real, and we have to realize sin has consequences…Why were we surprised when finally the hand of judgment fell? Sadly, innocents suffered along with the guilty. Sin always brings suffering to good people as well as to the bad” (The Birmingham News 28 September 2005). Erwin’s God sounds a lot like Enlil.

THREE POEMS OF LOVE-GONE-BAD, IN INCREASING DISTURBANCE

I

DOLL LOVE

I loved you like a doll loves the little girl, stuffed with straw and dragged along by skinny legs, without complaint, perched against the toy chest on my head.

I loved you like a doll loves the little girl, looking out with button eyes, lying in the dark beneath your hair, feeling I could see enough for simple child love, which simply is.

I loved you like a doll loves, not wanting to have flesh which hurts or nerves which tingle danger when she’s at school too long.

I loved you like a doll loves.

I didn’t love you like a doll loves. That’s just a poet’s trance.

In the world of analogies, I owned all the toy shops on Earth, snapped my fingers to let you buy a doll and lay down in the box myself.

My chest was feeling flesh, with not a single stalk of straw.

My real eyes saw more of you than all the dolls in the playroom ever did.

I was dragged along, by choice, and felt it, relaxing like a lethal cat at play, until your days at school were much too long.

I, not a doll, knew what it meant.

until your days at school were much too long,

relaxing like a lethal cat at play,

I was dragged along, by choice,

than all the dolls in the playroom ever did.

My real eyes saw more of you

with not a single stalk of straw.

My chest was feeling flesh,

and lay down in the box myself.

snapped my fingers to let you buy a doll

I owned all the toy shops on Earth,

In the world of analogies,

That’s just a poet’s trance.

In the world of analogies,

perched against the toy chest on my head.

feeling I was safe with no control,

dragged along by skinny legs, without complaint,

feeling I could see enough

for simple child love, which simply is.

I loved you like a doll loves the little girl,

not wanting to have flesh which hurts

or nerves which tingle danger when she’s at school too long.

I loved you like a doll loves.

I didn’t love you like a doll loves.

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My chest was feeling flesh,

with not a single stalk of straw.

My real eyes saw more of you

than all the dolls in the playroom ever did.

I was dragged along, by choice, and felt it,

relaxing like a lethal cat at play,

until your days at school were much too long.

I, not a doll, knew what it meant.
I'm larger than a whale's corpse.

When glowing brides emerge from church,
I snag them with a pincers arm,
and quickly flick them to a hole,
where they are ground to paste,
slowly enough they feel they're punished
for their brideness state.
I flick so many
they cease to be.
The idea bride goes away for good.

Pink cherub boys
who come from schools
with toddling steps in mother's grasp
take up space.
My jaws expand.
I eat the centers from their face,
quickly, but they comprehend,
push them by the millions
with tractor claws into a ditch
beside the world.
I bite so many they cease to be.
The idea boy goes away for good.

The green and leafy world of
self-caring living things
is vomit.
I bathe all things which pulse
in acid from my throat.
They feel the burn
and writhe to nothing.
I bathe so many, they cease to be.
The idea life goes away for good.

I'm larger than a whale's corpse.
The spirit overhead embracing all
is feces stinking in the city mud.
I take a curvy magic blade
and plunge it into the spine of god,
twisting it to hear
the loudest screams that ever were.
The screams die down, they cease to be.
The idea spirit goes away for good.

Be My Valentine

I'm in love.
I've never been in love before,
but there's no speck of doubt.
I'm in love.

At long, long last,
in love.
The first thing
that comes back
is all mine.

I have the novel right
to not love me,
or to love me from afar,
just as you please,
to mate with that one there,
without my say;
to play the game of learning,
I think that's the word you use.
You have the novel right
to condense my heart
to scribbles in a pad,
which you never set aside,
and keep pressed close
instead of me.
I learned these rules just as you,
though from where I don't recall,
and go along,
like some sort of good citizen
of the modern world.
But, inside, I'm not.
Inside, I'm ancient,
and I know
the Chinese binders
and young boy buyers
were smart.
They lived their lives with the one they loved.
So, I calmly wait for physics
to conquer time,
so I may travel as far back as I please.
I saved your hair and shoes,
so I may draw you back,
back to where my guards
will do to you
what a lover scorned
may not,
come future times.

The novel right
you have to not love me,
or to love me from afar,
just as you please,
to mate with that one there,
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II

Being with the One You Want

They bound the feet of little girls,
the Chinese did.
Hobbled for life, they hung around,
did what they were told.
So quiet, that in their graves, the village sounds the same.

They sold slave boys
all over the world,
someone did.
To live out lives
of thwarted will.
So passive, that when they died,
nothing in the city changed.

You have the novel right
to not love me,
or to love me from afar,
just as you please,
to mate with that one there,
without my say;
to play the game of learning,
I think that's the word you use.
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Inside, I'm ancient,
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So, I calmly wait for physics
to conquer time,
so I may travel as far back as I please.
I saved your hair and shoes,
so I may draw you back,
back to where my guards
will do to you
what a lover scorned
may not,
come future times.

So in the playroom dark,
your fading halo all around,
my real nerves tingling danger,
I deftly slid from under your hair,
scratched your face,
and walked back to the shop to find another box.
Not doll behavior at all.

There is a theory at your school
that had you not stayed away,
you'd soon have seen impostor doll pretending love,
and you'd be stuck in place,
and tricked, and sad.
And, for ease, you nod your head.
But in your gut you know they're wrong.
You remember owning toy shops of your own,
for years,
and know that
time's so precious,
that we lie down
in a doll box,
pretending doll love,
only when we know it's real.

I'm larger than a whale's corpse.
The spirit overhead embracing all
is feces stinking in the city mud.
I take a curvy magic blade
and plunge it into the spine of god,
twisting it to hear
the loudest screams that ever were.
The screams die down, they cease to be.
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James’s account of the earthquake’s power was not an embellishment of the events that morning. Indeed, the fortissimo shaking devastated Stanford University. The Gothic spire of Memorial Church collapsed and demolished much of the interior, after it had been shaken like James’s proverbial rat! The entrance archway to the campus, as well as the campus library and gymnasium, were ruined. Fourteen of the fifteen buildings on campus suffered damage, some irreparable. A statue of Louis Agassiz, a renowned geologist and natural historian, was propelled from its niche on the Zoology building. After a downward flight of thirty feet, the statue penetrated the earth headfirst. The nosedive led to “the campus quip that the ‘head-foremost’ scientist was ‘better in the abstract than the concrete’” (Burkhardt 183). Another statue, that of the Angel of Grief, also suffered significant damage. William James noted that he “felt no trace whatever of fear” (James 211). Likewise, he claimed that his wife had not been afraid (James 211). In an instructive anecdote about “the way in which the tremendousness of a catastrophe may banish fear,” James relayed the adventure of a particular student who was on the fourth floor of Encina Hall when the earthquake struck (James 214). With the building giving way, he descended three stories to the basement, where the debris of the crushed building surrounded him; he then decided to make his way back to his room because he was only wearing a nightgown. Upon returning to the fourth floor, he discovered that his
room no longer existed. He noticed pain in his injured feet and returned down the stairs with difficulty. William James spoke with him ten days later while the student was still in the hospital. During the entire event, the student claimed he had not been afraid. William James accounted for this by noting that “The experience was too overwhelming for anything but passive surrender to it” (James 215).

Upon his arrival in San Francisco on April 18, 1906, James made the following observations:

By midday, when we reached the city, the pall of smoke was vast and the dynamite detonations had begun, but the
practically wiped off the map. Three days after penning these words, William James returned to San Francisco to view the immense destruction that had occurred since his visit to the city on the day of the earthquake. James’s essay emphasized two of his most emphatic impressions about the citizens’ response to the catastrophic event. “The first of these was the rapidity of the improvisation of order out of chaos” (James 221). The rapid improvisation of order out of chaos seems questionable when one looks at other examples of catastrophes, where chaos only bred further chaos. Confusion and criminality are frequent companions of chaos. As a result of this widespread perception, James noted that in the case of San Francisco, the effect of Mayor Schmitz’s proclamation on the reduction of criminal activity inevitably diminished. William James must certainly have recognized, even if he did not emphasize, the effect of Mayor Schmitz’s proclamation on the reduction of criminal activity. Similarly, James must also have realized that Mayor Schmitz’s order to close all the saloons and to destroy all alcohol successfully assisted in curtailing lawlessness.

James altogether omitted mention of the massive evacuation of San Francisco. He only pithily and euphemistically commented that when he returned to the city eight days later “the inert elements of the population had mostly got away…” (James 223). This statement entirely fails to convey the then unprecedented, and perhaps still unmatched, evacuation of an American city. At the time of the earthquake, the population of San Francisco was approximately 400,000 people (Chase 146). After the earthquake, the Southern Pacific Company immediately repaired its damaged railroad tracks in San Francisco. After the repairs were completed, “Thousands of refugees crawled in and onto the railroad cars; every inch of every piece of rolling stock was occupied by human beings who...
wanted to flee the burning city.11 The exodus from San Francisco occurred on an immense scale. On April 25, 1906, a day before William James’s return to the city, the San Francisco Chronicle reported the following news story about the evacuation:

Between 6 a.m., Wednesday, April 18th, and Sunday night the Southern Pacific ran 129 trains, with over 900 cars to the main line and local and eastern points, carrying free refugees from San Francisco. During the same time 610 suburban trains were run from Oakland pier with 4880 cars, and a total of 739 trains with 5783 cars. During the same period about 50 trains with 500 cars were run from points between Third and Townsend streets and Ocean View to the South. The number of people carried exceeded 225,000.12

In addition to the railroads, an extensive ferry system throughout San Francisco Bay assisted in the evacuation of city residents. One-half of the refugees from San Francisco stayed in nearby towns. The other refugees were provided free railroad transportation to any place less than five hundred miles distant from San Francisco or Oakland.

James’s omission about the evacuation, along with his notable reluctance to accentuate the other salient facts about Mayor Schmitz’s orders, suggests that he tailored his account of the events to fit an idealized perspective about “the improvisation of order out of chaos” in San Francisco. But suggesting that James tailored his account, does not necessarily imply that he misapprehended important events. Rather, he seemed intent to focus on the creation of order by ordinary individuals. As James observed, it is clear that just as in every thousand human beings there will be statistically so many artists, so many athletes, so many thinkers, and so many potentially good soldiers, so there will be so many potential organizers in times of emergency. In point of fact, not only in the great city, but also in the outlying towns, these natural ordermakers, whether amateurs or officials, came to the front immediately. (James 221-222)

James then cited two examples to illustrate his point. He relayed the heroic efforts of two anonymous individuals to save the artwork of William Keith. He also relayed the collective efforts of the residents of Palo Alto to prepare for the arrival of refugees. In citing these examples, instead of the actions by Mayor Schmitz or General Fumston, he deliberately chose to highlight the labors of amateur “ordermakers.” By doing so, James suggested that all people must examine their own natures or abilities, especially those that lie latent until times of crisis.

James explored whether criminals were “solemnized by the immensity of the disaster” Perhaps they were. Such solemnity is plausible, and it might explain at least some of the lack of criminal activity.

According to various subsequent reports, federal authorities or local law enforcement officers shot only six individuals for the crime of the aftermath of the earthquake. Therefore, criminals might well have been solemnized by the disaster, instead of merely deterred by the “disciplinary methods” of the military. Regardless, James had made a crucial inquiry about how our human nature, or more precisely our better nature, might prevail during a catastrophe. Unfortunately, he never attempted to definitively answer his own question about criminal behavior in his essay. Although he did not directly answer this question, he did make the suggestive comment that the improvisation of order out of chaos in San Francisco was “reassuring as to human nature.” (James 223)

James emphasized the “universal equanimity” of San Franciscans and Californians during the catastrophe (James 223-224). While equanimity, especially that of a universal variety, typically absents itself during most catastrophic events, contemporary accounts are invariably in accord with James’s observation about the composure of San Franciscans. One of the most prominent contemporary accounts was by Jack London.

On the day of the earthquake, London journeyed to San Francisco, just as James had done. As a result, both James and London were in San Francisco on Wednesday night April 18, 1906. London soon after wrote an account of what he had observed, which was published in Collier’s Weekly magazine on May 5, 1906. Interestingly enough, London’s article also commented on the equanimity predominating in San Francisco during the disaster. He wrote, Remarkable as it may seem, Wednesday night while the whole city crashed and roared into ruin, was a quiet night. There were no crowds. There was no shouting and yelling. There was no hysteria, no disorder. I passed Wednesday night in the path of the advancing flames, and in all those terrible hours I saw not one woman who wept, not one man who was excited, not one person who was in the slightest degree panic-stricken.13

London’s account mirrors those of others. The eyewitness accounts constantly and repeatedly acknowledge the equanimity of San Francisco’s residents on the day of the earthquake and in the weeks that followed. In addition to the equanimity, or perhaps accounting for it, San Franciscans also displayed a characteristic optimism. For instance, William Wood, who at the time of the earthquake was the former Mayor of Seattle, noted, “San Francisco’s optimism is based upon fearlessness and clear-headedness. She triumphs in her trial because she has never for a moment lost those faculties.” Indeed, after surveying various first hand accounts, a later author noticed, What was exceptional about the San Franciscoans was the swift strength of their resiliency, the optimistic power of their bosom that brought them to say, not a month later, but within a week, “Let’s not stand around feeling sorry for ourselves. We’ve had good times. Now this is a bad time, and there’s work to do. Let’s get going.” (O’Brian 249)

This optimism did not go unnoticed by James, who also observed, “Every one looked cheerful, in spite of the awful discontinuity of past and future, with every familiar association with material things disapproved….” (James 223) Although it is natural to view with some skepticism any observation about cheerful participators in a catastrophe, James’s observation is again supported by numerous contemporaneous accounts. One remark, originating close to the time of the earthquake, wonderfully captured the prevalent cheerfulness. A lady in the park seven days after the earthquake, and a day before James visited the city for a second time, remarked,

I have money, if I could get it and use it. I have property, if I could realize on it. I have friends, if I could get to them. Meantime I am going to cook this piece of bacon on bricks and be happy. (Morris 107)

James explained this paradox, cheerfulness during catastrophe, by observing that people who suffer collectively do not possess the anguish of those who either suffer alone or suffer at a geogaphical distance from catastrophic events (James 225). Everyone in San Francisco experienced the earthquake itself. Moreover, the fires burned indiscriminately. As a result, the disaster leveled distinctions between rich and poor because all equally needed food, water, and shelter. James insightfully perceived:

The hearts concealed private bitterness, no doubt, but the tongues disclosed to dwell on the misfortunes of self, when almost everybody one spoke to had suffered equally. Surely the cutting edge of all our usual misfortunes comes from the character of loneliness. We lose our health, our wife or children die, our house burns down, or our money is made way with, and the world goes on rejoicing, leaving us on one side and counting us out for all its business (James 224).

James’s perception, that the cutting edge of misfortune is loneliness, readily accounts for the cheerfulness in San Francisco. No one suffered misfortune alone. James’s insight is aptly corroborated by Pauline Jacobson, who just ten days after the earthquake, wrote,

Everybody was your friend and you in turn everybody’s friend. The individual, the isolated self was dead. The social self was regnant. Never again shall we feel singled out by fate for hardships or ill luck that’s going. There will always be the other fellow. And that was the sweetness, the gladness of the earthquake and the fire. Not of bravery, not of strength, not of a new city, but of a new inclusiveness (Olmstead 52). This inclusiveness, and the corresponding cheerfulness, further clarifies why no psychological calamity befell the residents of San Francisco and California after the earthquake. Again, people were optimistic because they were in this catastrophe together.

From the contemporaneous historical accounts of the 1906 earthquake and fire, it becomes apparent that William James’s wishes had not made him “turn down the lights so as to give mir acle a chance,” as Oliver Wendell Holmes had once remarked. Indeed, something unique occurred in the echo of the destruction. As James emphasized in his essay, a prevalent order and apparent equanimity dwelt throughout San Francisco. James’s essay undoubtedly accentuated particular points, but he effectively portrayed the mind and spirit of Californians and San Franciscans. Stanford President David Starr Jordan, in the aftermath of the earthquake’s devastation at Stanford University, commented, “Men, not buildings, make a college.” Likewise, people, not buildings and houses, make a city. San Franciscans recognized this. William James recognized this. He wrote a personal letter to a friend in Italy only five days after the earthquake. James presciently stated, “A better city will grow up on the spot.”14 James was not wishing. He knew.


James, Alice. Letter to relatives dated April 18, 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

James, Alice. Letter to relatives dated April 18, 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

James, William. Letter to Ferrari dated January 30, 1906. (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

James, William. Letter to David Starr Jordan dated April 19, 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

James, William. Letter to Ferrari dated April 23, 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).


Notes:


4 Charles K. Field, a Stanford graduate (1895) and local raconteur at the time, upon learning that eighty churches had been destroyed in the earthquake and fire, quipped, “If as some say, God spared the trees, For how o’er frisky. Why did He save the Churches down, And save Hotaling’s Whisky?”

5 William James, letter to Ferrari, 23 April 1906, (Stanford University Library Special Collections).


7 William James, letter to Ferrari, 23 April 1906, (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

8 Proclamation by San Francisco Mayor E. E. Schmitz, 18 April 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).


12 “Vast Army Has Left the City —Southern Pacific Alone Has Taken Away Over 225,000 Refugees,” San Francisco Chronicle, 25 April 1906.


16 William James, letter to Ferrari, 23 April 1906 (Stanford University Library Special Collections).

Burghers of Calais:

A Personal Viewing Experience

by Jennifer Burton

Character is the essential truth of any natural object, whether ugly or beautiful; it is even what one might call a double truth, for it is the inner truth translated by the outer truth; it is the soul, the feelings, the ideas, expressed by the features of a face, by the gestures and actions of a human being, by the tones of a sky, by the lines of a horizon.

Auguste Rodin (Gsell 20)

In 1884, Auguste Rodin received a commission from the mayor of Calais to sculpt a monument honoring the heroes of the Hundred Years’ War, six wealthyburghers who surrendered themselves to King Edward II to end the eleven-month siege of Calais. Rodin was inspired by the courage of these men, and determined to capture their moment of sacrifice: gaunt from the long siege, with halters around their necks and the keys to the city in their hands, they made their way out of their beloved city, past their weeping family and friends to an almost certain death.

The statue group *The Burghers of Calais* located in the main quadrangle at Stanford University brilliantly evokes the ideas stated in the epigraph above. Rodin took pains to ensure that the burghers were appropriate Calaisian types in terms of physiognomy, but it is the “essential truth” of their emotions that makes the group a masterpiece of “lifelike humanity” (Butler 205). Studying the face of each statue, I find that Rodin, without idealizing or idealizing, presents them as genuine men. Their feelings of despair, dismay, hatred, determination, courage, and acceptance come through clearly and realistically.
The precisely-molded rope binds his neck more tightly than it does the other men, some of whom do not have any indication of a rope at all. Most physically affected by the long starving months, Saint-Pierre's stooped shoulders and emaciated figure seem to bear the weight of his decision.

Significantly, Saint-Pierre is the single figure who is depicted as moving deliberately ahead, though his steps clearly cost him great effort. His entire body is pitched forward, his front (left) foot lies nearly flat along the ground, and his front knee bends under his weight. His drapery drags in heavy folds down his front and over his back leg. He looks, in fact, like he might stumble or collapse at any moment, but a glance back at the face reveals the determination and spirit of sacrifice that will hold him upright.

Interestingly, though he is “the one who inspires the others” (Goell 36), Rodin did not depict him as ur ging or even communicating with the other burghers. His glance takes in only the road in front of him —the road he walks to his own presumed death. Appropriately for a sculpture, his inspiration of the other prisoners thus lies in his actions rather than his words.

**JACQUES DE WIESSANT: Resolution**

Jacques de Wiessant seems to be experiencing a moment of hesitation as well —or rather, he seems to have just experienced it and then affirmed his decision. His body shifts to the side as he takes a step, like most of the others, he is not moving directly forward. He pulls his right hand away from his face, as though a moment earlier he had his head in his hands like his compatriot Andrieu d’Andres. His mouth, now set, and his eyes, fixed on the horizon, indicate his resolution.

This statue displays several intriguing technical characteristics. It bears more of an “unfinished” look than the other statues (except Andrieu d’Andres; see below). There are many tool and burlap marks, especially down the right rear side, along with what appears to be a random thumb indentation under the drapery. Lumps of clay bump out from the drapery. Perhaps most interesting, the more visible parts of the head—the back and sides—are patently unfinished. The face itself, however, displays careful attention to details of character. Rodin captures d’Andres’s “stripes” run down the sides of the face.

Like Pierre de Wiessant, Jean de Fiennes also seems to experience irresolution at the crucial moment. However, de Wiessant’s pain is directed inward, toward his body with his gaze directed down. In contrast, de Fiennes appeals to those he is leaving with his arms flung open and his eyes searching outward. His mouth open, he seems to cry out for help, for someone to rescue him from his own decision.

His bearing is more erect than the other burghers’. He pulls his right arm from his face, as though a moment earlier he had his head in his hands like his compatriot Andrieu d’Andres. His mouth, now set, and his eyes, fixed on the horizon, indicate his resolution.

This statue displays several intriguing technical characteristics. It bears more of an “unfinished” look than the other statues (except Andrieu d’Andres; see below). There are many tool and burlap marks, especially down the right rear side, along with what appears to be a random thumb indentation under the drapery. Lumps of clay bump out from the drapery. Perhaps most interesting, the more visible parts of the head—the back and sides—are patently unfinished. The face itself, however, displays careful attention to details of character. Rodin captures d’Andres’s “stripes” run down the sides of the face.

The face, however, displays careful attention to details of character. Rodin captures d’Andres’s strength in the aquiline nose, prominent cheekbones and jaw; he grimaces in pain, but does not cry out. Curiously, his expression is nearly impossible to see unless the viewer crouches directly underneath the statue and looks straight up! This fact may again point to the importance of the face to Rodin — he would carefully mold it even if it were hardly visible. It may also reflect his desire to invite interaction on the part of the viewer: Lampert comments that “he sought to [enter] the spectator’s space” (110).
tangents 3130 tangents

Dionysus At Sea

He steers with the sail, his rudder trails. He might seem adrift. If so, the dolphins leaping are equally lost. How did that vineyard get in the sky? Who painted an eye on the prow? Why does he lounge on the deck smiling? His lap robe makes him look like a mermaid. Schooning at night is test enough of manhood — a shooting star to reckon by on an iridescent sea. He and his bark are dark as nature except for his snow-white jib. Dionysus lives by his own light; indeed, knows no night. Achilles would none of it; he’d strip the drunk of his leafy crown and ready a crew for battle. The touring god is too old for that. He fans away acrimony, sings to himself and watches for port.

WORKS CITED
Pickard-Cambridge, Arthur Wallace. The Dramatic Festivals of Athens. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953. 11. In the book The Dramatic Festivals of Athens is an illustration of an Attic cup, a kylix, on which is depicted a laughing Dionysus sailing at night. The depiction may represent the Athenian Anthesteria festival “in which Dionysos was escorted riding in a car shaped like a ship on wheels.” The late-winter festival is believed to have welcomed the fertility god from overseas. Though the grape arbor and car are staple motifs of Dionysiac procession, each artist treats the subject differently. The kylix artist referred to here ignored the festival and depicted Dionysus alone under the stars.

Jean d’Aire: Fierce Courage

Jean d’Aire stands with feet planted and arms extended. His hands clench an enormous key, which because of its central horizontal position appears larger than Jacques de Wessant’s. The rope is explicitly modeled, and even knotted at the side of his neck. The two symbols of the burghers’ martyrdom are thus given major prominence in this figure.

His gaze is particularly interesting. Directed outward, it is not pleading, like Jean de Fiennes’s, or faraway, like Jacques de Wessant’s. Rather, d’Aire’s look seems to bore into the eyes of his fellow townspeople almost as a challenge, saying, “Be strong! Be worthy of our sacrifice!”

There is a fierce tension in the figure, revealed in the clenched hands and straining neck tendons and clenched chest muscles. D’Aire looks almost like a weightlifter, a fourteenth-century Atlas who, with his brethren, shoulders the whole town’s grief and hope.

The Group as a Whole

Following the gaze and movement of the figures leads the eye from one to another, around the circle and back to Saint-Pierre. The Stanford sculpture is unique among the casts of The Burghers of Calais in its separation of the individual statues. This separation decreases both the sense of community between them, and also the feeling of urGENCY and confusion found in other, more closely-grouped compositions, such as the original cast installed in Calais in 1895.

CHARACTER ... IS THE SOUL. THE FEELINGS, THE IDEAS, EXPRESSED BY THE FEATURES OF A FACE...

WORKS CITED

NOTES
1 According to Jean Froissart, a contemporary chronicler, the six burghers were eventually spared through the intervention of Queen Philippa, King Edward’s pregnant consort. See, for example, “Tales from Froissart,” ed. Steve Mulhberger. http://www.nipissingu.ca/department/history/MULBERGER/FROISSART/TALES.HTM
2 Jacques de Wessant and Pierre de Wessant were brothers.
3 D’Andres’ face could be viewed easily if the statue was on a pedestal, but we know from Rodin’s second maquette that he had rejected that idea (Lampert 111).
A t the moment of reconciliation between Odysseus and his wife, after twenty years of separation and hardship, Penelope hesitates and asks herself, “… should she keep her distance, probe her husband? Or rush up to the man at once and kiss his head and cling to both his hands?” (Odyssey, 23.97-99). The answer to this question, and the subsequent actions of husband and wife as the story plays out, demonstrate the nature of an exemplary marriage in ancient Greece. By contrasting two components of marriage, sexual union and private conversation, Homer suggests that the ideal marriage in ancient Gr eece was defined, more than by conventionally expected sexual intimacy, by the intimacy of knowledge.

A sexual relationship is usually central to a marriage. However, in two important sections, The Odyssey depicts sex in direct contrast to marriage. First, on Calypso’s island, where the goddess offers him immortality, Odysseus spurns her in favor of returning home. Calypso tempts him explicitly with her beauty and power (traditional sexual qualities) and even asks Odysseus how his mortal wife could possibly compare with her. Odysseus admits that Penelope is not as sexually alluring as Calypso, but insists that it is his wise wife and his home that he seeks. “Look at my wise Penelope. She falls far short of you, your beauty, stature… Nevertheless I long—I pine, all my days—to travel home and see the dawn of my return” (5:239-43). This story is retiterated when Odysseus describes his stay with Calypso to the Phaeacians. Here, Odysseus unambiguously states that even though Calypso’s power was strong, he would not consent to be her husband. “True enough, Calypso the lustrous goddess tried to hold me back, deep in her arching caverns, craving me for a husband. So did Circe, holding me just as warmly in her halls… But they never won the heart inside me, never. So nothing is as sweet

as a man’s own country” (9:32-38). The marriage/country association is strong and emphasized in the repeated telling of the tale. Odysseus has sexual relations with Calypso for seven years, but never once does he consider himself her husband.

In Book 8, the bard Demodocus sings about “the Love of Ares and Aphrodite,” another relationship in which sex and marriage are opposed. This time, the adultery seems doubly egregious because it took place in “Hephaestus’s mansion,” and “showered Hephaestus’s marriage bed with shame” (8:303-5).

To explore whether Homer uses the word bed symbolically, as a euphemism for sexual relations, rather than literally (domestic furniture), consider several test sections in which lovers are described. Fagles’s translation makes available enough examples, referring specifically to lovemaking without using the word bed, to make the case against euphemism: Aphrodite and Ares “first made love…lost in each other’s arms and making love” (8:303, 808). Odysseus and Calypso, “long in each other’s arms they lost themselves in love” (5:251). Even when the time finally comes for Odysseus and Penelope, they speak about lovemaking in personal terms: “delight in each other” (23:290), and “once they’d revealed in all the longed-for joys of love” (23:342-3). Homer does not use the term bed to allude to sex.

Of further interest is Homer’s repeated reference to beds as belonging to men, particularly to husbands. Homer labels the bed in which Aphrodite and Ares make love as Hephaestus’s bed, no fewer than three times:

“Hephaestus’s marriage bed” (8:305), “Once he’d spun that cunning trap around his [Hephaestus’s] bed” (8:320), “Just look at the two lovers…crawled inside my [Hephaestus’s] bed, locked in each other’s arms” (8:355). Would the lovemaking of the two gods have been so scandalous had they not desecrated a marriage bed?

Another example of the husband’s claim to his bed occurs when Penelope, at the beginning of the long reconciliation scene in book 23, invokes Helen. “Remember Helen of Argos, Zeus’s daughter—would she have sported so in a stranger’s bed if she had dreamed that Achaea’s sons were doomed to fight and die and bring her home again?” (23:247-249; italics added). The bed is the man’s domain, and in this case, the domain of Paris, who is not Helen’s husband. Odysseus provides the last example himself, when he goes to great pains to remind Penelope that their bed is his, that he built it, that it is the very foundation of his home, “Who could move my bed? Impossible task […] I know, I built it myself—no one else” (23: 216-214). In The Odyssey, beds belong to husbands, not to lovers.

The great rooted bed is the crowning symbol of Odysseus’s long journey. It is congruent with the house, originating directly from the soil of Odysseus’s beloved Ithaca. The bed is carved from a single olive tree, an important physical symbol in ancient Greece. The secret of the bed is evidence of Odysseus’s cunning and wisdom, and ultimately the sign by which Penelope knows this strange traveler to be her husband. “There’s our secret sign, I tell you, our life story! Does the bed, my lady, still stand planted firm?” (23:227). Odysseus seeks the answer to his question both literally (is the bed still in the house?), and figuratively (does the symbol of his home, that is, his marriage, still exist?). Odysseus’s bed is a powerful sign of his union with Penelope, a symbol simultaneously sexual and domestic. For her part, Penelope ultimately recognizes and accepts her husband not by his physical nature, or by his sexual conquest of her, but because he possesses knowledge of their marriage: “… you have revealed such overwhelming proof—the secret sign of our bed, … you’ve conquered my heart, my hard heart, at last” (23:253-8).

Perhaps the most startling evidence that marriage for the ancient Greeks was something more complex and valuable than just sex, is how Odysseus and Penelope act when they finally go to bed. They talk. They tell each other tales of their long adventures, revealing “in each other’s stories, the radiant woman telling of all she’d borne at home… And great Odysseus [telling] his wife of all the pains he had dealt out to other men and all the hardships he’d endured himself” (23:343-51). And then they keep talking, planning what they will do next, as husband and wife, going forward to defeat their enemies. Odysseus’s bed is both the literal foundation of his home and the symbol of the stability of his marriage, the locus of domestic experience and intimate knowledge. Penelope and Odysseus consummated their reunion with their conversation as well as sex. Athena extended the night for them, and Odysseus told his wife “his story first to last, and she listened on, enchanted…” (23:351-353).

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MARRIAGE IN THE ODYSSEY: AN INTIMATE CONVERSATION
By Jennifer Swanton Brown
The nineteenth century was a time of great change for the field of medicine. Paris, particularly during the first half of the century, was the leading city in this burgeoning medical landscape. Empiricism was replacing the outdated "library medicine," a practice based on philosophical theories, not observation or experience. The established concepts of what was and was not considered "scientific" were being challenged. Also, French physician Marie-François-Xavier Bichat's 1801 work on dissection was helping to make Paris the early-nineteenth-century center for medical exploration and advancement (Furst 1:18; Vess 10). This changing medical arena was a concomitant of the tumultuous political landscape of Paris from the late eighteenth century through the early-nineteenth century. Central to the change was the public health movement (hygiène publique), or hygienist movement, emerging.

Although concepts of the "public" and of "health" were both important to the Enlightenment, the term "public health" did not exist until the early nineteenth century (Kudlick 35-36). This movement was born out of French Enlightenment ideals in the late eighteenth century, developing from the Enlightenment's focus on progress, rational reform, natural law, orderliness, empiricism, and humanitarianism (La Berge, "Mission" 11). As Dr. J. F. Rameaux stated in 1839, "Public health concerns itself with the man in society, and considers him as a species. Religion, government, morals and customs, institutions, relations from man to man, and from people to people—all of this is its jurisdiction. In a word, [public health] touches upon every aspect of our social existence" (qtd. in Kudlick 72). The nineteenth-century hygienists focused on endemic disease, occupational hygiene, sanitation, water distribution, bathing, prostitution, and food safety, to name a few of their areas of interest (La Berge, "Mission" 18, 186-213, 249-267). Although the movement grew both in size and reputation during the early-nineteenth century, the Parisian cholera epidemic of 1832 disrupted it and caused people to lose confidence in its theories and practices. Ironically, the cholera epidemic was a frightening mirror of death, eventually improved the French public health movement by revealing its faults and weaknesses.

Throughout most of the eighteenth century, health as a social issue largely remained outside the oversight of the central government; issues of public health existed primarily within the local, private sphere. Charitable assistance was principally dependent upon mortality and Church claims regarding the generosity of the faithful, and such financial support was limited. Disease and poverty were also viewed through a religious lens. Poverty was often perceived as a type of religious "test," and the ill and poor were understood to be children of God, deserving of kindness. Yet the political and social changes of the late eighteenth century, the same changes that were beginning to reshape the practice of medicine, altered the general attitude toward the poor and also redefined the role of the French government in the lives of the people. Impoverished peoples began to be judged more harshly, as the association between poverty and holiness weakened. At the same time, however, a new sense of public welfare and a new desire for government intervention in the lives of the French people emerged (Kudlick 32-35; Coleman 26).

This blossoming sense of public welfare and governmental responsibility was in part expressed through the public health movement, which was composed of doctors, pharmacist-chemists, engineers, administrators, and others. This hybrid group coalesced, and the practitioners were referred to en masse as "hygienists." In 1802 the movement was further legitimized as a profession with the foundation of the Paris Health Council (Conseil de salubrité de Paris). In 1829 the journal Annales d'hygiène publique et de médecine légale first appeared, which served as the movement's central body of work. Both the Paris Health Council and the Annales d'hygiène publique were prominent in establishing public health as a professional scientific discipline (La Berge, "Mission" 1, 44; Coleman 18-20; Kudlick 71-72).

As hygienists were a composite of professionals from several disciplines, training was not uniform. One of the movement's leaders and most influential hygienists, Alexandre Parent-Duchatelet, however, had specific guidelines regarding how he thought a public hygienist ought to be trained. According to Parent-Duchatelet, once a man has obtained an formal academic preparation, the best training ground for becoming a public hygienist was the Paris Health Council (Conseil de salubrité). He believed strongly that the only way to properly train to be a hygienist was through practical, on-the-job training. Whereas public hygiene did have a place in the medical curriculum of the early nineteenth century, it was only one small part of the larger curriculum. Of the five exams required to receive a medical degree, only one tested knowledge of hygiene. The hygienic curricula in the medical schools were also not uniform and medical students were not being taught the principles of scientific hygiene. Parent-Duchatelet believed this preparation was insufficient and thus touted practical training measures (La Berge, "Mission" 45-47).

The Napoleonic Wars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, had given medical professionals a new and unique array of experiences that prepared them for the practices of the public health movement. Military medical professionals worked in tumultuous environments involving large numbers of people. The military also demanded detailed, comprehensive reports. In this environment, such professionals received practical experience investigating health issues among large numbers of people, while thoroughly documenting their work—ideal preparation for public health investigation. The conditions of the French Revolution and the wars also created a desire among practitioners for a medical model that attempted to eradicate disease through the improvement of foul, loathsome conditions. These experiences were part of the impetus behind the movement (Coleman 23; Vess 140-150).

The public health movement had several goals, stemming both from national and humanitarian interests, including lowering the mortality rate, improving the quality of life, reducing disease, increasing life expectancy, and reducing pain and suffering (La Berge, "Mission" 42). The main thrust of the movement was urban. The industrialization of France during this time created social changes such as the concentration of populations and the erosion of traditional social bonds, resulting in increased mortality, destitution, and morbidity among the urban poor. Industrialization had created social problems that became part of the primary focus of the movement (La Berge, "Mission" 42; Coleman xvii).

Another salient feature of the hygienist movement was "moralization," an outgrowth of the belief that a correlation exists between the moral and the material. "Continuing an older tradition among physicians, hygienists attempted to help the urban poor internalize middle-class morals and habits, while also working to improve their living standards. Believing in a connection between morality and health, the public health officials thought that improvements in health, surroundings, and hygiene would serve to improve the moral state (La Berge, "Mission" 40-42)."
While health councils did exist in other cities such as Lille and Lyon, and between the years of 1815 and 1848 important health reforms came out of Lyon, Paris was the heart of the movement. The movement itself was deeply connected to the French government, both nationally and municipally. The health councils served under the direct supervision of prefects (the prefect of police in Paris), who were themselves under the jurisdiction of the Minister of the Interior. The national academies also helped shape the movement in serving as forums for debating public health issues, since many of the leading public hygienists were members of the Royal Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Political and Moral Sciences. Furthermore, the city of Paris served as a “laboratory” for the hygienists, as it contained numerous records and statistical data for investigation and historical research, and offered a plethora of locations and public health concerns for investigation (La Berge, “Mission” 22-25, 184).

Endemic to the Ganges Valley in India, cholera started its world tour via trade routes and colonial outposts in 1817. Fifty percent of those who contracted cholera died, usually within one day, and as a result of acute dehydration (Coleman 171; Quinlan 309; Kudlick 1). The French, however, were certain that cholera was not a disease of their country, believing that their unique, accomplished levels of civilization, industry, and commerce would protect them not only from the cholera epidemic, but also from all other epidemics. They understood themselves to be the most advanced, civilized country in the world, they viewed France as a perfected nation with the most enlightened physicians, who were also the most trained and experienced in maintaining public health (Delaporte 1-2).

The French also believed that cholera physically could not enter the country. Many thought France’s topography was a physical barrier to disease, and considered their sanitary measures to be so well advanced and followed as to prohibit cholera from entering through the seaports. If the disease did make its way to the ports, it would be quickly confined to the port city of Paris. Financial assistance came from the Chamber of Deputies, which allocated emergency funds. Donations were also collected from charities. The doctors of the Royal Academy of Medicine (Académie Royale de Médecine) discussed the epidemic and debated disease etiology as well. Despite such well-intentioned actions, however, a lack of government interest in the cause along with little desire to spend public funds on prevention resulted in relatively little being done (Delaporte 9, Quinlan 306-308).

On March 15, 1832, cholera entered France at Calais; on March 26th, it entered Paris. Once cholera struck, the results were devastating. Death from cholera was painful and gruesome; throughout much of the scourge, hundreds of people were dying per day. Although the outbreak lingered into early October, on September 25, 1832, the administration declared cholera to be over. The cholera epidemic lasted 189 days, or twenty-seven weeks. In total, about 18,000 Parisians, roughly 2% of the city’s population, died from cholera between the 26th of March and the 30th of September (Coleman 171-172; Quinlan 309; Kudlick 15).

The epidemic shocked the Parisian elite-consciousness; confidence in French and European cultural superiority was shaken to the core. The fact that an “Oriental” disease could so ravage the most civilized city in the world created questions and doubt among government administrators, public health officials, medical professionals, and laypeople alike. Cholera not only created a fissure within the public health movement, but also within the sophisticated bourgeois self-concept (Quinlan 309-310).

The cholera epidemic directly and substantially altered the public health movement, forcing the hygienists and the movement to take a honest look at their strengths, weaknesses, and abilities. The epidemic served as a horrific learning-tool that stimulated the movement. It confirmed social and environmental theories of disease causation, increased awareness of local sanitary conditions and the importance of municipal clean-up campaigns, and forced Parisian administrators to take a serious approach to sanitary reform. Although the protective actions of the hygienists had failed, the epidemic fostered the notion that cleanliness was the best measure of prevention. It encouraged the hygienists to continue their work on unhealthy sites such as dumps, sewers, cesspools, unclean streets, and unsanitary homes (La Berge, “Mission” 21, 187). As Dr. J. Howard Beard states, cholera “taught with terrible emphasis the necessity of sanitation, the danger of procrastination and the cost of indifference” (Beard 516). When the epidemic hit Paris in 1832, the public health movement was at the pinnacle of its activity and the hygienists were thus primed to study the disease with rational scientific inquiry and methodology. The investigating hygienists were deep in the “trenches” of the epidemic; they cared for cholera patients and conducted door-to-door sanitary investigations. Hygienists were also involved with the contagion from the standpoints of investigation, prevention, management, and care. They used the outbreak to scientifically test their theories regarding disease causation. The hygienists’ final report on the epidemic, Rapport sur la marche et les effets du cholera-morbus dans Paris, is now considered a “masterpiece of socio-hygienic investigation” (La Berge, “Mission” 185).

While there were several theories of disease causation prevalent at this time, the social theory of disease causation was predominant among French hygienists. This theory emphasized social factors in disease, arguing that social status and class play a direct role in disease causation, or stated more simply, that poverty causes disease. The hygienists expected more poor people to die of cholera than wealthy citizens, which is what their investigations confirmed (Quinlan 314-316; La Berge, “Mission” 185). As the epidemic seemed to support the social theory of epidemiology, the cholera commission gave the hypothesis quasi-official sanction, leading physicians and hygienists to place more emphasis on social class in disease analysis. Epidemic disease began to be viewed as a symptom of degeneracy. Moreover, during the epidemic, the lower classes also struck a chord of fear among the bourgeois because the disease had spread from the lower classes to the upper classes, shattering the elites’ assumption that they were immune to cholera, and forcing the bourgeois to take a greater interest in the uncouth parts of Paris (La Berge, “Mission” 187; Kudlick 63; Quinlan 315-316).

As is now commonly known, cholera is caused by a waterborne microbe, a bacterium, that enters the body through contact with or ingestion of infected water, food, clothing, or other items (Quinlan 305). In meliorating sanitation practices, the hygienists were improving the city’s resistance against another epidemic. While they made positive, concrete improvements, and Poland, the bacterium that caused cholera also struck a chord of fear among the bourgeois. In entering and ravaging Paris, the cholera scourge proved that the public health movement had clearly failed in some way. In falsely confirming the social theory of disease causation, the hygienists were not forced to challenge their notion and mis-conception of cholera. Although their incorrect theories did lead to tangible improvements for the city and for public health, it was not until the German physician Robert Koch isolated the Asiatic cholera bacillus in 1883 that the social theory could be scientifically challenged and further progress made against the disease. Even with this new discovery, however, late-nineteenth century public opinion regarding bacteriology remained skeptical, even as the discipline became more central to medicine (Furst 12-13). While their conclusions regarding the social theory of disease causation were incorrect, the epidemic forced hygienists and physicians to challenge their beliefs through detailed research. The hygienists’ rigorous methods of investigation produced thorough public health reports that dealt with such variables as topography, sex, age, atmospheric conditions, humidity, soil, elevation, levels of habitation, and prison populations. They thought that such reports would also strengthen the movement by garnering and solidifying public support for their sanitation movement (Quinlan 311). In addition, the cholera epidemic “problematized traditional thinking about disease and environment, forcing doctors to consider epidemics in different ways” (Quinlan 312).

**IN ENTERING AND RAVAGING PARIS. THE CHOLERA SCOURGE PROVED THAT THE PUBLIC HEALTH MOVEMENT HAD CLEARLY FAILED.**
The importance of the public health movement, and accordingly the 1832 cholera epidemic, must not be understated. In investigating issues such as sewage, water supply and dispersal, prostitution, food and drink safety, and disease control, the nineteenth century public health movement in France was a precursor to many of the public health works that we, at the turn of the twenty-first century, take for granted. Today, throughout much of the world, people enjoy safe and monitored drinking supplies, efficient sewage management, and food and drug supervision, among other public health measures. What we benefit from today has deep roots in the public health movement in France throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which itself was improved and made more visible by the Parisian cholera epidemic of 1832.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND WORKS CITED


ON THE PATH TO THE POND

By Jennifer Swanton Brown

On the path to the pond
she walks ahead of him.
He hears the distance between them vibrate
with light,
he watches her shoulders tipping
like small craft in a storm
even though the hot afternoon is calm—
She inhabits their marriage
with every word she speaks,
how he sings in the mountains
his name.
She came up to him from her turtle-wide water,
she named the yarrow—

He imagines the distance
moves with music,
the mated phrases alive
between the bar lines of his body and her body,
the tones in their rows
a complicated syntax
of pitch, length
and breathing—

She stops ahead of him,
rotates her ankle to free her foot from its sandal,
her toes touch the ground briefly
as if with her very gait,
her foot from its sandal,
rotates her ankle to free
this world.
She is testing the temperature of the earth
before stepping in.
We are riding horses up to a high ridge in the Absaroka Range in northwestern Wyoming on a crisp, sunny day in August. We will spend three to four hours on the trail up to Soublette Peak, at about 11,000 feet, where we will have a picnic lunch and then ride back down. The 15 of us, two wranglers and 13 guests, have brought the horses by trailer from the guest ranch in Grand Teton National Park up to the trailhead about 3,000 feet below our destination. We can see the mountains of the Teton Range to the west of us and we know that the ranch is down there, although its green-roofed barns and cabins have disappeared into the folds and valleys of the foothills below us. We start up the steep trail into the woods and meadows through which we will go until we reach the tree line at about 9,500 feet. This is grizzly bear country, and we see a few “bear trees,” recognizable because the trunks are stripped of bark up to about 10-12 feet from the ground. We will most likely not see any bears, although we know that the bears will see us. We are safe because there are 15 of us and because we are on horseback, and even a single horseback rider seems very large and formidable to the bears. We place our faith in the wranglers. They have ridden these trails before, and they have cell phones and, if we were left alone, downhill in any direction leads to roads and help.

I am reminded of Abraham going to the mountain to sacrifice his son Isaac, as Soren Kierkegaard once imagined it in his passionate work, Fear and Trembling. Kierkegaard meditates upon Abraham’s journey, how it could have been and how it must have been. I imagine our journey up the mountain as being like Abraham’s journey. He came from an arid valley, as we are doing, and saw the mountain in the distance, a mountain perhaps like this one, scalable by a horse or donkey, high and cold. Abraham goes to the mountain, and the journey may have been beautiful, but he holds in his mind and heart a purpose known only to himself and to God. He goes to the mountain to kill his own son as a sacrifice. He goes as God has commanded, but he dreads the journey. Journeys, no matter how much anticipated, begin with a sense of dread, a foreboding that is anticipation and even excitement, and continue with movement toward the as yet unknown and the discovery of a future still hidden. Faith stronger than the dread is needed, and if the journey is successful, freedom is attained at the end: freedom of knowledge, completion and resolution. Abraham’s journey began in dread and in faith, in dread of the purpose, in dread of the absurdity of the command he was obeying, in faith that the journey into the unknown would find him at the end free of the burden of his purpose, free in his faith. But we must imagine that the purpose of Abraham’s journey made this of all journeys, the most dreadful.

After a little way up the narrow trail, we are in a deep woodland out of sight of the road. The trail will continue at a steep incline for most of the ride up to the peak. The woods are cool and sheltered, studded with filtered sunlight and woodland flowers, and interspersed with lovely small alpine meadows in full bloom. The meadow flowers are arranged like rock gardens with mixtures of bluebells, Indian paintbrush, white yarrow, yellow mountain sunflowers, and light purple asters. It is as if someone had carefully planted each flower to be perfectly spaced among the others, the colors perfectly harmonized. In the more shaded areas are blue lupines, pink wild geranium, and the red fruits of the poisonous baneberry. This is where we see the stripped trunks of the bear trees, and we think this a perfect habitat for a bear, flowery, quiet and sunny.
the sky (Gen. 17:1-8)? It is preposterior for Abraham to hold to his faith in God’s promise for the future and at the same time fully resign himself to the sacrifice of his son as God requires. Who among us would go to the mountain with Abraham, with a task like his and with his faith? As we ride up past the tree line, the trail disappears and we continue across broad meadows that fall off steeply on either side. Each meadow lies higher with little swales in between, so we are always climbing up to a grassy ridge, then down the shallow depressions, and up across the next meadow to the next ridge. The riders ahead of me become silhouetted and lonely on the ridges and seem to disappear over the tops, but I catch up and see that this is only an illusion. Like them, my horse and I drop down the steep slopes and then climb up the far sides again. All along the ride up the mountain, we have little tests, little temptations to lose faith in ourselves and our horses, to give in to fear, worry, even panic. The bear trees are a test, as are the steep climbs and descents. Abraham’s faith was tempted beyond our comprehension: he must not doubt God and he must not try to avoid God’s request. Abraham was tested as an individual alone in his relationship with God. Kierkegaard describes this as putting the individual, Abraham, above the universal ethic. Abraham’s response to God’s command, his “faith that God would not demand Isaac of him” together with his willingness to “sacrifice him if it were demanded” (35), is absurd. The two outcomes are mutually exclusive in human terms and cannot be comprehended in reason, but they are exactly comprehended in Abraham’s faith. Abraham’s temptation is to revert to the universal ethic, to reason with God and with himself and by reasoning to save Isaac. But if he is not to lose himself and his faith, he must put his duty to God above his duty to conform to or deny ethics. Abraham does not lose his faith and he follows the command of God until, as he is ready to kill Isaac, God intervenes and provides a ram for the sacrifice.

The final paradox is that Abraham is ethically right as he prepares to sacrifice his son’s life at God’s command, and at the same time, the prohibition against killing another human being is not erased. The universal ethical demand for a father to love his son and to place to the son’s life before his own was as operative before Abraham as it is after him. There are only two possibilities: either Abraham is a murderer, for any that commit murder in their hearts are indeed murderers (Matthew 5:21-22), or the universal ethic is suspended and Abraham comes to repentance. For Kierkegaard, neither of those are true: the universal command, “thou shalt not kill,” can never be compromised or broken, and, at the same time, Abraham’s intention to murder his son is righteous, a paradox that cannot be accepted by reason but must be accepted by faith.

Kierkegaard finds no analogies to Abraham’s situation, except perhaps a “later one” (56), by which he may have meant Christ. We can perhaps see an analogy in contempory choices regarding the end of life: continued, or not, of life support for a loved one or, for ourselves, continuing or not continuing treatments for terminal disease. We are all Abrahams in our world, asked to make decisions not covered by normative ethics. The usual right/wrong of ethical thinking is suspended for such choices, as it was for Abraham. The duty is to the absolute, the ultimately human and humane, and those who never need to make this choice will never understand what it is to be, like Abraham, beyond the universal ethic in this way.

We continue to ride through meadows of grass where flowers are fewer, and as we climb higher, the wind blows and the air grows colder. Finally, we reach a shallow, oval-shaped meadow bordered with outcroppings of rock at the top of the highest ridge. The wind is fierce and very cold, and we put on more layers of jackets and sweaters. On the peak, we are as if on top of the earth. Mountains surround us in all directions, and we look down on a valley floor with a small river connecting three tiny lakes like a string of intensely blue beads. The snow-covered mountains to the east are the Wind River Range, one of the most remote and wild of the wilderness areas of Wyoming, and we see Grand Teton far off to the west. We dismount to let the horses graze, and we dig out our packed lunches from the saddlebags. Then, looking for sheltered places to eat, we find pockets in the rocks along the edge of the ridge overlooking the valley, and miraculously we are all warm and cozy sitting in our little crevices and depressions. I choose a flat, sun-warmed rock slightly below a large one so that I have everything one could want: warmth from the rock I am sitting on, a place to set my lunch, and a warm backrest.

Our views from here are immense. The mountains stand back from us, lovely and silent, and we hear only the wind rustling the grasses across the meadowy ridge. A small bird flies by, and I wonder what kind of living he makes up here where there are no trees, and if he nests so high up or if he is only a day visitor. There are tiny butterflies lighting on small flowers hidden in the grass. Someone sees a coyote far across on another ridge, making his way up higher, looking as though he knows where he is going, and we wonder at seeing one alone this high up.

We feel that we are heroes on this ridge, and that not many can come up this high. Abraham may have felt exhausted, weighted by his purpose, imagining the sacrifice he was to make, but did he also feel the rush of being on top of the mountain? Did he feel like a hero? For Kierkegaard, Abraham is not a hero in the usual sense of someone who has accomplished a great achievement. He is not even a tragic hero. Abraham is a hero of faith. He is never going to be understood either before or after his act of obedience to God’s command, and he will never be able to explain himself or his journey.

Kierkegaard’s individual hero, his “knighthood” of faith, gives up everything human and understandable in his duty to the absolute. Abraham is unlike the classic tragic hero, who gives himself up for universally understood values. In Kierkegaard’s view, Agamemnon, sacrificing his daughter for a favorable wind and victory for his people, is a tragic hero. He gives up his human desires and sacrifices the daughter he loved. His is a personal tragedy that happens through a confluence of events, tragic but understandable. Abraham gives up for the universal, that is nobility, glory, understanding, for his individual duty to the absolute. The tragic hero and the knight of faith both violate the universal ethic—Agamemnon and Abraham are both murderers of their own children. But for Abraham, the murder of his son is above the personal and the humanly tragic; it begins in his relationship to God, not in events of ordinary life; it is absurd since the sacrifice of Isaac would have destroyed the very future that God had promised.

We need to go down from the mountain, and so we gather up our lunch bags, in order to leave nothing behind. We want to think that our passage is in visible, that the meadows and this beautiful high ridge are pristine and unaffected by the horses or ourselves. But we have left marks: flowers trodden down, grass eaten by the horses. The mere fact of our being here perhaps forced the coyote to go up the far ridge rather than the one we are on. We want to believe that we have discovered this place, that it was untouched before we got here, and that no one will be here again.

One of the wranglers points to Grand Teton, far off in the distance, and we know that the ranch lies that way and down from here. The ranch, invisible and small in the grand scale of this landscape, will be before the end of the afternoon. From up here, it seems impossible. Where do we find confidence to start, and how can we believe that we will make our way back to the ranch? How will we find our way down through the meadows and the trees to the right trail? Our horses will touch each foot of the way down, each slope, each steep path.

The wind blows and blows. We mount up and start down, pushing around the side of the ridge into more wind, riding across a large meadow, and finally dropping below the tree line where the wind stops and there is a resting place. It takes about an hour to get down this far, and we have more than another hour to go to the trail that leads to the road.

What did Abraham think as he came down the mountain? Kierkegaard reflects on his relief and joy (22–33, 37), but says little more. Abraham could not be understood by anyone, and perhaps even Isaac never understood why the intended sacrifice was to have been himself. In the end, it doesn’t matter so much what Abraham thought or did after the journey to Mount Moriah. He stands as an individual whose unique task was to await a promise in faith for 100 years, to gain the fulfillment of that promise in his son, then to be asked to sacrifice him in an unthinkable act of faith. And no one would understand this.

As we ride down the mountain, we are on our way back to the ordinary world, the world of roads and signposts, and people. At the ranch, food will be waiting, and there will be rest and warmth and comfort. But we have ridden our horses to the top of the mountain. We have felt the wind and the cold and the loneliness of the wilderness.

Notes


I

Do Laws Govern the Evolution of Technology?

By Denise Osborne

In Gesture and Speech, Leroi-Gourhan poses the idea that we neither direct nor control our technological progress, but that it evolves as a consequence of natural processes, just as we do. If this suggestion is correct, then we must wonder what these natural processes are. Could the processes that steer our technological evolution be resolved into physical laws, and if so, what might these laws be? What determines the evolution of technology—what laws govern it? Attempting to understand ourselves by searching for laws of nature is not new. In an ironic twist, the same Enlightenment that gave us absolute dominion over nature immediately discovered ways in which we are subject to it. Newton looked at gravity and found that we are held fast to this earth by predictable rules, and Carnot and Clausius further restrained us with the laws of thermodynamics. Since then, scientific advances have continued to codify into the laws of physics a system that describes how we are restricted by our universe. We cannot exceed the speed of light; we cannot create new energy or matter, and we cannot stop an endless increase in entropy.1

Thus, to best understand the evolution of technology, perhaps we should look for its invariant—it’s aspect that remains unchanged—and maybe we’ll find our natural law there. If, as Leroi-Gourhan has suggested, natural processes and laws direct the “movement” of technology, then, as in all physical systems of movement, there would be a conservation law that would limit it as well. Rather than conserving energy, which is the motive force for motion in physical systems, it would conserve “benefit,” which is the analogous motive force of technology. Benefit can be defined as the goal that a technology aims to achieve; it is the way in which the results of the technology do good. Conserving benefit would mean that every benefit that humankind has received from its technological advances would require an equal, but opposite, “disbenefit.”

Perhaps we could call this law the “Conservation of Benefit.” It would be inescapable, just like the Conservation of Energy and Conservation of Momentum and all the other physical laws of conservation. And it would predict that for every benefit mankind has generated through the mastery of technology, there has been an inescapable disbenefit. However, unlike the conservation laws that are quantifiable in measurable units, such as mass and energy, conservation of benefit is more of a conceptual construct.

Moreover, perhaps this quality that we call “benefit”—which we have likened to energy—would have, like energy, its own kind of entropy. Like all entropy, it would demand that a kind of unpr edictable change and disorder be increased each time we release “benefit” into nature.

Of course, we would be irresponsible if we blithely postulated a new law of nature without any evidence. Science has strict standards that we must respect. However, even without scientific proof, we intuitively suspect that a law of Conservation of Benefit might exist because this suspicion is supported by widespread anecdotal evidence. For instance, we have benefited agriculture by creating pesticides to eliminate harmful insects. However, consistent with a law of Conservation of Benefit, there were concomitant disbenefits to these pesticides, such as the unintended creation of pesticide-resistant insects, and the elimination of beneficial populations of honeybees. Moreover, this disbenefit, following the rules of entry, spread randomly, so that the pesticides found their way into the drinking water supplies in neighboring communities, increasing the risk of cancer. Similar observations regarding benefit and disbenefit can be made for antibiotics that have created far more virulent, antibiotic-resistant diseases; and chlorofluorocarbons which made superb refrigerants for air conditioners and propellants for deodorants, yet produced continent-size holes in our planet’s protective ozone layer.

As we consider this more, we realize that the idea that every benefit has an associated disbenefit—the proverbial “double-edged sword”—is not new. It appears whenever the genie in the bottle grants you three wishes, yet mischievously leaves you with unwanted and unexpected consequences. It is the voice of Faust’s Mephistopheles, questioning whether science and technology will ultimately demand its price.

Perhaps until now, Conservation of Benefit has been difficult to recognize because of the inherent lag between the time when we begin to enjoy the benefits of our technologies and when their negative consequences become known to us. Perhaps it is not that disbenefit needs time to evolve—it can be created simultaneously with benefit. Instead, this may be due to the time it takes for us to recognize the disbenefit we have created. Until then, we are simply unaware of what we have done.

But if our technological progress is governed by a law of Conservation of Benefit, then our error would be to ignore it, carelessly pretending that we are somehow free of its consequences. We have already seen what happens when we are simply unaware that a disbenefit has been created: species expire due to DDT poisoning, the ice caps begin to melt, and forests wither under acid rains. Have we deluded ourselves into thinking that we are making progress, as we watch our technological advances increase almost exponentially? What if disbenefit—the shadow side of this progress—is likewise increasing exponentially? What if there really is a law of Conservation of Benefit, so that the sum total of all our “progress” is zero? ingful existence than many other physical quantities.

Invariants are the ultimate basis for most solutions to the equations of physics, and they simplify our understanding of the structure of our universe. Because invariants remain unchanged in the midst of change, they seem to preserve for us a kind of a physical reality, echoing Hanna Arendt’s conviction that our reality is seen what happens when we are simply unaware of the consequences of our actions. We have already seen how we can be to ignore it, carelessly pretending that we are somehow free of its consequences. Perhaps this law could be proved by postulating its opposite, namely: has there ever been a technology without disbenefit? Is there any technology that humankind has created that has not had negative consequences?

Mankind’s original technology—fire—led to deforestation. Early hunting technologies, even though they were primitive, caused the extinction of species. Since then, each technological age has left its negative impact. Mining practices during the Industrial Age released lead, mercury, and radioactive minerals which continue to leach into today’s drinking water supplies. The Chemical Age left a legacy of lethally contaminated Superfund sites, Bhopal-like explosions, and environmentally-persistent carcinogens. The Nuclear Age still threatens us with world-wide annihilation, and the Genetic Age, still in its infancy, holds the risk of a strange new world that we can only as yet imagine. Concurrently, the Modern Age of consumerism has left us with mountains of non-biodegradable trash to throw away, even though the landfills are full. Does every technological advance have its downside?

Most of even the simplest household conveniences from toasters and electric toothbrushes consume electricity, and generating this power necessitates the exploitation, extraction, transportation, refinement, and combustion of fossil fuels which leave a trail of environmentally-persistent carcinogens, and the Nuclear Age left a legacy of lethal contamination of pesticide-resistant insects, and the destruction of forests. Early hunting technologies, even though they were primitive, caused the extinction of species.

Deforestation. Early hunting technologies, even though they were primitive, caused the extinction of species.
Although we have not yet proved our law, what would be gained if we did?Generally, we hope to discover the laws of nature so that we can better understand our world. They let us know what we can and cannot do. Accordingly, if we could prove the existence of a law of Conservation of Benefit, how would it change our understanding of the "bottle" we live in, that aforementioned bottle of physical laws that constrains us on earth?

Perhaps it would change our perception of our relationship with Nature, altering our assumptions about where power lies. As Horkheimer and Adorno stated in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, not only did our Enlightenment fathers leave us with an alienation and disenchantment from Nature, they also taught us to arrogantly presume our superiority to her, exploiting and dominating her to suit our whims. Consistent with eighteenth-century conventions, she was intentionally feminized, further underscoring her subjectship to patriarchal notions of Reason and Rationality. We have felt bound only by abstract physical laws—laws like Einstein's E=mc² governing lifeless substances like energy and light—while no laws limited our authority over Nature.

But even though our technological power has made us feel that we dominate the earth, other evidence should make us somewhat insensitiveto both a cosmic and an earthly scale. Carl Sagan once used a universe-in-one-year metaphor to demonstrate our cosmic unimportance. In it, he showed that if the history of the universe were compressed into a single year—one that begins with the Big Bang on New Year's Day—all of our known human history would occur in just the final seconds before the year's end (Sagan 13). In Sagan's model, even the voyage of Christopher Columbus occurs in the last second before midnight on December 31st, and human history is only a blip in cosmic time.

And on an earthly scale, we are merely part of the mix in a thin layer of biota on the surface of the planet. We operate so interdependently as an ecological web, that from a distance we could almost be considered a single organism. Perhaps it is this organism—this biotic layer—that is actually evolving over time, while we are as extraneous as a human appendix. Of course, this is not the impression we have of ourselves. In our view, we stand above earth's ecological web. This idea can be extended one step further, by postulating that we can be so far removed from this layer of biota that the human and could be approached without either the flesh or the planet which houses it (Lyotard).

### 1) You Can't Win.

### 2) You Can't Break Even.

### 3) You Can't Get Out of the Game.

Perhaps our delusions about our importance result from our perceptions about our own evolutionary progress. We still think of ourselves as the most erector of the hominids in hierarchical exhibits in Natural History museums—those exhibits that show our evolution from shrew to ape to Neanderthal to man. We appear there at the pinnacle of something, an ultimate position that proves our significance.

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And on an earthly scale, we are merely part of the mix in a thin layer of biota on the surface of the planet. We operate so interdependently as an ecological web, that from a distance we could almost be considered a single organism. Perhaps it is this organism—this biotic layer—that is actually evolving over time, while we are as extraneous as a human appendix. Of course, this is not the impression we have of ourselves. In our view, we stand above earth’s ecological web. This idea can be extended one step further, by postulating that we can be so far removed from this layer of biota that the human and could be approached without either the flesh or the planet which houses it (Lyotard).
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JENNIFER SWANTON BROWN is currently in her second MLA year, has degrees in Linguistics, German Literature, and Nursing. Once an oncology and hospice nurse, working now as a free-lance medical/technical writer and editor, she is also a published poet, a poet/teacher with California Poets in the Schools, and a long-suffering soccer mom. Brown’s interests (academic and otherwise) include: literature, letter writing, mental health, images of the modern mother and wife, collage, knitting, yoga, California’s natural and human landscapes, and classical singing. She lives in Cupertino with her family.

JENNIFER BURTON graduated from the MLA program in 2005. Her thesis, Making Room for a View: Tourism and Authenticity in E.M. Forster’s Italian Works, allowed her to indulge two of her great passions: travel and Victorian/Edwardian literature. Since graduation, she has spent her time trying to reverse the chaos caused by five years of housekeeping neglect, while keeping up with the antics and tribulations of her three young sons (ages three, five, and seven).

JOHN DEVINE is a second-year student in the MLA program. He grew up in San Francisco, where coincidentally, all his grandparents lived on April 18, 1906. He attended UC Davis and, while there, earned NCAA All-American honors as a hurdler for the track team. After college, he developed an abiding interest in sea tales and adventures while working on a commercial fishing boat. He attended law school at the University of Oregon, and he is a Deputy Attorney General for the California Department of Justice. John and his lovely wife Mercedes have two children and are expecting the arrival of another child in 2006.

ANDY GROSE is a 2001 graduate of the MLA program. His thesis explored the convergence and interaction of two once prominent nineteenth-century intellectual currents, language reform and radical millennialism, in the creation of the now largely forgotten Desert Alphabet. A graduate of the University of Notre Dame and the University of Utah College of Medicine, he is a full-time practicing physician. He lives in Saratoga, California “The Silk Horse” is one of a set of linked short stories.

NANCY KRAJEWSKI is a second-year MLA student, is enjoying the seminars, and is very grateful that she does not yet have to choose a thesis topic. She has a BA in Education from Concordia University and an MBA from Northern Illinois University. She was an elementary and nursery school teacher for some years before switching to a business career in accounting and financial management. Extracurricular interests have included raising three kids, volunteering and board memberships for arts organizations, reading and photography. After retirement she plans to focus on the MLA program, prose writing, playing the piano, and her current obsession with English horseback riding.

DENISE OSBORNE is a fourth-year MLA student. Prior to joining the MLA program, she voluntarily left a 20-year career in mechanical engineering and structural analysis to pursue a lifelong interest in history, literature, and the arts. She studied mechanical engineering at the University of California at San Diego, and San Diego State University. She hopes to one day embark on a new career that combines her interest in science and technology with her love of the humanities.

LORENSZPER is a third-year MLA student, planning to graduate in 2007. In addition to the MLA program and full-time work, Loren enjoys participating in sports and physical activities, playing and studying the piano, reading, and traveling. She also serves on her homeowners’ board, recently became a certified open water scuba diver, and took a ride in a hot air balloon.

TAMARA TINKER is a third-year MLA student. She attended the Oxford Summer Program in English in 2005 where she studied poets Chaucer, Byron, Shelley and Keats.

MASON TOBAC is an MD who works in psychiatric emergency rooms in the Bay Area. He completed the Stanford MLA program in 2002, submitting a thesis on the philosophy of mind. Readers will be relieved to learn that, despite his misanthropic poetry, Mason enjoys Valentine’s Day and believes that all you need is love.

BRYON WILLIAMS is in his second year of the MLA program. He teaches high school English at Crystal Springs Uplands School in Hillsborough and leads student trips and groups to Oxford for literary-historical tours of England. Bryon lives in San Carlos with his wife Clair and daughter Ella.