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Spring 2023

## Mistletoe Blooms: A Proposal of Method

Petra Ellerby

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# Mistletoe Blooms

Petra Ellerby

*For Tom Moore, advisor extraordinaire,  
who helped shepherd this project from the very start;*

*for Steven Garfinkle, keeper of History, whose steadfast faith  
in my inconstant efforts has opened many doors;*

*for Kimberly Lynn, wise and compassionate,  
who treats scholarship as both a craft  
and an art (and allows me to do the same);*

*and for Tristan Goldman, alma mater,  
who first taught me that thinking could also be a way of living  
and who showed me how to love unfamiliar ideas  
and difficult histories by sharing his own affection  
for Mediterranean antiquity.*

Gratias vobis ago.

*On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble;  
 His forest fleece the Wrekin heaves;  
 The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
 And thick on Severn snow the leaves.*

*'Twould blow like this through holt and hangar  
 When Uricon the city stood:  
 'Tis the old wind in the old anger,  
 But then it threshed another wood.*

*Then, 'twas before my time, the Roman  
 At yonder heaving hill would stare:  
 The blood that warms an English yeoman,  
 The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.*

*There, like the wind through woods in riot,  
 Through him the gale of life blew high:  
 The tree of man was never quiet:  
 Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I.*

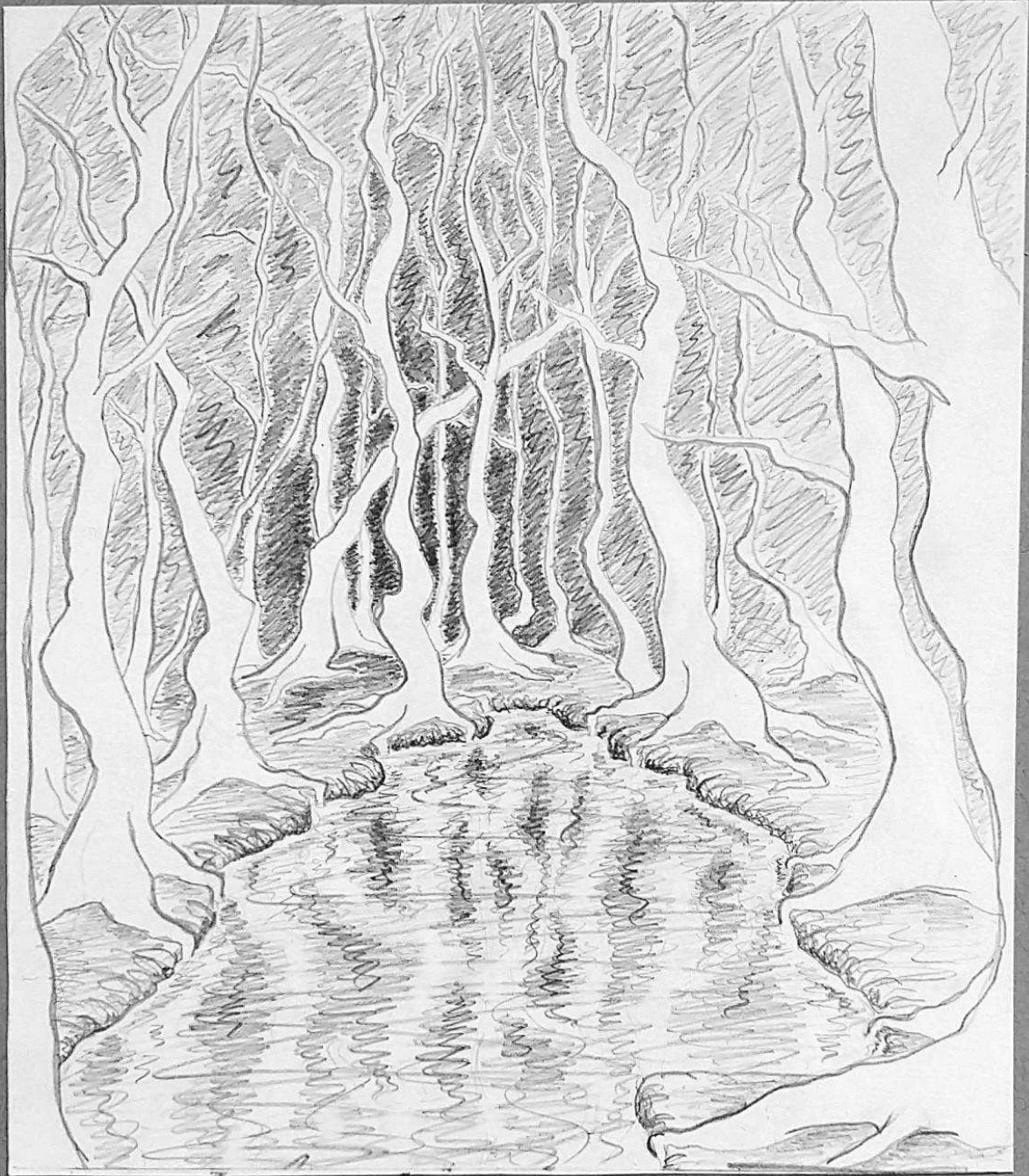
*The gale, it plies the saplings double,  
 It blows so hard, 'twill soon be gone:  
 Today the Roman and his trouble  
 Are ashes under Uricon.*

- A.E. Housman  
 A Shropshire Lad

*During winter's cold, deep in the woods,  
Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage  
On a tree not its own and entwines  
The burl'd branches with its yellow fruit.*

*- Vergil  
Aeneid 6.205*





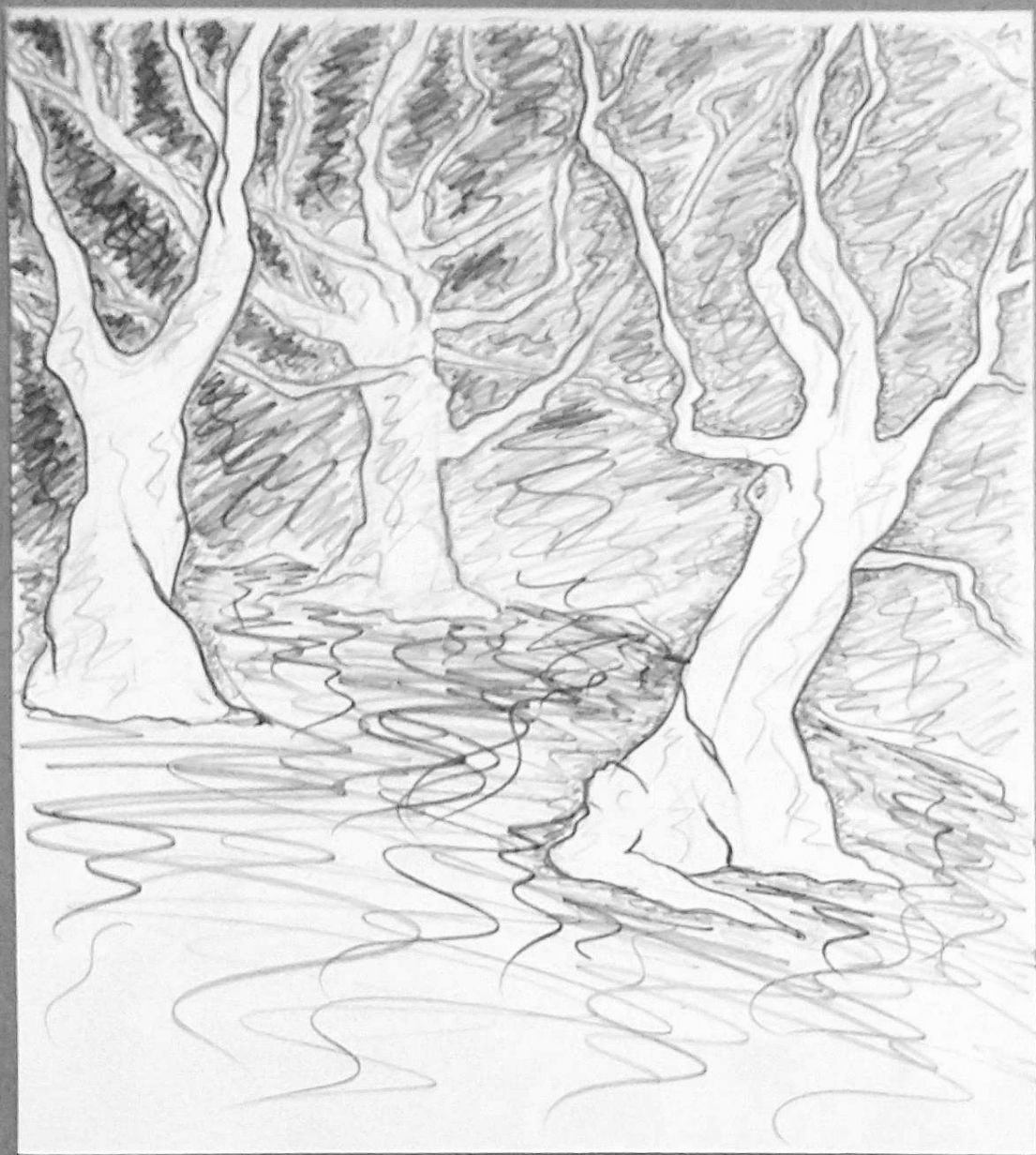


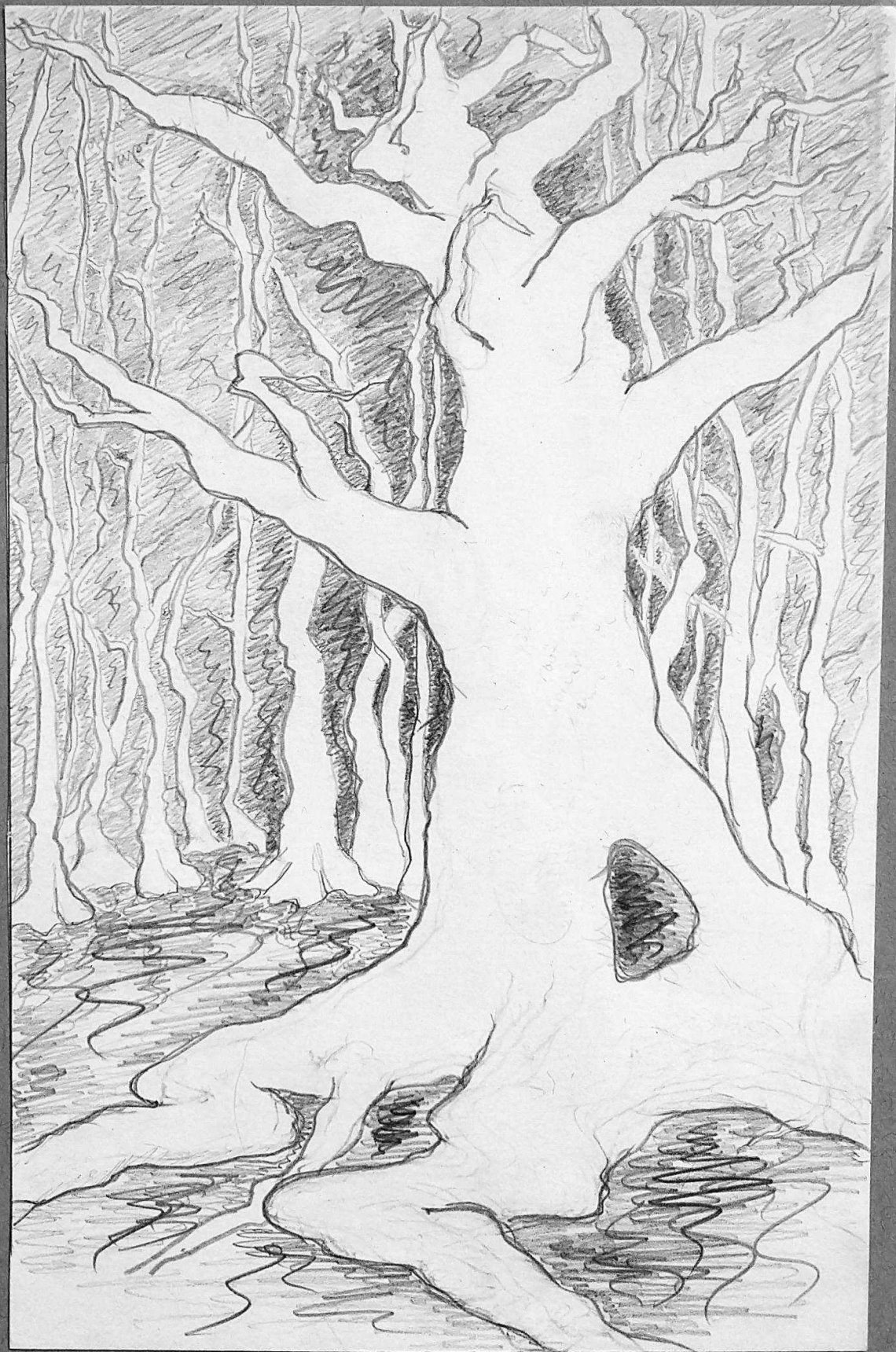
*Winds sometimes rise in a deep mountain wood  
From different directions, and the trees—  
Beech, ash, and cornelian cherry—  
Batter each other with their long, tapered branches.  
And you can hear the sound from a long way off,  
The unnerving splintering of hardwood limbs.*

*Homer, Iliad 16.800*

*It struck the beasts of the steppe so they butted one another  
like an orchard whose branches are being torn away. . .*

Against Headache, *Anonymous Akkadian Spell 418*



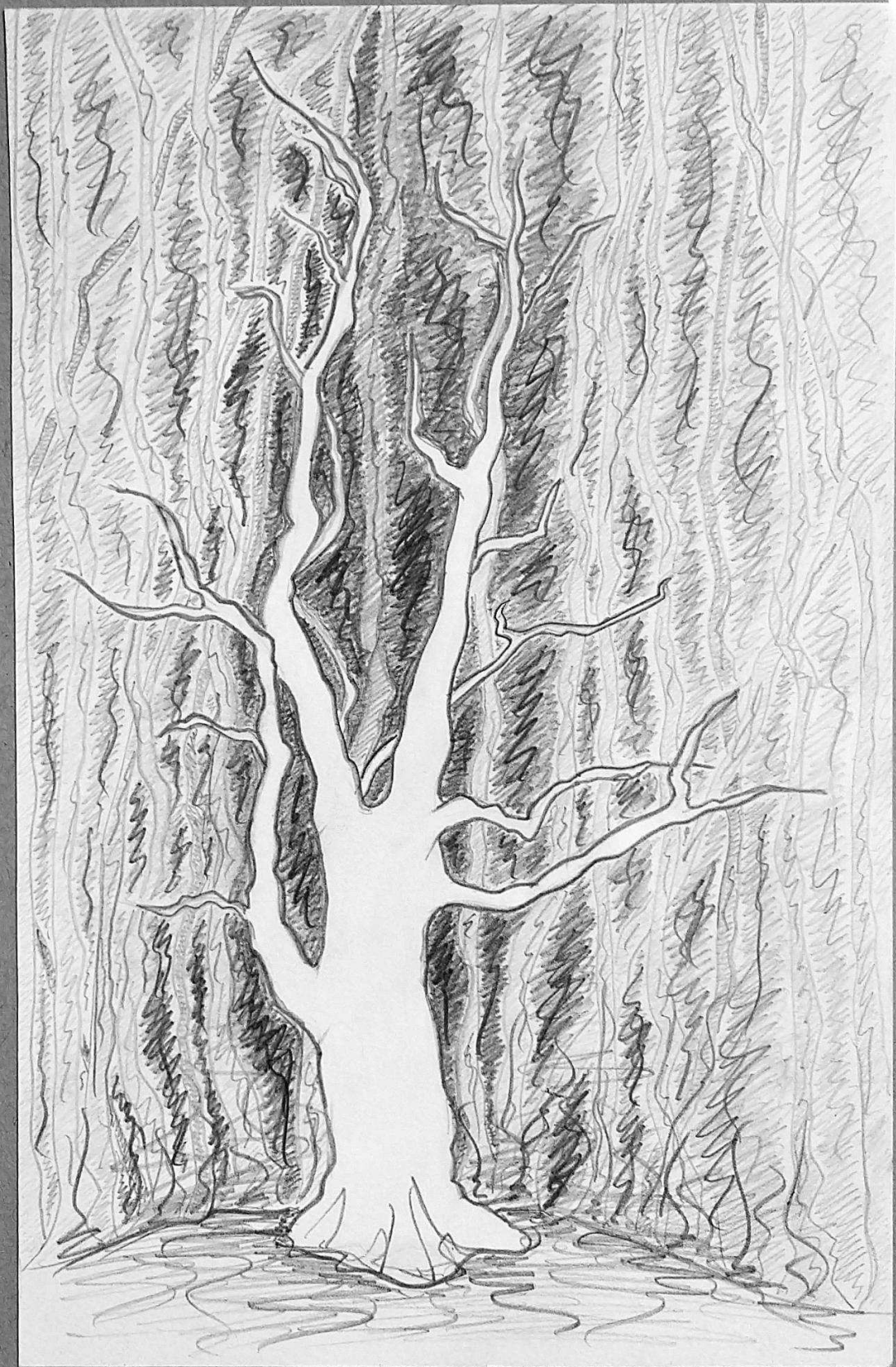


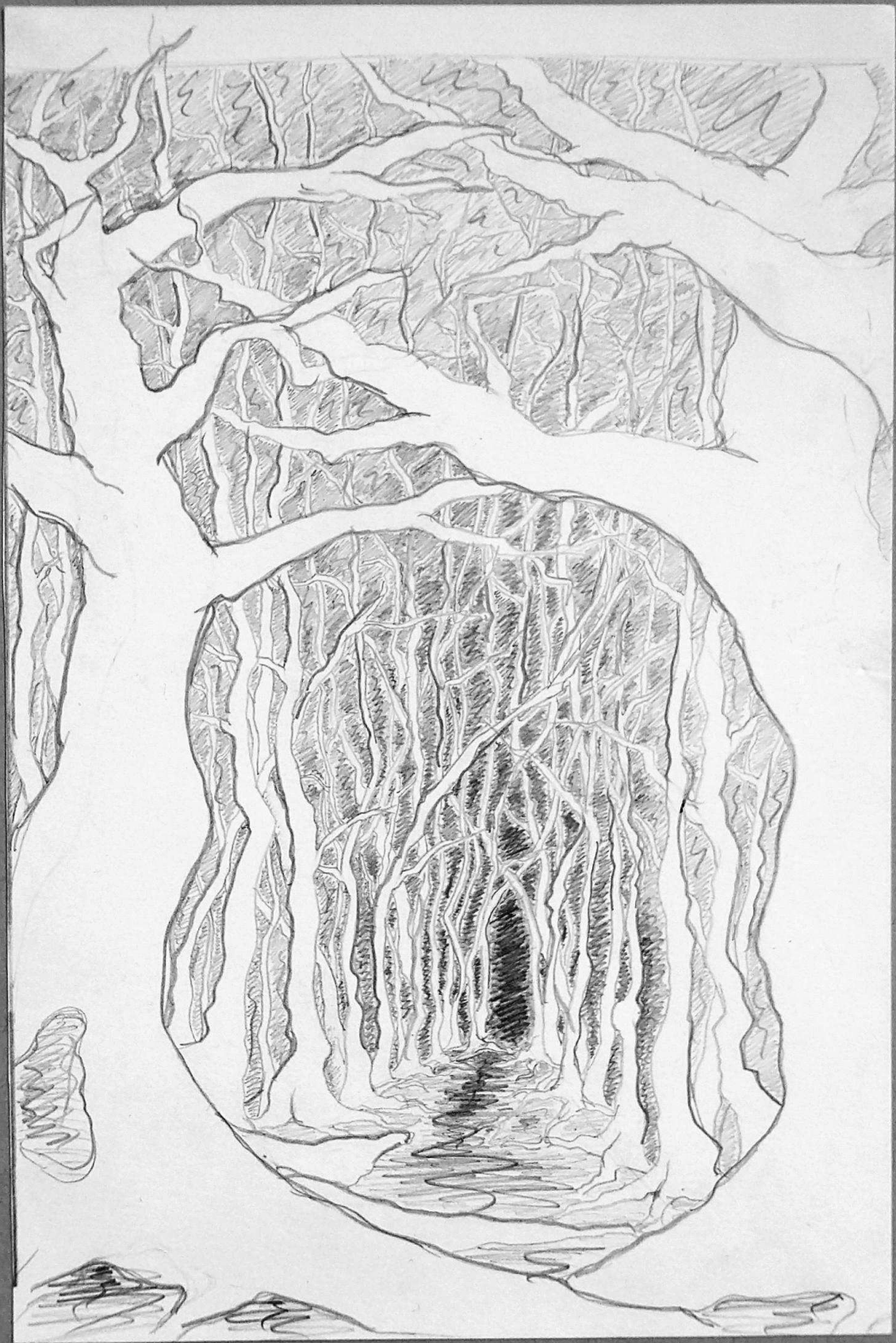
*Like the hyacinth which shepherds on the hillsides  
trample underfoot, and on the ground the crimson  
flower*

*Sappho*

*A fire raging through endless forests  
In a mountain range can be seen far away  
As a distant glow.*

*Homer, Iliad 2.485*







*As many as leaves that fall in the woods  
At autumn's first frost, as many as birds  
That teem to shore when the cold year  
Drives them over the sea to sunny lands,*

*There they stood, begging to be the first  
Ferried across, hands stretched out in love  
For the farther shore.*

*Vergil, Aeneid 6.382*

*They stood there, marveling at the forest,  
They gazed at the height of the cedars,  
They gazed at the way into the forest.  
The undergrowth was tangled, the forest dense,  
Cedars and balsam grew so close together, there was no way in among them.  
The cedars sent out shoots for a league,  
The cypress branches for two-thirds of a league.  
The cedar was dappled sixty cubits high with exudation,  
The resin oozed out, dribbling down like raindrops,  
It flowed so that ditches had to carry it away.*

The Epic of Gilgamesh V.1





*Hidden in a darkling tree there lies  
A golden bough, blossoming gold  
In leaf and pliant branch, held sacred  
To the goddess below. A grove conceals  
This bough on every side; and umber shadows  
Veil it from view in a valley dim.  
No one may pass beneath the earth  
Until he has plucked from the tree  
This golden-leaved fruit. Fair Proserpina  
Decrees it be brought to her as a gift.  
When one bough is torn away another  
Grows in its place and leafs out in gold.  
Search it out with your deepest gaze  
And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand. [...]  
Only then will you see the Stygian groves  
And realms closed to the living.*

*Vergil, Aeneid 6.175-200*

*For sixty leagues the forest is a wilderness,  
who is there who would venture inside it? [...]*

*Gilgamesh opened his mouth,  
saying to Enkidu:  
'I will climb, my friend, the forest's slopes.'*

The Epic of Gilgamesh II.100



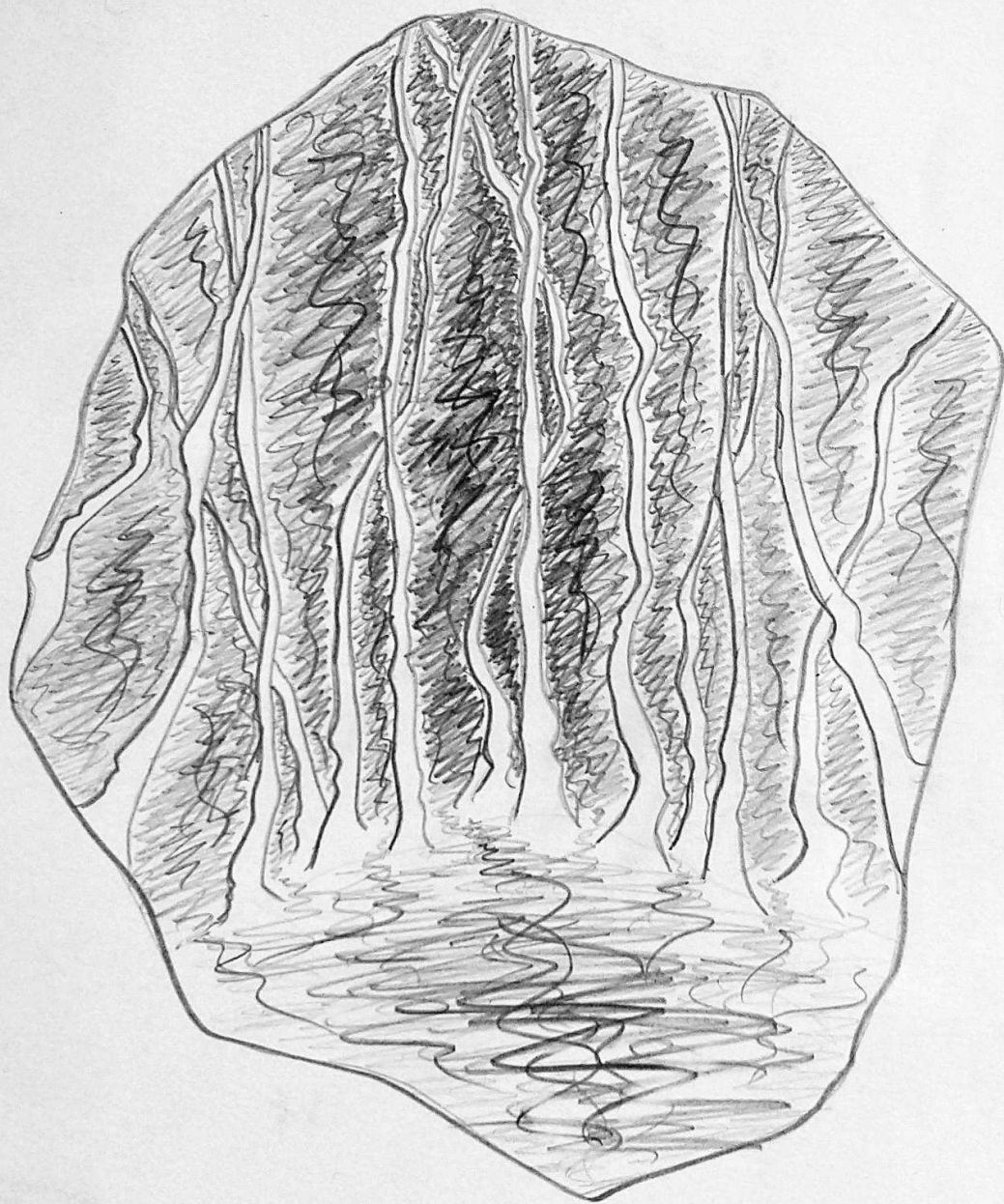
*Dense was the darkness, no light was there,  
It would not let him look behind him.  
When he had gone ten double hours,  
The time for the sun's entry was drawing near,  
When he had gone eleven hours, just one double  
hour was left,  
When he had gone twelve double hours, he came out ahead  
of the sun!  
Ahead of him there was a bright gleam,  
When he saw the .... of the trees of the gods, he went  
forward.  
A carnelian tree bore its fruit,  
Like bunches of grapes dangling, lovely to see,  
A lapis tree bore foliage,  
Fruit it bore, a delight to behold.  
cypress  
cedar  
Its boughs were striped agate and  
Coral .. and rubies  
Instead of thorns and brambles there were clusters of  
crystal; [...]  
Agates, hematite,  
Lay about like cucumbers on the open ground.  
Instead of a sea there was turquoise.  
Which ... pearls instead of shells. . .*

The Epic of Gilgamesh IX.120 F



*And in it cold water makes a clear sound through  
apple branches and with roses the whole place  
is shadowed and down from radiant-shaking leaves  
sleep comes dropping*

*Sappho*





*I looked, my friend, and I saw the cedars,  
Their splendor veiling the ranges.*

Gilgamesh IV.220 F

*As I stood there, lending my ears to the roar of pine trees upon distant mountains. I felt moved  
deep in the bottom of my heart.  
In the utter darkness  
Of a moonless night,  
A powerful wind embraces  
The ancient cedar trees.*

*Matsuo Basho, The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton 54*





*I saw a huge pine tree, probably over a thousand years old, in the garden of the Taima Temple at the foot of Mount Futagami. The trunk was large enough to hold a bull. As I stood in front of this tree, I felt a strange sense of awe and respect, for, though the tree itself was a cold senseless object, it had survived the punishment of an axe for so many years [...].*

*Matsuo Basho. The Records of a Weather-Exposed Skeleton 56*



*Well planted is not uprooted,  
well kept is not lost*

*Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching 54*



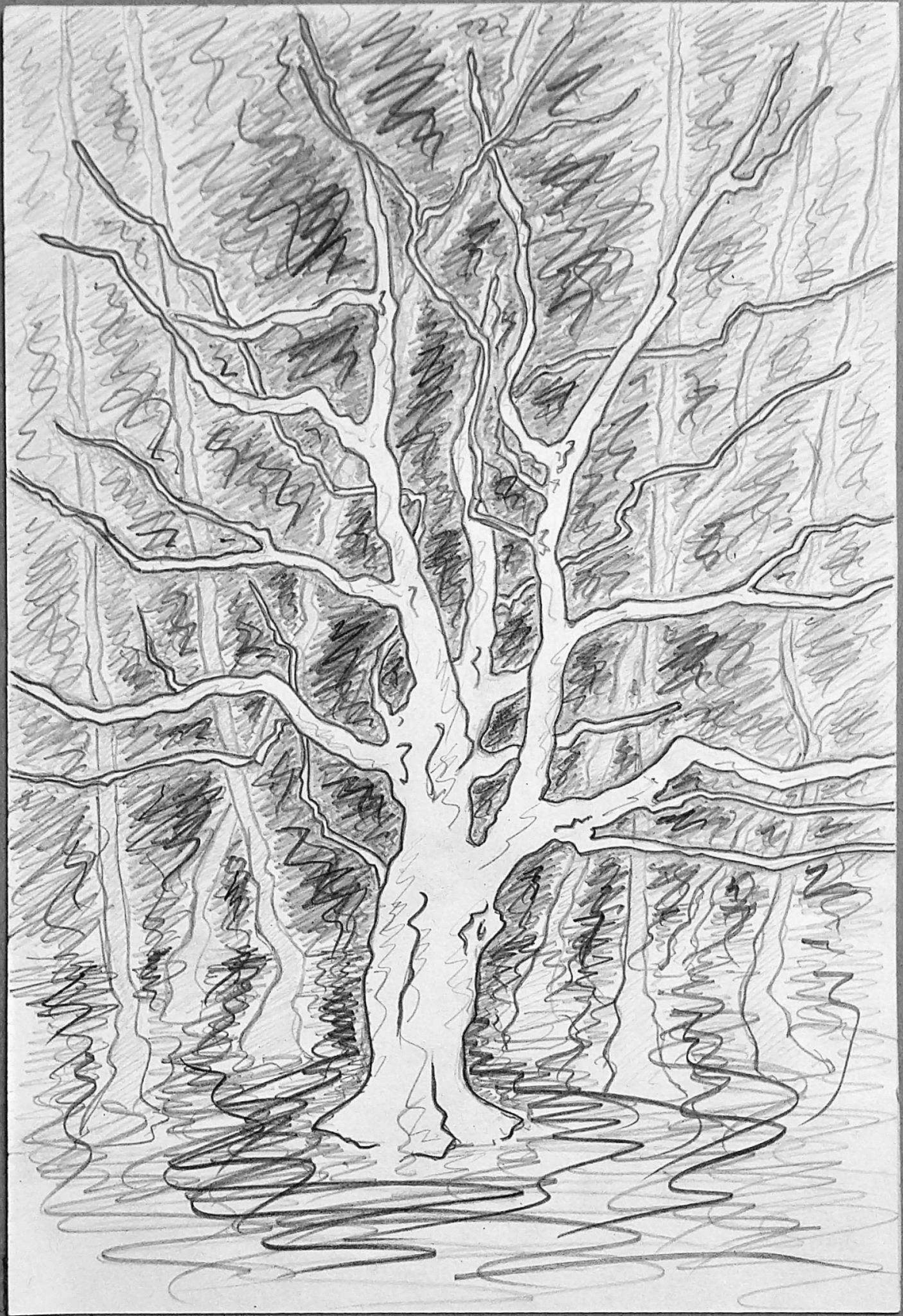


*The way goes on forever nameless  
Uncut wood, nothing important,  
yet nobody under heaven  
dare try to carve it.*

*Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching 32*

*A young shoot has borne  
Beautiful flowers,  
Growing upon  
An aged plum tree.*

*Matsuo Basho. The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel 79*





*In the poem, "Under the deep snows in the last village / Last night numerous branches of plum blossomed," the opulence of the phrase "numerous branches" was changed to "a single branch". It is said that this "single branch" contains true tranquility.*

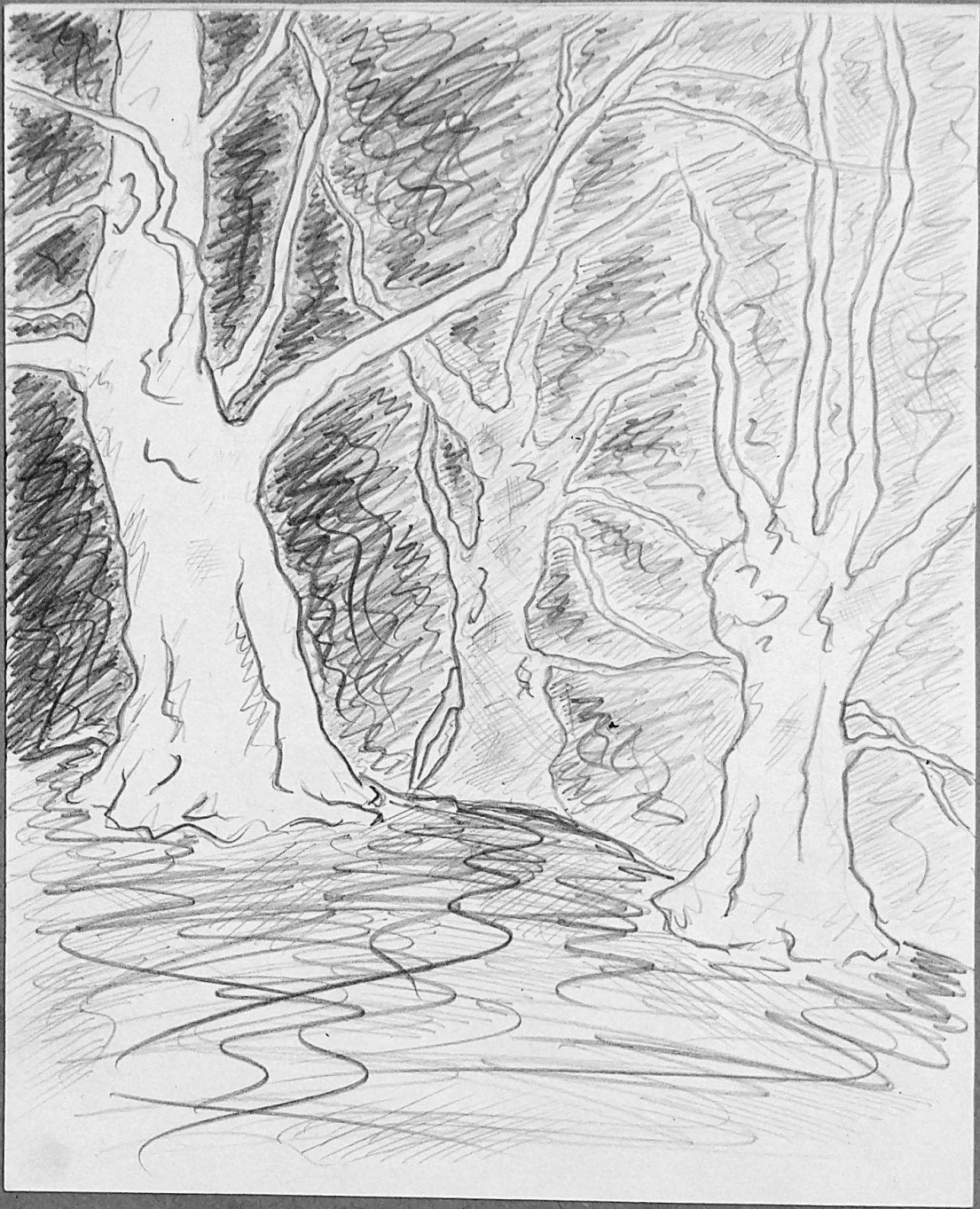
*Yamamoto Tsunetomo, Hagakure 71*



*Under the deep snows in the last village  
Last night a single branch of plum blossomed*

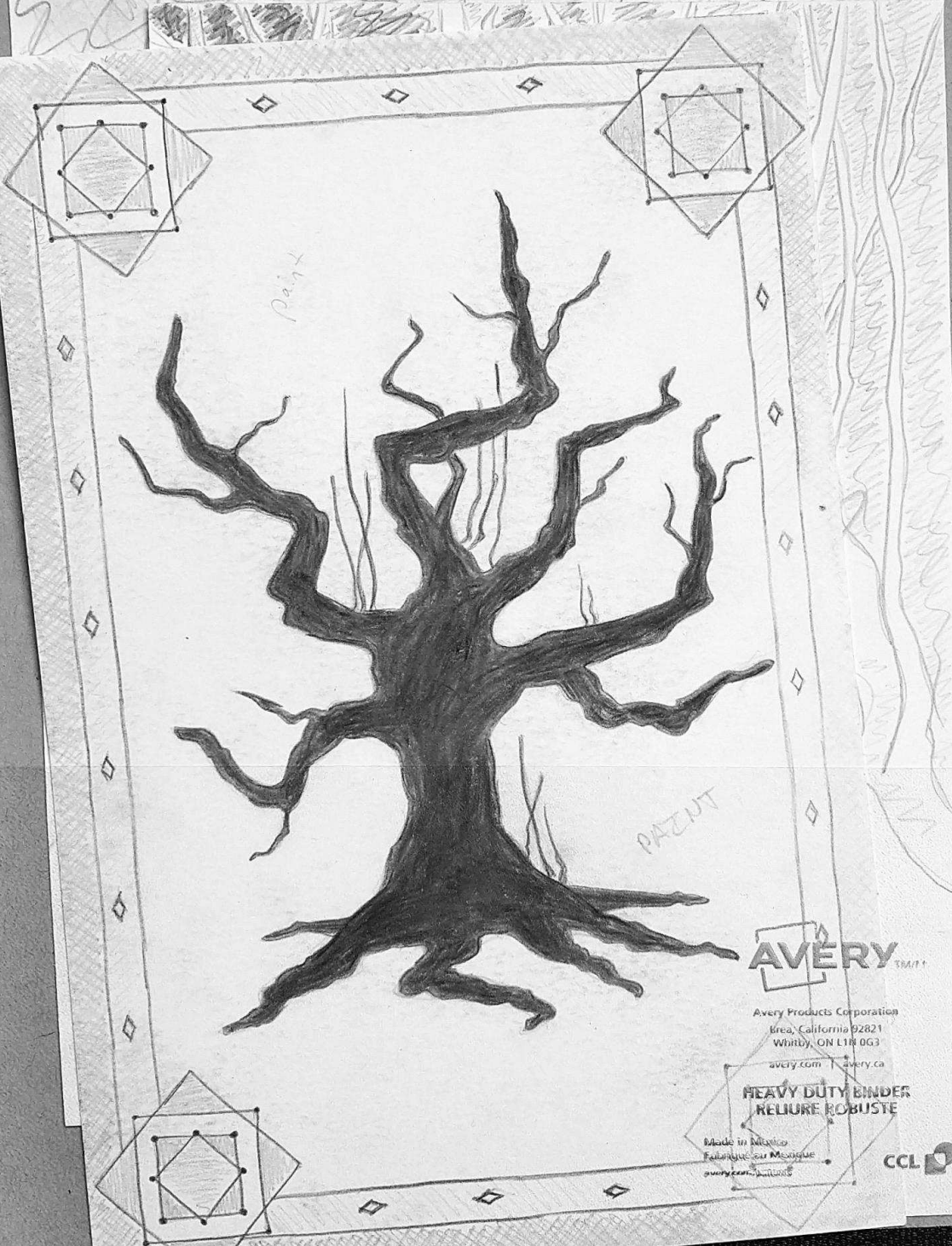
*Yamamoto Tsunetomo, Hagakure 71*







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# Mistletoe Blooms

A Proposal of Method

Petra Ellerby  
Honors 490  
June 10, 2023

*During winter's cold, deep in the woods,  
Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage  
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Gratias vobis ago.





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## Part One

## 1. HOW I GOT HERE

This project began its life as a half-baked idea involving a hypothetical collection of short papers composed in the meandering style of Michel de Montaigne, the tolerant, benevolent, brilliant, curious, compassionate, and deeply erudite French aristocrat known best for pioneering the personal essay.<sup>1</sup> As is often the case, my aspirations evolved as time progressed, and the project's focus eventually shifted—for a whole slew of reasons, many of which are discussed below—towards a more expansive, interdisciplinary, and even multi-medium exercise in humanistic inquiry. The intellectual product housed within this document (as well as its companion volume; see above) is the result of an attempt both to engage with unaccustomed formats—fine art, design—and to do justice by a set of idiosyncratic methodological tenets that have played a pivotal role in my personal trajectory, my own internal history of ideas. In spite of its modified nature, the project remains faithful to a fundamentally Montaignian spirit: it is an allusive study in cross-disciplinary thinking, a humane (I hope!) and affective attempt to summarize, define, communicate, and defend a specific way of seeing and understanding that encourages both rigorous *and* empathetic inquiry.<sup>2</sup> At its core, my capstone serves as a venue (even an excuse) for me to bring together all the things I love the most, to explain why I love them,<sup>3</sup> and to lay out a roadmap for the intellectual process I identify with their fullest or most complete use.

My initial intent in embarking upon this Montaigne-inspired joyride was to undertake, in concentrated form, a version of the task I have completed quietly (and with sometimes-considerable stealth) at almost every opportunity throughout my undergraduate career. I had originally envisioned my work as a relatively narrow riff on a single theme, but realized after several weeks that unity of both philosophy and form would be a better goal. In order to accurately and honestly relate the words and ideas that have populated my internal landscape during the last four years—to do justice by these things that have 'fleshed' me, to filch a phrase from Gene Wolfe<sup>4</sup>—it has proved necessary to catalogue all the excerpts and artifacts that have contributed to this evolving epistemological worldview. My decision to use the project's generous processual parameters as a means of restoring or revitalizing my relationship with thought itself highlights another related aim: to practice more organic sorts of intellectual inquiry, to eschew mechanistic scholarship in favor of less limiting approaches. It functions, most importantly, to

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<sup>1</sup> Montaigne is also responsible for the 700-odd page volume that has functioned for the past four years as my academic grail.

<sup>2</sup> Montaigne (indeed) serves as a paradigm for this project in more ways than one. An inveterate analyst, his activities model the ideal of applied, habitual, and life-long thought; a far-ranging 'relativist' living in insular times, his ability to identify and dignify alien arrangements of human life provides a near-perfect guide for my own epistemological efforts. The *essais'* investment in affective inquiry intermeshes especially well with their discursive style, allowing Montaigne's focus to switch deftly between a serious thesis on political philosophy, an argument with (say) Cicero, and an invocation of contemporary interpersonal ties.

Montaigne's habit of peppering his prose with block-style quotations is also germane.

<sup>3</sup> And why they must be combined....

<sup>4</sup> Gene Wolfe, *Shadow & Claw: The Shadow of the Torturer & The Claw of the Conciliator* (New York, NY: ORB, 1981), 308.

permit the presence of that strange, spontaneous joy I associate primarily with the process of *coming to know*.

The tale of my path towards this extra-disciplinary *telos* is long and winding, but its beginnings are simple enough. I have always thought in very widely associative ways, and have long held a peculiarly intense relationship with the act of learning. As far back as I can remember, I have tended to connect and sometimes conflate the categories of things—thoughts, ideas, music, art—which produce, in me, the unusual sensation that collective human life might not be so terrible an idea after all. Listening to a large student choir, reading a beloved novel, making sounds in time with a fifty-piece orchestra, stumbling upon a solitary voice encoded in a historical source transmitted across multiple millennia: all of these activities intersect in different ways with the same sublime core. Thinking, for me, is like breathing: it is a necessary function, a critical mental organ that allows for the possibility of continued existence. Scholarship, the expression of thought, occupies a similar spot in my internal map, and can produce the same sort of compound cognitive-affective sensation that might otherwise be associated most closely with profound musical experience.<sup>5</sup>

My relationship with thinking changed in both scale and scope around the time of my entrance into university-level academic contexts. I began to develop more robust procedures for approaching texts—primarily via in-depth annotation, structured note-taking, and exploratory writing—that encouraged me to build increasingly elaborate conceptual scaffolds.<sup>6</sup> During my first few quarters, I produced a set of odd, poignant, and out-of-place political-philosophical papers on the role that historical work can play in shaping collective cultural perceptions,<sup>7</sup> essays which laid the foundation for an argumentative trajectory I have been pursuing ever since. Looking back, I can confidently claim that the bulk of my undergraduate writing has intersected at one point or another (or in one way or another) with this central investigation, an applied historical inquiry that draws its core argumentative energy from the admission and consideration of interdisciplinary, and often emotional, concerns.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The memories I identify most with this idiosyncratic perspective on thinking and knowing stretch back quite a ways, although I can discern discrete developmental moments that testify to what is probably an innate temperamental affinity: laying on the floor in a high school music theory class while Mahler's 5th rolls out from the staticky speakers, reading Oliver Sacks or Jill Lepore or J. R. R. Tolkien for the first time. Nevertheless, my awareness of the disconnect between my own mode of perceiving and the way that contemporary academic fields define their methods and goals was delayed by a substantial set of buffering factors. Early exposure to works crafted by jacks-of-all-trades (Tolkien or Sacks, say), a secondary education that gave me ample room to explore interdisciplinary ideas almost entirely on my own, and a lack of confidence in my own analytical abilities all contributed to the very peculiar idea that contemporary academic instruction resembled Renaissance training—without the religion or the bigotry, of course. I *did* know that I was not a man.

<sup>6</sup> Which nevertheless meshed well with my preexisting academic goals.

<sup>7</sup> (Primarily those that involve contemporary assessments of political possibility.)

<sup>8</sup> It is a pattern which has persisted to this very day. That my personal understanding of ideal historical method includes tenets tied with musical performance is of no minor relevance to the shape of the current project.

(The ending of my first four-hundred level research paper—of itself a very conventional history assignment—was transformed, for example, into a venue for methodological advocacy.)

The common procedural theme which forms the basis of that essential 'method-thesis' foregrounds two interrelated epistemological ideas. The first is tied most closely with my penchant for mixing music and method, and advocates for the inclusion of non-academic approaches, perceptual tools which can be translated in formal settings (and in writing) into pathos, certain sorts of sensitive rhetoric, and an unwillingness to shy away from *Weltanschauung*-challenging ideas—or to avoid connecting historical thinking with contemporary affairs. In sum, this argument can be stated as follows: Humanistic inquiry is most compelling and most effective when it involves interdisciplinary and even inter-modal aspects.

The second idea builds directly upon the first. Indeed, I posit that an openness to certain sorts of emotion in researching, teaching, thinking, and writing—emotion that is most easily accessed via unconventional or extra-disciplinary routes—increases the likelihood that one key intellectual leap necessary for good historical scholarship will be able to occur. That perceptual 'jump' or 'step', which is in my mind a non-negotiable analytical prerequisite, involves at its core an ability to disambiguate human constants from contingent cultural variables. In layman's terms, this effort foregrounds an attempt to be the least anachronistic one can possibly be, to determine precisely what about a given moment's method of organizing the world is truly universal (or immutably human) and what is in fact subject to agency and change.

The eminent Assyriologist Marc Van De Mieroop formulates this critical goal primarily in terms of intellectual humility, arguing that good-faith historical study must be undertaken with the knowledge that "our [current] habits of behavior and thinking are not the only ones that make sense."<sup>9</sup> Montaigne offers his own riff on Van De Mieroop's claim, noting that "it is always a tyrannical ill humour to be unable to endure a way of thinking different from your own."<sup>10</sup> And the *Hagakure*, an eighteenth-century Japanese volume on martial valor, combines Van De Mieroop's tolerant goal with an understanding of its roots: "[l]istening to the old stories and reading books", writes Yamamoto Tsunetomo, "are for the purpose of sloughing off one's own discrimination and attaching oneself to that of the ancients."<sup>11</sup>

The exercise that I am proposing is not particularly radical. Nevertheless, it *is* difficult, and can be uncomfortable, and is practiced less (and less consciously) than should be the case. Montaigne was willing to contend in 1580 that "the principal effect of the power of custom is to seize and ensnare us in such a way that it is hardly within our power to get ourselves back out of its grip and return to ourselves to reflect and reason about its ordinances," and his insights about the occluding nature of enculturated

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<sup>9</sup> Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC* (Chichester, UK: Wiley/Blackwell, 2016), xix.

<sup>10</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York, NY: Everyman's Library, 2003), 861.

<sup>11</sup> Yamamoto Tsunetomo, *Hagakure: The Book of the Samurai*, trans. William Scott Wilson (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2012), 12.

concepts ring out as straight and true—and as necessary—as they did four hundred years ago.<sup>12</sup> "In truth," he continues, it is "because we drink [habit and culture] with milk from our birth, and because the face of the world presents itself in this aspect to our first view, it seems that we are born on condition of following this course."<sup>13</sup> It is because of their *ostensible* ubiquity, rather than their predestined nature, that "the common notions we find [...] infused into our soul [...] seem to be the universal and natural ones.

Whence it comes to pass that what is off the hinges of custom, people believe to be off the hinges of reason: God knows how unreasonably, most of the time. [...] Whoever wants to get rid of this violent prejudice of custom will find many things accepted with undoubting resolution, which have no support but in the hoary beard and the wrinkles of the usage that goes with them.<sup>14</sup>

The exercise in introspective anthropology that Montaigne, Tsunetomo, and Van De Mieroop all encourage is inseparable from affect. Indeed, the temporary divorce between deeply ingrained (and often dearly held) ideas that allows us to "slough off [our] own discrimination" is most effectively achieved by means of "attaching [ourselves] to that of the ancients": by means, that is, of investigative self-projection.

This necessary step in preparing the way for non-anachronizing historical analysis is designed to encourage an empathetic, intellectual putting-on of somebody else's—or some *peoples'* else's—skin. The cognitive mechanics hidden behind Tsunetomo's moral move involve, at their core, an expansive and mind-changing sort of sympathetic hypothesis, a temporary exercise in enlarging one's potential circle of understanding. Indeed, the humanistic benefits that tag along with Montaigne's *modus operandi*—admitting emotion, using affect as a tool for inquiry, allowing the past the necessary latitude to surprise or even shock us—can unlock a wealth of unexpected goods. In addition to the psychological liberation that this self-projection provides can be found a set of perceptual benefits, benefits which upset popular narratives about the 'use' of history (a 'use' that is often limited to 'drawing parallels' or 'remembering mistakes').<sup>15</sup> Montaigne's is a method which allows us to *shift* or even *extend*, rather than *reinforce*, our preexisting ideas about human possibility.<sup>16</sup>

It is by no means an easy prescription, not least because its necessity is not always readily apparent. The transparent nature of enculturated schemas (not all of which are negative, but most of which have the

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<sup>12</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 101-2.

<sup>13</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 101-2.

<sup>14</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 101-2.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Mary Beard, "What's the Point of Classics?," Hertford College | University of Oxford, 2019, <https://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/alumni/hertford-today/john-donne-lectures/mary-beard-2019>: "The most frequent query I now receive from journalists is: what Roman emperor do I think that Donald Trump is most like? When I get this, as I frequently do, I take pleasure in explaining that while that might be a fun party game, historically, any superficial similarity between a modern U.S. president and an ancient Roman emperor is practically meaningless. That usually takes quite a lot of time to explain. If I don't have time to go through all that, I tend to suggest a Roman Emperor that they wouldn't have heard of and take some comfort that at least they'll learn something by going away and looking him up. [...] [Indeed,] [n]o one's identities can be found in the ancient world. This is not a place for identity politics. The classical world is a mirror to nobody. To put that more positively, one of the greatest and mind changing intellectual rewards of studying the classical world is this it is simultaneously familiar because it is in some way embedded in modern discursive practices, and simultaneously so strange. But it turns us into analysts and anthropologists, not only of it, but of ourselves."

<sup>16</sup> I.e., our sense of the options available for twenty-first century human community.

potential to interfere with historical inquiry) as described by Montaigne is such that every era is most blind to the time-stamped nature of *just those ideas which are taken to be natural*. Logic, furthermore, appears to be jeopardized by our inclusion of pathos: what effect will *intentional* emotion have upon the scientific status of an interpreter's observations? It is easy to argue that overreliance on affect (or even the mere admission of affect) endangers academic objectivity, but the problem with this traditional perspective is that the idea of scholastic detachment is itself contingent—a claim which will be discussed further in Part Two below—in a way that certain sorts of human emotion simply are not. It is in this light that carefully calibrated affectual thinking can actually function as an *aid* for 'rationality', a way to create investigative logics which do not depend upon variable metrics like 'common sense'.<sup>17</sup>

It is also worth noting that Montaigne's method is not an uncritical riff on spineless relativism, and that *my* procedure is not meant, at least initially, to produce ethical conclusions.<sup>18</sup> It *is* hoped that arguments built upon a foundation grounded in empathetic, intelligent, and immersive analysis will be more able to identify philosophically and historically defensible claims about human suffering and human wellbeing,<sup>19</sup> but these ethical outgrowths are secondary results which must be disambiguated from the initial 'step' made mandatory by Tsunetomo. (It is a baseline requirement of Montaignian thought that *one must not necessarily agree, in everyday life, with the moral choices of one's historical subjects*.) My process's key effect is to unlock possibilities: but to unlock possibilities, an analyst must be willing to suspend disbelief and even disapproval—at least for a while.

\* \* \*

This, then, is the simplified essence of my method-thesis, the epistemological goal which this capstone project seeks to describe.<sup>20</sup> While I have indeed been building the same core case for almost four years, it is only here that I have attempted to assemble a cohesive, coherent, and comprehensive description of that underlying critical approach. My affect-oriented perspective has thus far been elaborated only in bits and pieces, via digressions smuggled into assignments originally earmarked for entirely different pedagogical

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<sup>17</sup> I.e., metrics (or 'notions') that differ depending upon era/area. Cf. Marc Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 164: "What seems logical to us is informed by our own vision of the world, a vision that derives from our [particular, current] historical condition. Much of that vision is unconscious, and we often become aware of its limitations only due to external influences."

<sup>18</sup> Or 'judgments'. Or, even worse, transhistorical tenets!

<sup>19</sup> My goal is not to throw out all recent ideas or to simply say 'screw the enlightenment'—,any of our current ethical understandings are indeed historically defensible—but rather to take a step away and assess everything from a more (dia)chronically informed standpoint.

<sup>20</sup> See Part Two below.



ends.<sup>21</sup> It is this paper's goal to unify that complex perspective, to outline its most critical components,<sup>22</sup> and to communicate those findings clearly enough so that they might be better understood (and, ideally, engaged). My hope is to create a thesis, a defense, even a guide.

It is well apparent that this project is also a personal endeavor, a product tied with an individual sense of intellectual import. I am searching for a strange sort of cognitive emotion, and a specifically social one at that—but one with more practical import than might be assumed. Just as Tsunetomo's plea (and prescribed palliative) is both methodological and civic or cultural, so is my elaboration upon this common theme.

The late, great, and utterly irreplaceable Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in a 2014 National Book Foundation award acceptance speech that imaginative inquiry could not help but be absolutely essential, a necessary bulwark against endlessly reflexive and increasingly intolerant modes of public discourse. There is a sense in contemporary (and especially American) political thought that nothing new exists under the sun, a feeling both enabled and confirmed by multiple Western democracies' recent slides towards self-defeating strife. Each country's conceptual civic upper bounds are dragged down with its courts and laws and citizenries, and so are its observers' senses of the possible or probable. That the bar is lowered is a tragedy of itself; that its level determines our perspectival horizons should induce nothing less than horror. A prospective imposition of diminished expectations, in the end, all but insures their continued descent. In Le Guin's words:

I think hard times are coming when we will be wanting the voices of writers who can see alternatives to how we live now and can see through our fear-stricken society and its obsessive technologies. We will need writers who can *remember* [...]. Poets, visionaries—the realists of a larger reality.<sup>23</sup>

I do not envision myself as one such 'realist', of course, but I do desire to make a case for their continued importance, and to outline a methodological understanding that might provide insight into the type of academic inquiry which can—in addition to speculative fiction, to the more strictly literary arts—buttress these critical efforts. Bridging the gap between Montaignian epistemological rescue missions and the possibility of personal fulfillment is one step in that process, and much the same can be said of my effort to outline an inter- or trans-'modal' model to support this project's analytical foundation. The motives behind Tsunetomo's time-traveling intellectual intimacy are in fact *essential* for the success of Le Guin's imaginative mission: it not without affective investment that we can hope to cultivate enough good faith to treat our unfamiliar subjects with a true and proper dignity. The suspension of supposedly 'empirical'

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<sup>21</sup> Most of my thinking has indeed been directed towards developing one central idea, but that idea's expression has been necessarily limited to literary nooks and crannies—primarily the tail ends of essays.

<sup>22</sup> In *one* document, no less! (Or, rather, *no more*...)

<sup>23</sup> "Ursula K Le Guin's Speech at National Book Awards: 'Books Aren't Just Commodities,'" The Guardian, November 20, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/20/ursula-k-le-guin-national-book-awards-speech>.

(but in practice often era-specific) assumptions about what is *humanly* plausible cannot easily occur without the aid of legitimate affection.

This project's engagement with a personal goal—the fact that its contents are to some extent 'about' my attempt to restore a pathos-filled relationship with academic thought<sup>24</sup>—is, then, in no way incompatible with these more expansive theoretical missions. Each level builds upon the other, providing support and space for the growth and development of symbiotic ideas. That the product itself is largely a synthesis or weaving-together of my most beloved sub-theses poses no problems at all.

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<sup>24</sup> And to define myself, and to understand how I might, in the future, live a thinking life...

## 2. METHOD NARRATIVE

What, though, was the impetus for this directional decision? What experiential factors led me to pursue these particular methodological threads? Why have I chosen to communicate my odd and un-disciplinary ideas? How?

I have found, throughout my undergraduate career, as someone who has been involved in or adjacent to various administrative conversations, and as a person who pays attention (however limited) to public discussions about university education, that the fields I cherish are quite often unable or unwilling to defend themselves in compelling terms—that is, without ceding important rhetorical *as well as* intellectual ground. Historians, especially ancient historians, are terrible at describing ourselves: as a general rule, we find it unbearably irksome to explain our work to the uninitiated public. It is for this reason that I sought to view my project as an attempt not only to define my own idiosyncratic approach but also to better *outline* the humanistic benefits that it can confer. I wanted to identify and explain the sort of processes and products that we—humanities scholars—can claim, *for ourselves, in positive terms*. Our work cannot revolve around a desire to become as scientific or STEM-like as possible, or even an oppositional wish simply *not* to become quantifiable or mathematical. There must be other goods and other goals.

My natural inclination was to look towards other disciplines in order to identify culturally legible options for the communication of humanistic praxis. Western's College of Fine & Performing Arts (CFPA), and especially the university's orchestral program, is a natural match for this project's interdisciplinary focus: in an essay that begins with Montaigne and music, after all, its inclusion is apt. I was struck particularly by a line pulled from AY 2022-3's Western Symphony Orchestra (WSO) syllabus, a document intended to lay the groundwork for successful musicianship:

Performance is an act of service. Your accomplishments and expertise on your instruments have earned you the right to engage with the pieces we play; you should hold this fact in your mind with pride and humility in equal share.<sup>25</sup>

Western's performing arts pedagogy frames the duties of students in both service- and sublimity-oriented terms. Our job as apprentice musicians in the WSO is to make sounds that "go through you like a spear."<sup>26</sup> Why? Because service and pathos *are* the point of music... and are acknowledged to be so. The business of performance is perceptual expansion.

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<sup>25</sup> Ryan K. Dudenbostel, ts, *Syllabus: Western Symphony Orchestra (MUS 473)* (2023).

<sup>26</sup> Quote adapted from Tom Stoppard, *The Invention of Love* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1998), 71.

There is of course some engagement with similar ideas in humanistic-academic circles, but the WSO's emphasis on enchantment contrasts quite starkly with one common state-of-the-field complaint. As Nathan Heller of *The New Yorker* writes in this year's obligatory death-of-the-humanities dirge:

[T]he professional practice of scholarship has become self-defeatingly disdainful of moving [textual] encounters. [...] 'Contemporary critics pride themselves on their power to disenchant'.<sup>27</sup>

But the human past *is* enchanted and enchanting, in ways both inspiring and terrifying, and a failure to recognize the import of that simple fact paves the way not only for disciplinary obsolescence but for deadening disengagement—and for overconfident (and thus dangerous?) analysis by those who believe they are unaffected by affect.<sup>28</sup>

The correspondence apparent between this CFPA-derived perspective and the music-method associations housed within my own brain made it increasingly clear to me that I had, at almost every opportunity, been attempting to achieve with scholarship what most humans make via melody. The best of everything, including both art and academics, functions for me as a sort of extra expansive *memento mori*: a reminder not only of human mortality but of the full potential inherent in a given context, an enforcing (or enlarging) of *what matters*.<sup>29</sup> I realized, in other words, that I was trying to create sacred scholarship—but my goal was not quixotic. Indeed, my objective was to use these interdisciplinary ties to more clearly articulate the ways that key cognitive-cultural-perceptual processes can be re-shaped by humanistic inquiry in much the same way that they can be altered via exposure to specific sorts of artistic power. After all, the most essential benefit I associate with the sum total of my university-endowed knowledge has more to do with the emotional frameworks within which it is housed than the volume of data it contains. The greatest boon produced by my historical training is primarily perspectival, rather than purely or narrowly 'academic'. It is true that my thinking is better for its now-extensive factual grounding, but the essential perceptual infrastructure that *orders* this data cannot be overvalued—and cannot be conveyed in the absence of affect.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Nathan Heller, "The End of the English Major," *The New Yorker*, February 27, 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/03/06/the-end-of-the-english-major>.

<sup>28</sup> We can recognize this fact without indulging or enabling deception and credulity.

<sup>29</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 73: "Since I am constantly brooding over my thoughts and settling them within me, I am at all times about as well prepared as I can be. And the coming of death will teach me nothing new."

<sup>30</sup> In other words: our goal—and role—is not about amassing facts. I've got lots of those, of course, but the core of the matter is the way my cognitive *processes* have changed. The world is thicker now, layered with pasts and possibilities.

The obvious importance of interdisciplinary inquiry—for me, for my fields—has been the primary 'push' in my decision to create an interdisciplinary project. It is because of these essential principles that my hodgepodge creation has assumed its current compound form. I set out, months ago, to defend something that could not defend itself, to define something that had not been defined,<sup>31</sup> to articulate and communicate an intangible intellectual operation, *and* to practice what I preached. I had to make an expansive and untraditional and interdisciplinary *thing* both so that I could avoid hypocrisy *and* could convey, in the most compelling terms, the content of my thesis.

But there was another factor hidden behind my desire to create a capstone that reviewed and united all my previous thinking, that expressed my centralmost convictions about humanities work, that included both emotional and artistic aspects: and that reason was—*is*—my brain.

Part of the madness behind my methodological motive is decidedly and idiosyncratically personal. One of the core considerations at play in the genesis of this Franken-project is the fact that traditional models of academic creation had, towards the end of my undergraduate career, begun to become increasingly unsustainable—that is, in *neurological* terms. When I arrived at Western, I experienced an extraordinary proliferation of thought, a profound sensation of having discovered for the first time a set of remarkable and expansive and heretofore unimagined *rooms* or *spaces* in my mind. There is a wonderful passage contained within Oliver Sacks' final volume of medical writing, a glorious excerpt on the as-yet-uncharted cognitive mechanisms that influence creativity, and it is precisely this sort of intellectual experience that I only now began to understand:

Creativity—that state when ideas seem to organize themselves into a swift, tightly woven flow, with a feeling of gorgeous clarity and meaning emerging—seems to me psychologically distinctive [...]. At such times, when I am writing, thoughts seem to organize themselves in spontaneous succession and to clothe themselves instantly in appropriate words. I feel I can bypass or transcend much of my own personality, my neuroses. It is at once not me and the innermost part of me, certainly the best part of me.<sup>32</sup>

Emily Dickinson's fragment No. 316—a scrap of a poem written on the back of an old envelope—conveys something similar:

Oh Sumptuous moment  
Slower go  
That I may gloat on thee —  
'Twill never be the same to starve  
Now I abundance see —<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> At least as I wished it to be defined!

<sup>32</sup> Oliver Sacks, *The River of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2017), 147. Sacks himself serves as model for this project: a pathos-loving poet laureate of science.

<sup>33</sup> Emily Dickinson, *Envelope Poems*, ed. Jen Bervin and Marta Werner (New York, NY: New Directions, 2017), 42.

But this sudden prosperity was not untempered, and the disruptions caused by COVID and its cultural effects amplified an already-emerging turbulence. In short: I got sick. My brain went haywire. The most devastating of feelings attend the loss of something rare and new, and the sensation of being evicted from those intellectual spaces that I had only recently unlocked was certainly quite something. Reckoning with the sort of thinking I now knew I *could* undertake, contrasted against my painful awareness of how little, in that COVID-era moment, I was actually able to produce, was no joyride. As Dickinson writes:

A great Hope fell  
You heard no noise  
The Ruin was within  
Oh cunning wreck  
That told no tale  
And let no Witness in

The mind was built  
For mighty Freight  
For dread occasion planned  
How often foundering at Sea  
Ostensibly, on Land.<sup>34</sup>

In purely intellectual terms, it might be said by way of explanation that I experienced an encroachment of impinging cognitive loads or drives that were not under my accustomed routes of conscious control. The best descriptive analogue might involve motors: motors and operators. Imagine discovering *very suddenly* that you have a shiny new racing engine sitting inside your head, a powerful machine which allows you to engage with the most wonderful ideas and the most fulfilling experiments. Envision realizing, equally suddenly, that you are increasingly unable to influence its direction. Indeed, your lack of agency over this strange and unexpected cognitive activity can escalate *to such an extreme extent that the engine turns right around and drives straight at you.*

Me from Myself—to banish—  
Had I Art—  
Impregnable my Fortress  
Unto All Heart

But since Myself—assault Me—  
How have I peace  
Except by subjugating  
Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch

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<sup>34</sup> Dickinson, *Envelope Poems*, 8.

How this be  
Except by Abdication—  
Me—of Me?<sup>35</sup>

The symptoms of this illness are, for me, expressed as malignant or metastatic perversions (inversions? weaponizations?) of mental capacity.<sup>36</sup> It is difficult to concentrate on academic matters when one's mind has decided that it must, against one's will and without one's consent, create seven different and *competing* classification systems<sup>37</sup> into which one will then be compelled to mentally (or physically, depending on the day) sort every single item within view.

"The thing I fear most", wrote Montaigne, "is fear."<sup>38</sup> "Fear", claims Ennius (as quoted by Cicero), "drives out all wisdom from my mind." Elaborating upon this apprehensive theme, the Frenchman complains that although he

hardly know[s] by what springs fear acts in us, [...] at all events it is a strange passion, and the doctors say that there is none which carries our judgment away sooner from its proper seat.

Naturally, the presence of such unfortunate states means (for Montaigne, for me) that we "shall never heap enough insults on the unruliness of our mind."<sup>39</sup> Aye aye, say I. But the fact that my own turbulence did not comprise a purely additive problem made these roadblocks even more intrusive—and that my symptoms interrupted something so new and so central<sup>40</sup> was especially challenging. I lost access not only to my newfound cognitive 'rooms' but also to the expansive humanistic benefits that their use, as introduced above, can confer.<sup>41</sup> And *that* was the greatest tragedy involved in my attempt to wrangle an uncooperative mind.

Into my heart an air that kills  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remembered hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,  
I see it shining plain,  
The happy highways where I went  
And cannot come again.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Alik Barnstone, *The Shambhala Anthology of Women's Spiritual Poetry* (Boston, MA: Shambhala, 2003), 121. Cf. Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 31: "I have little control over myself and my moods. Chance [and circumstance] has more power here than I.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake, *Matilda* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> —each of which possesses a distinct and very detailed set of merits and shortcomings—

<sup>38</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> To my developing identity, my understanding of intellectual engagement...

<sup>41</sup> These things were (and are) essential to my sense of self, my view of the world: human possibility, company...

<sup>42</sup> A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (New York, NY: Macmillan Collector's Library, 2017), 90.

In spite of its gorgeous salience, A. E. Housman's melodramatic verse makes my illness seem rather more romantic than was actually the case. The brevity of my stay in intellectual Arcadia also lends a certain silliness to "Poem #40's unqualified use. While the core of my trouble was (and *is*) internal, the crisis that plugged my thoughts throughout the spring of 2020 cannot be blamed—exclusively, at least—for the hardship I have faced during my final few quarters. Producing traditional written scholarship has never been an easy or automatic task, and the strictures I associate with disciplinary composition certainly have not helped. An overzealous attitude towards work and effort also interfered with my academic well-being; the same cognitive tendency that can drive me to spend four or five hours per day sorting my belongings also allows me, in ideal circumstances, to synthesize ideas and craft arguments on a scale that is very useful. As might be expected, that intellection-production experience can be exhausting.<sup>43</sup> Towards the end of my first year, I began to associate thinking with panic: if I invest in a particular thesis, will I be driven *by my own mind* until I drop? When will I be content enough with my work to comfortably stop? As Cervantes says of his eponymous Don Quixote:

with too little sleep and too much reading his brains dried up.<sup>44</sup>

And as Montaigne warns his bookish readers:

"fourteen or fifteen hours a day" of hard labor can "spoil [the] mind."<sup>45</sup>

It is, then, for these cognitive reasons—in addition to the more generalized methodological motives addressed above—that the present project took such a dramatically interdisciplinary turn. Part of my purview became psychological; part of my goal assumed a therapeutic end. In addition to conveying or communicating my philosophical thesis, I sought also to gently re-inhabit (even to leapfrog) the most fraught, angst-infused corridors of my thinking mind. In order to write, I had to think; in order to think, I had to incorporate new steps into my research process that would slow me down or anchor me to a different sort of time.<sup>46</sup> Hence, the multi-modal focus; hence, the alternative paths introduced in hopes of accessing that strange sort of sought-after investigative sublimity. The sensation most prevalent throughout my project creation process has been that of cleaning out my mind, of replacing recursively folded pathological patterns with a more expansive and uncluttered cognitive space.

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<sup>43</sup> (At best, it is extremely difficult to moderate.)

<sup>44</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, ed. Harold Bloom, trans. Edith Grossman (New York, NY: Ecco, 2015), 21.

<sup>45</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 147.

<sup>46</sup> Or, in other words, anchor me to tranquility in a way that writing could not—by virtue of its neurosis-adjacency—always provide.



My central goals have been to synthesize and share my long-developed idea-web, to defend a way of thinking about thinking, to tidy up an unruly head, *and* to tell the tale of that messy and multi-modal attempt. It almost need not be mentioned that I sought also to remind myself *why and how humanistic thinking matters*—or that I wanted, in the writing, to lessen my burden. "A joy it will be one day, perhaps, to remember even this", says Aeneas in Book 1 of Vergil's Roman epic, and it was my hope too that this exercise could hasten that day. "Happy is he who can tell of his experience, so that the / calamity passes", a talking serpent sings in the Middle Kingdom Egyptian *Tale of Sinuhe*.<sup>47</sup> "This [was] not"—returning to the *Aeneid*—our first taste of trouble:

[We] have suffered worse than this my friends,  
And God will grant an end to this also. [...]  
Recall your courage  
And put aside your fear and grief. Someday, perhaps,  
It will help to remember these troubles as well.<sup>48</sup>

But, as my discipline-specific reservations can attest, not all of those 'troubles' were purely personal. This present project is indeed a response to the individual sensation of having lost something precious and hard-won, but it is also (as hinted above) a reflection upon the various ways that my idiosyncratic thinking-ills can be tied too with certain limiting sorts of methodological or epistemological practice.<sup>49</sup> The approach has worked, at least in psychological terms: my retrospective, interdisciplinary, and reading-heavy capstone-creation quarters have encouraged me to shift my relationship with academic production. I knew that I had, at the close of my undergraduate career, to reconcile my internal academic perspective with the markers of success emblazoned upon my transcript—and I knew that I had to create a new and more sustainable model for intellectual engagement, historical research, and written scholarship.

A unity of purpose is once again apparent. In spite of the project's hodgepodge structure, and in spite of my manifold motives, I strove to present both a personal and a public case for the value of *one* specific investigative thesis. This capstone can be understood as a means for me to reinforce my convictions about affect and inquiry, to remind myself after four years of the value inherent in empathetic intellectual 'escape', and to communicate my view of the more generalizable public benefits provided by that affective approach's good-faith use.<sup>50</sup> I sought to define and defend a practice that needed to be defended; to construct a coherent personal history of ideas; to unlock my own mind and carry my knowledge more

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems, 1940-1640 BC* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95. Cf. page 90: "In this survival, art has a role: the telling and retelling of misfortune enables people to overcome or endure it. In the Tale as a whole, literature acts as a redress for suffering."

<sup>48</sup> Parkinson, *Egyptian Poems*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Often apparent within (say) the field of History.

<sup>50</sup> See esp. section 5.iv below.

confidently; and to communicate, in the most compelling way I could, my method's most important and expansive perspectival results.

### 3. PROJECT PROCESS

How did I go about addressing these compound concerns? What has been my on-the-ground process for effectively combining such a wide array of motives and goals? How have I made the things that I have?

My procedural approach—that is, my strategy for producing the material contained within this document and its companion volume—itsself embodied a similarly wide-ranging set of embedded objectives. I wanted to follow my own advice, to align the project's finished 'product' with its stated goals, so the cross-medium format I employed meshed especially well with those public-private ends already encoded in my academic mission.<sup>51</sup>

The first stage of this larger strategy foregrounded reading and note-taking. I sat down at the very beginning of my initial capstone quarter and made a list of all the volumes that have been especially influential, a tally which included texts that have contributed significantly to the development of my method thesis, have left lasting aesthetic impressions, or even that I simply and unqualifiedly love. Inevitably, my catalogue encompassed almost every book assigned throughout my four years at WWU (and even a few [or more than a few] that I discovered on my own).

This introductory activity occupied several full months, allowing me to immerse myself for extended periods in the materials that have (in a very real sense) *built* my brain. It was an ideal opportunity for me to engage in intellectual play, to reinhabit my previous knowledge, and to convince myself that I have indeed learned the things that I have. Reading is an essential first step in any solid thought-related endeavor, and this exercise certainly served to "bypass my neuroses",<sup>52</sup> to unfold critical memories—intellectual, sensory—which would not have been accessible without the presence of such perfect time-tagged stimuli. I did my best to make sacred space for reading and browsing, to prioritize the sort of immersive activity that could plunge me back into a book's original context: back, that is, both into the world of my personal past and into the historical worlds unfolded within the volumes I perused. I found it easier now to comprehend many of the texts that had been especially challenging when I first cracked them open, some as long as four years ago, a realization which did wonders both for my sense of personal continuity—I *remembered* things!—and for my psychological confidence. Rediscovering my own internal capacities alongside the many gems of wisdom, guidance, insight, and humor apparent in these pages felt like the reclamation of a *limb* or even an entire *sense*. I was able now to recall all the parts of myself that had been occluded by distraction or fear.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For more than one reason... and in more than one way.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Sacks, *The River of Consciousness*, 147.

<sup>53</sup> Revisiting *Don Quixote*, a cherished example, produced (purely and plainly) joy.

It is in this sense that Step 1 can be understood as an exercise in cataloguing what is, to me, most beloved: an attempt to reunite with old, dear friends for purposes both intellectual and personal. "Does not everything move with your movement?" Montaigne asked at the outset of my investigation. "Is there anything that does not grow old along with you?" Reminding me to remove my head from my ass and think about the scope of things, he continued:

A thousand men, a thousand animals, and a thousand other creatures die at the very moment when you die.<sup>54</sup>

After all, as Sophocles says: "We are all insubstantial shadows, / And life is just a flickering dream."<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, the temporal function of these selected excerpts does not capture their entire effect. Quoting Horace, Montaigne complements his meditation on mortality by claiming that inappropriate anxiety is incompatible with intellectual humility (a point well taken):

God hides within night's blackest folds,  
Most wisely, what the future holds,  
And laughs if a man takes fright  
More than is right.<sup>56</sup>

Archilochus, a seventh century Greek lyric poet, encourages moderation by highlighting similar sentiments:

rejoice in what is joyful, grieve at troubles,  
but not too much: be aware what sort of rhythm rules  
man's life.<sup>57</sup>

And Marcus Aurelius—who needs no introduction—skewers learned helplessness in his attack on apathy:

That things happen for the worst and always will, that [we] have no power to regulate them, and the world is condemned to never-ending evil—how can you say that?<sup>58</sup>

In general, and especially at the beginning, my goal in implementing this literary exercise was primarily psychological, although I always kept an eye out for arguments and excerpts that could prove helpful in the construction or communication of my overarching methodological claim. The two objectives are, of

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<sup>54</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 76.

<sup>55</sup> Sophocles, *Four Tragedies: Electra, Philoctetes, Ajax, the Women of Trachis*, trans. Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2007), 10.

<sup>56</sup> Horace via Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Andrew M. Miller, *Greek Lyric: An Anthology in Translation* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1996), 6-7.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Gregory Hays (New York, NY: Modern Library, 2004), 9.35.

course, connected; reinforcing the scope and scale of my textual knowledge, asserting the internal coherence of my academic approach, and marshalling evidence in support of the procedural thesis that unites each 'prong' proved to be valuable tasks in overlapping ways. I set out to locate the most lovely passages and found that they corresponded to a great extent with those that were most *methodologically* relevant—no great surprise, perhaps, given the place of sublimity in my humanistic schema. The best excerpts were connected by a shared (though often intangible) affinity, an alignment of outlook that reinforced the perceived coherence of my project's goal.

As expected, the thread or through-line that spans most of my major undergraduate work is decidedly methodological. That a sense of internal intellectual alignment can produce a positive personal effect is perhaps not surprising, but the question of coherence was not, when I began this project, assumed or foregone. I knew that I had been pursuing connected arguments for quite some time, and I was aware that these arguments had a psychological salience, but I had not yet charted the full scale and scope of this symbiotic match. That my months of re-reading also functioned to re-acquaint me with almost the entirety of my own thought-history was both lucky and necessary: I was able to review the sum total of all the knowledge I had received, synthesized, and produced—and, in the process, enliven (resurrect?) the full extent of my thinking self.<sup>59</sup> In order to trace the path of my intellectual priorities, I sought to unite my body of work; in order to address my psychological concerns, I strove to more confidently inhabit that unified whole. Once again, my goal was compound: to make the most personally fulfilling project, to track my philosophical progress, *and* to produce or present the best possible external argument.<sup>60</sup>

In the end, my academic objectives became almost synonymous with my personal goals. Bolstering the connection between my current mind and the efforts that built it allowed me to *prove myself to myself*. My exercise in surveying and assessing previous work permitted me to think critically about method and evidence, but it also (and perhaps primarily) encouraged me to wear my knowledge with more grace. This 'reading' stage was one way that I sought to inhabit my favorite thought-worlds, an exercise which allowed me to expand my thinking outside of Montaigne's infamous tower of solitude.<sup>61</sup> But the same attempt also hinged upon a different sort of perspectival re-orientation: a shift away from achievement-based valuations and towards something more secure.

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<sup>59</sup> All the texts that I reference make up my person, and it is in this sense that the project as a whole also functions to *describe a self*. This is my mind.

<sup>60</sup> One helpful way to view the definitional/communicative portion of this paper's larger task is to understand it as an exercise in collating and synthesizing the most critical method-related historical knowledge drawn from every course taken in every quarter at WWU. I tried to craft a combined personal/philosophical narrative, to follow the diachronic thread of my own intellectual development. This progressive or cumulative pattern was recognizable in the moment (i.e., as I was crafting it), but is markedly clearer when viewed retroactively... as I was encouraged to observe via my project's retrospective approach.

<sup>61</sup> I.e., to shore up confidence in previous intellectual investments, to scaffold more sustainable strategies for interacting with this important intellectual sphere.

Learning to think about my thinking as an inalienable ability, a way of moving through the world, demanded that I make explicit an understanding which had until now been merely assumed. Montaigne writes in his essay on *The Education of Children* that "[in] solitude, [in] company, morning and evening, [and at] all hours [...] all places will be [the] study; for philosophy [...] has this privilege of being everywhere at home".<sup>62</sup> It is a view almost identical to mine, but a view which had (in its applied form) until now been largely elusive. How could I conceptualize my learning in such a manner that it did not disappear when not in active *academic* use?

The solution did not prove to be particularly revolutionary, but it *was* meaningful—and it connected quite directly with my methodological focus. The sheer volume of information I have ingested throughout my time at WWU is formidable;<sup>63</sup> I have amassed a vast trove of factual knowledge in the course of my historical studies, and one of the core benefits associated with the current project's investment in immersive re-reading is that this knowledge is now especially present and accessible. Lines drawn from ancient Egyptian poems bubble up over the course of a given day, and my perception of the world is richer for it. But the core result (or gain, or gift) attributable to this coursework-driven investment—one that cannot be taken from me—is a radical shift in intellectual *outlook*. The most critical reward I have gleaned from my undergraduate humanities education is not a name or a date or even an entire history; instead, that honor goes to a very specific *way of thinking*. It almost need not be said that individual facts are nowhere near as intellectually important as the insights that their *interpretation* teaches, and the layered reality I now possess (cf. those Egyptian poems) exists thanks both to a basic factual foundation *and* to the larger or more overarching perspective that those facts, in concert, can transmit. It is this mode of thought that allows me to imagine coherent cultural wholes: different possibilities, paths, and *Weltanschauungen* which exist alongside our contemporary world.<sup>64</sup> This awareness of alternate options and divergent choices is the introspective key that encourages me to feel a Montaignian command over my own thinking, a confidence that these perceptual practices will accompany me "in solitude, [...] morning and evening, [...] and in all places."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 148.

<sup>63</sup> Especially when considered in retrospect!

<sup>64</sup> My formal academic paths have furnished me with a wealth of knowledge, a toolkit of theories and methods necessary for the production and analysis of contemporary scholarship. The best offerings in each of my three 'home' departments have compelled me to write and think in ways that are not automatic or intuitive, to expand my base of cultural and historical knowledge, and to refine my investigative, argumentative, and even literary capacities (the best studies are written with both integrity *and* love). Every one of these traditional abilities is more than worth the time and effort (and tears, and sleep!) it cost to develop; every one is invaluable both because of its internal virtues and in light of its ability to facilitate engagement with disciplinary expectations. I would not have been equipped—or motivated—to write and publish on the scale that I have without the instruction and guidance of my departmental advisors, nor would I have learned the full value of rigor and perseverance and plodding work. My sense of intellectual self-confidence owes much to these accumulated experiences, and the same can be said of whatever formal credentials I have acquired. The true crux of my academic reward, however, has been the *meaning* more than the method: the insight into old, alien, and otherwise Other ways of thinking or being which historical inquiry can (at its best) provide.

<sup>65</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 148.

It is the key, too, that bridges the academic and the *effectual*.<sup>66</sup> Cicero wrote in his first-century treatise *On Obligations* that intelligent philosophical principles "are relevant to the highest aim among goods, but [also apply] to the way we regulate our mundane lives."<sup>67</sup> Carrying my thinking with me in a Montaignian or a Ciceronian sense, then, encourages its omnipresence. If that knowledge is constantly engaged, if it is the lens through which I perceive the present, it is inalienable: nothing can usurp it. It is a practice both practically and psychologically (and publicly) beneficial, and it is also deeply *affecting*: there is magic here.

T.S. Eliot's 1940 *East Coker* contains a gorgeous passage that I associate with the transformative role humanistic thinking can play in enriching everyday experience, in increasing the *layered* nature of historically-informed perception—

In that open field  
If you do not come too close, if you do not come too close,  
[...] you can hear the music  
Of the weak pipe and the little drum  
And see them dancing around the bonfire.<sup>68</sup>

—a ghostly image which echoes also in other places. As James Baldwin wrote in his "Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of Emancipation", a thinking understanding of the human past gives us "strange perspective[s] on time and [...] pain and effort." Behind "your father's face", Baldwin told his nephew, "are all those faces which were his."<sup>69</sup>

Seeing the faces behind faces (or the people within the field) is a privilege and a burden, a gift that "can't be shirked."<sup>70</sup> It is not a frivolous task, and its effects are not to be taken lightly. Such experience is nothing if not consequential; studying the right sort of history makes us feel that "it has done things to us", that we "are not quite the same men."<sup>71</sup> But it is something—like my method—that is sturdy, and solid, and stays with you. It gives you different eyes.

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<sup>66</sup> Yes, 'effect' with an 'e'.

<sup>67</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Obligations*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>68</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1968), 24.

<sup>69</sup> James Baldwin, *Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York, NY: Library of America, 1998), 291.

<sup>70</sup> Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019), xx.

<sup>71</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Reading Life* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2019), 111.

The project's third procedural 'step' prioritized a similarly retrospective exercise: revisiting old essays. I chose to help along my synthetic perspectival-psychological process by investing,<sup>72</sup> additionally, in written work. I dug up papers from as early as 2019; I read old notes, letters, and outlines. As was true of my reading experience, the process of sitting with my own writings allowed me to make new connections, to remind myself of old ones, and to return in even greater depth to the same theme that I have been exploring and developing throughout my undergraduate career. Four papers from previous courses were being revised for publication at the same time that my second re-reading campaign was getting underway, and the granular work required to polish each piece also helped bridge between this final backward-looking step and my first truly *creative* effort: writing (the verb!) itself.<sup>73</sup>

Most of the prose contained within this document was produced during the project's final stages, but a long trail of drafts and outlines undergird its finished form. Reading encourages note-taking, and note-taking encourages synthesis, so a series of increasingly complex and increasingly structured texts grew up almost organically alongside my ever-expanding booklist.<sup>74</sup> Crafting imperfect documents intended to function as organizational aids allowed me to write without pressure, a step that—like my focus on art, my prioritization of affect—served to bypass fraught and frequently less-than-functional cognitive corridors. I accumulated fifty pages of relevant excerpts, passages chosen either for their beauty or for their ability to illuminate my methodological cause (and often for both); I wrote a twenty-thousand word outline to explain my goals and house my ideas. But the true core of this project, and the primary root of its restorative impact, did not involve either reading or writing. That title can be taken only by the thirty-odd drawings featured in the companion volume attached above.

I drew before I did any other work. I knew, when I set out to craft this capstone project, that I wanted to write, and I wanted to read, and I wanted to think; what I did not know was *how* I could write or read or think. The drawings' initial role was to calm me down, to occupy just enough of my neurons and my time so that I could concentrate on the procedural thesis I wanted to convey. Using my hands to create intricate and often repetitive patterns forced me to slow down, to give myself the space—a meditative sort of space—to introspect about my mind and method without internal pressure or distraction. I had developed work habits which led me to write and think at a high level as much as I possibly could (which turned out to be *almost all my waking hours* as well as *many hours that should not have been waking*), and these habits, while helpful during dead week, were not especially sustainable. The drawing process enforced a step away from that broken system, an interruption in my one-track mental monologue of *work* and *work*

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<sup>72</sup> And immersing myself.

<sup>73</sup> In other words: Editing helped ease me back into the compositional saddle.

<sup>74</sup> /Bibliography.



and *work* and *work*. I was forced, in order to complete the project I designed, to spend time *not* engaging with specific sorts of academic toil.

My emphasis on material arts arose partly out of desperation and partly out of inspiration, a mix of exasperation and hope that has as much to do with my malfunctioning mind as with the techniques I employed to address its intrusive ills. Musical practice—an apt activity to mention in this particular context!—tends to act as a calming agent, and the same can be said of something as simple as movement (walking, writing). The relief I felt during long rehearsals scheduled in preparation for the WSO's Spring 2023 performance cycle made me think that I should add something truly interdisciplinary to my menu of academic options,<sup>75</sup> and visual art presented itself as a natural choice.

I drew until I could think again, and kept drawing even after; I knew, once I had made the first few images, that I couldn't give it up. It for this reason that the sketches may be seen as an exercise in housekeeping or even a therapeutic trick:<sup>76</sup> while the drawings did not themselves start out as an individual end, their *production* certainly was. But in spite of this initially abstract and somewhat instrumentalized function, each image quickly assumed a communicative purpose, and helped—additionally—to plug the gap between my project's form and thesis.<sup>77</sup> Every picture illustrates, in visual form, one critical aspect of my compound humanistic goal: an engagement with not only knowledge but beauty and meaning.

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<sup>75</sup> Oliver Sacks writes in *Awakenings* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1990), xii that "music has been the profoundest non-medical medication for [his] patients", and I can certainly understand this effect.

<sup>76</sup> When I got ill in the spring of 2020, my ability to write without great strain was almost entirely destroyed. Writing had functioned as the substrate for my newly-discovered abilities—it served as a physical elaboration of intricate thought process, and allowed me to produce things of unexpected complexity. The sketches do not function in this particular elaboratory/scaling/constructive way, but they do allow me to bypass certain blocks such that *I am more likely to be able to think and write in the future*.

<sup>77</sup> They served (that is) to foreground a multi-modal and affect-centered product... which of course accords quite well with my intellectual claims.

It is clear then that the project practices what it preaches with the aid of these images, but it also merits mention that my *writing* itself has also been calibrated to reflect this central thesis' stated intent. Pathos, poetry, and a whole lot of distinctly extra-disciplinary digressions have been very intentionally included. (See esp. section 6 below.) Heck, I even have some Walt Whitman in here...

#### 4. CRAFT NARRATIVE

What, though, did I draw? What did I choose and *why* did I choose it? Can the sketches be understood only as an ancillary project, a psychological tool, perhaps an easy way to fulfill my interdisciplinary itch? Are they, in some more central fashion, connected with this capstone's larger methodological thesis?

While the drawings are not meant to function as figurative illustrations or one-to-one metaphors, their content is purposeful. My artwork may indeed act as a thinking tool, an internal aid, but its role is compound and communicative, and indeed speaks quite directly to this project's more expansive philosophical goals.

Somewhere in the muddy middle of my self-prescribed re-readings, I stumbled—quite unexpectedly—across a beloved passage from Vergil's *Aeneid*, his epic poem on Rome's origins. Almost miraculously, the passage appeared to reflect a wide set of relevant concerns: it contained a mirrored version of my own personal search for something precious; it touched on themes of loss and recovery (or at least understanding); and it *also* embodied a version of the multifaceted methodological process that I sought, via this project, both to outline, to demonstrate, and to defend. The episode's dense imagery additionally echoed a certain sort of symbolic sensibility that resurfaced again and again as I revisited my favorite texts. (Many of these reflections or 'echoes' have been excerpted and inserted into the book of drawings linked above.)

In a slimmed-down format, presented without context, Vergil's most relevant 'stanza' reads:

*During winter's cold, deep in the woods,  
Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage  
On a tree not its own and entwines  
The burl'd branches with its yellow fruit.*<sup>78</sup>

And so I drew trees. The decision was propitious—and, as the classicist Paul Rahe might say, also perhaps "by no means fortuitous".<sup>79</sup> I did not know why I was drawn to depict trees and forests when I began this process—my core motive was to clear the muck out of my mind, to create a mental space that would allow me to re-start the process, ever so slowly, of thinking—but trees were (maybe not coincidentally) what emerged from my pencil. As Tsunetomo writes,

When the five senses have thus been cleansed, the mind will of itself be purified. [Such activity] will cleanse the mind when the mind is clogged up.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Virgil and Stanley Lombardo, *The Aeneid* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), 137.

<sup>79</sup> See Paul A. Rahe, *The Spartan Regime: Its Character, Origins, and Grand Strategy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), in which the phrase appears at regular intervals.

<sup>80</sup> Tsunetomo, *Hagakure*, 71.

This passage from the *Hagakure*'s second chapter proceeds almost immediately to invoke an arboreal image, relating that

In the poem, "*Under the deep snows in the last village / Last night numerous branches of plum blossomed,*" the opulence of the phrase "numerous branches" was changed to "a single branch". It is said that this "single branch" contains true tranquility.<sup>81</sup>

That the *Aeneid* passage also hinges on a woodland expedition, a search for a sylvan key, meant it was a perfect fit to address both the personal or psychological *as well as* academic aspects of my capstone project's visual core.

After a long and harrowing journey, Aeneas seeks in Book Six to enter the underworld in an attempt to access information—and to receive advice from his recently deceased father, Anchises, regarding his political destiny.<sup>82</sup> Aeneas' initial guide, the Sibyl of Cumae, answers his queries with a challenging prophecy:

*Hidden in a darkling tree there lies  
A golden bough, blossoming gold  
In leaf and pliant branch, held sacred  
To the goddess below. A grove conceals  
This bough on every side, and umber shadows  
Veil it from view in a valley dim.  
No one may pass beneath the earth  
Until he has plucked from the tree  
This golden-leaved fruit. Fair Proserpina  
Decrees it be brought to her as a gift.  
When one bough is torn away another  
Grows in its place and leafs out in gold.  
Search it out with your deepest gaze  
And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand. [...]  
Only then will you see the Stygian groves  
And realms closed to the living.<sup>83</sup>*

The most central and indeed most immediate parallel apparent between Aeneas' quest and the undertaking outlined by own project is the descent, the journey to the depths, the entrance into Avernus' underworld. *Aeneid* 6 can illuminate any search for something difficult, something in the depths, but it is especially aligned with a search—or inquiry—for knowledge: a freighted, effortful, but also indispensable task.<sup>84</sup> ("Search it out with your deepest gaze.") My own intellectual trajectory, as well as the trajectory of my capstone-related efforts, mirrors this aspect of Vergil's tale, including as it does a reckoning with

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<sup>81</sup> Tsunetomo, *Hagakure*, 71 (emphasis original).

<sup>82</sup> (I.e., to found Rome.)

<sup>83</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, 6.175-200.

<sup>84</sup> Also cf. Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin, 2000).

turbulence and loss, an exercise in subterranean introspection, and a return (at the very end) to fulfilling functionality. A similar affinity is apparent between this mental exercise and the praxis advocated by my method-thesis, a thesis which demands that good-faith academic pathfinders be willing to engage with affect, however dark, and be eager to acquire knowledge without losing sight of its emotional origins and human import.<sup>85</sup>

It is in this sense that Vergil's woodland tale serves as an apt analogy both for my process of personal 'recovery' and for the multi-modal, multidisciplinary, affect-enlightened methodology I seek to promote. The golden bough episode can stand in for my own psychological goal or quest: I seek solace. It can stand in, too, for Aeneas' own larger destiny: finding his father, dragging the depths, securing knowledge, founding Rome. And the whole story, when put together into a coherent gestalt, can of course also be viewed as an analogue for my disciplinary argument: that one must seek within shadows, must search for guidance and enlightenment (it is especially apt, in a punning sort of way, that Aeneas' bough actually *glows*),<sup>86</sup> must proceed with love and pathos,<sup>87</sup> and must approach one's goal prepared in mind as well as body—lest you see only yourself and the dark forest. If the proper procedures are not initiated—that is, if one searches only for a reflection of their own face—that reflection is all they will find. The mistletoe will not glow.<sup>88</sup> They will not enter Avernus' jaws.<sup>89</sup>

It is particularly clear that Vergil values the *character*-informed foundation of Aeneas' qualifications. Not just any explorer approaching a problem from any angle can be permitted to remove or even to perceive the bough. For our purposes, the affective aspects of Aeneas' quest are particularly relevant: the Trojan gains access to his otherworldly goal in no small part *because* he searches with sincerity, because he searches for the right set of practical, personal, and pathos-influenced reasons.

As must we. True humanistic inquiry demands that the right person with the right goals and the right rationale embark upon a good-faith mission girded by the proper tools. Thus, Aeneas' branch, a symbol which signifies (at least within this idea-web) that there are certain things one must do to make one's efforts fruitful. Historical thinking necessitates affective investment, empathetic projection, a willingness to seek something singular and difficult. Any sort of freighted quest may be mapped relatively productively onto Aeneas' tale, but the moral the story projects is in large part consistent. At its core,

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<sup>85</sup> Aeneas, after all, seeks informational guidance about the fate of Rome from his recently deceased and much-beloved father.

<sup>86</sup> I.e.: the term "enlightenment" = a perfect visual echo of the illuminated bough.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Aeneas' love for his father... and for Dido (Book IV).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Lewis, *Reading Life*, 119-21: "[I]t would seem to me to be a waste of the past if we were content to see in the literature of every bygone age only the reflection of our own faces."

<sup>89</sup> See Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.190 (Lombardo's page 135): "It [the bough] will come off easily, of itself, / If the Fates call you. Otherwise you will not / Wrench it off by force or cut it with steel. [You must fulfill your duties first]. / Only then will you see the Stygian groves / And realms closed to the living."

Sibyl's equation indicates that *every search must be undertaken with the aid of an affect-oriented processual key*.

(The progression of those allusive, extra-*Aeneid* arboreal quotations which are included in my complementary sketchbook also mirrors the process of good-faith inquiry as proposed by this paper's method thesis: seeking the deep, braving troubles. This same sequence likewise echoes the trajectory of my project creation process: diving into the affectual depths, locating difficult knowledge, finding brilliance, and achieving acceptance. Tribulation gives way to accommodation; the narrative is crafted intentionally. Images, symbols, sentiments, and an exquisite-corpse-style progression connect each quote to the next. The best way to experience the book is to search for the story, to enter the journey or embark upon the inquiry. You will find the ties.)

It is clear then that Book Six serves as an ideal capstone metaphor, a means to unite all the different 'branches' affixed to my project's core. Indeed, the more I scrutinize *Aeneid* 6, the more ways I see that it can act not only as a symbol for personal or intellectual inquiry but may also reflect or refract something important about virtually every element of my overarching effort. As becomes apparent at approximately line 190, the branch's pursuit is also multi-modal in a way which meshes quite nicely with my own capstone's Franken-format: Aeneas' quest is a physical one, involving both practical duties and visual symbols; an intellectual one, i.e. a search for knowledge; and an emotional endeavor, centering on the reunification of father and son—and all for the ultimate end of community welfare.

But what a harrowing prophecy! And what a harrowing task! To be told that only the most perfect conduct will permit a return from the realm of the dead!<sup>90</sup> The last and most critical reason that this project has chosen as its title a line from *Aeneid* 6 is that the passage's recognition of fragility and tenuousness perfectly reflected my work's own uncertain existence. All the many factors which conspired to clog this essay's gears—persistent pandemics, international catastrophes, hostile contexts, internal uncertainty—made my continued engagement feel almost miraculous. Mistletoe blooms on a tree not its own, deep in the dark of winter. I was in winter (both literal and symbolic) when I started this project; our world was in winter, too. *Mistletoe blooms*—the title, this excerpt—speaks to the relief I found via my own subterranean search, but it also signifies the challenge of teaching or learning in an unfriendly world.<sup>91</sup> I loved the image in large part because of its emphasis on improbability, its engagement with the

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<sup>90</sup> See Virgil, *Aeneid*, 134-5: "goddess-born son / Of Trojan Anchises, the road down / To Avernus is easy [i.e., via death]. Day and night / The door to black Dis stands open. / But to retrace your steps and come out / To the upper air, this is the task, / The labor. A few, whom Jupiter / Has favored, or whom bright virtue / Has lifted to heaven, sons of the gods, / Have succeeded. [...] But if you have such longing, such dread desire / To cross the Styx twice, twice to see / Black Tartarus, and if it pleases you / To indulge this madness as a sacred mission, / Listen to what you must do."

<sup>91</sup> *Hidden in a darkling tree there lies / A golden bough, blossoming gold.*

pain and risk which attend certain sorts of affect-informed inquiry. Machiavelli highlights this challenge in the second preface to his 1517 *Discourses on Livy*, writing that "it is the duty of a good man

to teach others the good you yourself were unable to accomplish due to the malignity of the times or to fortune, so that among the many people capable of such actions, some of those more favored by heaven may accomplish it.<sup>92</sup>

What else is one to do?

But what if the mistletoe blooms? What if the seed takes? The knowledge spreads? Vergil's image foregrounds the fantastic implausibility of beauty blooming in the middle of winter on a tree not its own, and it is this haunting statistical impression which ties Aeneas' tale together with the trajectory of my procedural thesis. Indeed, this particular aspect of my title's role speaks to the key function I sought to center, the function first broached by Tsunetomo and Montaigne: an exercise in advocating for something rare and improbable, an illustration of the way that thinking can—for me, for all—encourage, via the affect-enabled acceptance of historical strangeness or remoteness or even plain unlikelihood,<sup>93</sup> a temporary escape from the contingent cognitive horizons that limit our current view.

Why, after all, would we want to stay stuck in the world that we are? Disallowing the consideration of strange, unexpected, uncomfortable, or otherwise challenging realities permits our era's ever-shrinking horizons to define themselves into a deep, dark pit. (*Mistletoe blooms with strange leafage.*) If a divorce from the increasingly eschatological pessimism of the last eight years seems unimaginable, think of the gap which exists between our worldview and that of Montaigne—or Tsunetomo, or Vergil, or even Dickinson! Aeneas' journey is a risky one, yes, but its rewards are correspondingly great.

If there is one most critical result that such study might provide, it is this: an enforcement of possibility, a demonstration of the alternative options available beyond those we have chosen to populate our contemporary menu of civilizational choices. (*Mistletoe can bloom.*) That self-reinforcing loop of societal definition which characterizes twenty-first century discourse does not contain the full extent of all historic—and future, perhaps—cultural configurations. No single era can be mined for the 'right' or 'proper' models, of course, and miracle cures remain just that: illusive. (History is not a panacea.) But our collective past can still act as a corrective to counteract uncritical investments in the universalizability of certain contemporary 'facts'.<sup>2</sup> Assumptions about the avaricious or otherwise ineducable essence of human nature cannot stand as 'objective' interpretive tools, so why should they play any role in the shaping of our

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<sup>92</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, Julia Conaway Bondanella, and Peter Bondanella, *Discourses on Livy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 152.

<sup>93</sup> Book Six's golden bough episode (thus) illuminates the specific methodological investment required to enable the admission of improbable results: a willingness to consider unexpected historical possibilities. See also below for more on this strategic suspension of disbelief.

collective epistemological (and perhaps psychological) outlook? *During winter's cold, deep in the woods,*  
*/ Mistletoe blooms. . .*

## Part Two



## 5. EPISTEMOLOGICAL GOALS

What, exactly, am I advocating? What do I uphold as the specific, applied, and scalable building blocks of good-faith humanistic thought?

While this project's methodological portrait has thus far been presented primarily in light of my own idiosyncratic academic trajectory, its value—as I hope to argue—is much more expansive. As the sections contained within this essay's second half strive to explain, a Montaignian outlook can be defined and defended entirely on its own internal terms.<sup>94</sup>

Here, in schematized form, are the four core aspects of my humanistic historical-methodological thesis. Each 'step' is designed to build upon (or to allow and enable) the next.

### i. Transmission

Study requires subjects. The basic chore of preserving sources seems a needless task to emphasize, but its importance, which intersects with a number of salient concerns, requires explanation. In the middle of his miraculous play on the Victorian classicist A. E. Housman, Tom Stoppard (via Housman's character) compares the transmission of texts, especially *ancient* texts, with the reaping of a cornfield "laid flat to stubble".

[H]ere and there, unaccountably, miraculously spared, a few stalks still [stand] upright. Why those? There is no reason. Ovid's *Medea*, the *Thyestes* of Varius who was Virgil's friend and considered by some his equal, the lost Aeschylus trilogy of the Trojan war... gathered to oblivion in *sheaves*, along with hundreds of Greek and Roman authors known only for fragments or their names alone—and here and there a cornstalk, a thistle, a poppy, still standing, but as to purpose signifying nothing.<sup>95</sup>

Scholarship, in this formulation, is "a small redress against the vast unreason of what is taken from us."<sup>96</sup> It would indeed be beyond naive to claim that "the best survives because it is the best", as does Housman's interlocutor. But is pure and unmediated chance truly the only force at play? Is the material persistence of untouched manuscripts the sole arbiter of a source's persistence—or a source's *use*? (Can the two even be disconnected?)

Housman's character belies his own argument in an earlier outburst. Explaining the nature of affection to a dispirited young companion,<sup>97</sup> "A.E.H." relates that

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<sup>94</sup> Many of the ideas and arguments invoked above will be elaborated in much greater (and more thoroughly evidenced/contextualized) detail throughout the following five mini-essays.

<sup>95</sup> Stoppard, *Invention of Love*, 71-2.

<sup>96</sup> Stoppard, *Invention of Love*, 71.

<sup>97</sup> Who happens to be his own college-age self...

[i]n the Dark Ages, in Macedonia, in the last guttering light of classical antiquity, a man copied out bits from old books for his young son, so we have one sentence from *The Loves of Achilles*. Love, said Sophocles, feels like the ice held in the hand by children.<sup>98</sup>

What is the mechanism here by which Sophokles has survived? Not chance, surely. Not chance and not unreason. The preservation of sources is never dictated entirely by physical factors, and those sources' perceived relevance, their continued human interest, is just as important as mere survival in determining a given writing's academic fate. Stoppard has included his Sophokles excerpt for a very specific and very pathetic reason,<sup>99</sup> a reason which illuminates the affect hidden behind each half of this essential scholastic equation. Manuscripts survive because of chance *and* effort *and* affection, and their role in contemporary thought is dictated as much by care as by availability. Without some other sort of compelling academic (perhaps scientific) salience, words and fragments must rely upon contemporary *human* interest to be both transmitted and used.

'Transmission' itself is a similarly compound concept.<sup>100</sup> Materials must be maintained, of course, but the traditions of their interpretation—their *study*—also require intentional preservation. The physical survival of a source is insufficient in our age of documentary abundance, and the same can be said of a given discipline's exegetical habits. Preserving sources and preserving approaches go hand-in-hand, each step encompassing a twofold set of practical-emotional concerns.

The connection between survival and sentiment is already apparent. (Would we want it to be otherwise?) Archival work is inextricable from affective work; apprenticeship lies at each's core. Preserving evidence and passing passion on to the next generation, even the next era, demand emotional effort. Love, says Sophokles, feels like the ice held in the hand by children.

## ii. Emotion

Housman's character persists throughout the majority of Stoppard's play in his Scrooge-like opposition to warmth and emotion. "Poetical feelings", he opines, are "a peril to scholarship."<sup>101</sup> For Housman, the role of a humanist is that of a mechanic: "To be a scholar is to strike your finger on the page and say, 'Thou ailest here, and here.'"<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Stoppard, *Invention of Love*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> 'Pathetic' as in 'Pathétique', i.e., emotional or emotion-considering.

<sup>100</sup> Indeed, a related idea that houses two twinned affectual cores.

<sup>101</sup> Stoppard, *Invention*, 36.

<sup>102</sup> Stoppard, *Invention*, 36.

Montaigne takes exception to this numerical approach. Describing the results of miserable and meaningless labor—the sort of philological drudgery that *could* be lauded as crucial or critical if it chose to defend itself, to admit its own potential humanistic relevance—the Frenchman questions whether "this fellow, all dirty, with running nose and eyes, whom you see coming out of his study after midnight, do you think he is seeking among his books now to make himself a better, happier, and wiser man?"<sup>103</sup> Alas no. Instead, the monastic wretch is "going to teach posterity the meter of Plautus' verses and the true spelling of a Latin word, or die in the trying."<sup>104</sup> Nowhere here is there room for an inquiry into import or impact; nowhere is there space for an acknowledgment of human sociality... except perhaps in the implicit desire for prestige that tags along with Montaigne's unwashed academic.

What could be the result of a wider perspective? What benefits might the consideration of those factors underlying (say) Sophokles' survival bring to the analytical table?

One of the principal promises afforded by an admission of affect involves exactly that which Montaigne's "dirty fellow" does not possess. Those who *do* seek among their books to make themselves "happier, better, and wiser m[e]n" know that humanistic study *helps us*.<sup>105</sup> Machiavelli writes in his *Discourses on Livy* about a specific relationship he has curated with his study, an exercise in fellowship that reminds one to some extent of time travel. "When evening comes," he relates, "I return to my home, and I go into my study; and on the threshold, I take off my everyday clothes,

which are covered with mud and mire, and I put on regal and curial robes; and dressed in a more appropriate manner I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men and am welcomed by them kindly, and there I taste the food that alone is mine, and for which I was born; and there I am not ashamed to speak to them, to ask them the reasons for their actions; and they, in their humanity, answer me; and for four hours I feel no boredom, I dismiss everyday affliction, I no longer fear poverty nor do I tremble at the thought of death: *I become completely part of them*.<sup>106</sup>

A similar sort of trans-temporal congress is foregrounded in Francisco de Quevedo's 1637 "From the Tower" ("*Desde la Torre*"), a brief and piercing poem which describes the improbable interactions made possible by writing and reading:

*Retirado en la paz de estos desiertos,  
Con pocos, pero doctos libros juntos,  
Vivo en conversación con los difuntos,  
Y escucho con mis ojos a los muertos.*

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<sup>103</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 215.

<sup>104</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 215.

<sup>105</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 215.

<sup>106</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, x.

(Withdrawn into the peace of this desert, along with some books, few but wise, I live in conversation with the deceased, and listen to the dead with my eyes.)<sup>107</sup>

It is this precious sort of academic exploration or escape that forms, for me, the most intrinsically enjoyable element of historical work. These "ancient courts" allow us time away from the present: like Machiavelli, we "no longer fear poverty" or "tremble at the thought of death." But their function is not merely negatory, and among the positive results that stem from such encounters are a sense of affinity or even belonging. Housman himself—the real Housman, not Stoppard's rendition—wrote a poem that captures well this compound boon, describing the camaraderie shared between a Greek statue and a passing observer. These lines echo with familiarity for those of us who feel out of place in a less-than-hospitable present:

I too would be where I am not.  
I too survey the endless line  
Of men whose thoughts are not as mine.<sup>108</sup>

That such encounters also act as *mementos mori* (cf. Quevedo's repetition of "dead" and "deceased") is similarly beneficial; as Montaigne wrote, "[p]remeditation of death is premeditation of freedom."<sup>109</sup> This is an effect which serves to remind one of *what matters*, to pin a bright target upon the aspects of human thought and human history that simply can't be shirked.<sup>110</sup> Living well and well-informedly lies at the core of Montaigne's methodological viewpoint, a perspective which aligns easily with that of (say) Tsunetomo:

For it seems to me that the first lessons in which we should steep [our] mind[s] must be those that [...] will teach [us] to know [ourselves] and to die and live well. Among the liberal arts, let us begin with the art that liberates us. They are all somewhat useful [...], [b]ut let us choose the one that is directly and professedly useful for it.<sup>111</sup>

The tasks of personal enlargement and perspectival calibration upheld by Machiavelli and Montaigne function both as individual salves and procedural keys. These compound cognitive-affective investments allow for individual healing, of course, but the *shape* of that recuperation is scholastically salient. Central to this effect is an expansion of self, an ability to inhabit the times and views of other humans. C. S.

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<sup>107</sup> Francisco de Quevedo, "'From the Tower' by Francisco de Quevedo," trans. Elwin Wirkala, Society of Classical Poets, February 25, 2022, <https://classicalpoets.org/2022/02/25/from-the-tower-by-francisco-de-quevedo-translated-by-elwin-wirkala/>.

Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.175-200: "Search [the golden bough] out with your deepest gaze / And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand. [...] / Only then will you see the Stygian groves / And realms closed to the living."

<sup>108</sup> Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, 110.

<sup>109</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 72.

In full: "It is uncertain where death awaits us; let us await it everywhere. Premeditation of death is premeditation of freedom. He who has learned how to die has unlearned how to be a slave. Knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and constraint. There is nothing evil in life for a man who has thoroughly grasped the fact that to be deprived of life is not an evil." Cf. p. 75: "He who would teach men to die would teach them to live." Also cf. p. 76: "this is the true and sovereign liberty, which enables us to thumb our noses at force and injustice and to laugh at prisons and chains."

<sup>110</sup> Once again, cf. Lepore, *These Truths*, xx. It is not coincidental that these unshirkables turn out not to include the spelling of a Latin word (at least if that spelling is seen as an ultimate end entirely in itself).

<sup>111</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 142.

Lewis once wrote that, while "the primary impulse of each [person] is to maintain and aggrandise himself," our "secondary impulse is to go out of the self, to correct its provincialism and heal its loneliness."<sup>112</sup> And what activities encourage this magnanimous impulse? Thinking and knowing *and feeling*. "In love, in virtue, [and] in the pursuit of knowledge", Lewis writes, "we are doing this.

Obviously the process can be described either as an enlargement or as a temporary annihilation of the self. But that is an old paradox; 'he that loseth his life shall save it.' Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. [...] [Indeed,] in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in a Greek poem, I see with myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do."<sup>113</sup>

The expansion of view enforced by such vulnerable self-projection serves both to succor "individual [...] wound[s]" and to make anachronistic or 'modernizing' misconceptions difficult to maintain. (Lewis' insistence that historical study encourages an escape from one's own era-specific provincialism is the *Hagakurean* core shared between every author cited above.) It is in this sense that the affect-enlightened use of lovingly preserved sources—as well as the humanizing benefits that their use entails—are exactly that which best enable unclouded (or at least *less* context-clouded) academic inquiry.

From Lewis' vantage, then, we can argue that good-faith humanistic study both helps us *and* helps the work we undertake. An openness to difference enables internal expansion *and* perspectival reorientation in matching measure. That such strategies also act to enlarge our sense of collective possibility (and, thus, to defend against certain nefarious uses of history),<sup>114</sup> likewise means that these benefits can come full circle: we help ourselves, as individuals, which helps our work, which then helps us—as a collective species, as communities—to think in less limited ways about our common purpose.

### iii. Cognitive cages

Assuming that sources have survived, approaches have been transmitted, and emotion has been admitted, this perceptual shift is the most difficult and most critical 'step' included in my methodological argument. Affect—which can be accessed via songs, manuscripts, literature—unlocks a whole series of

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<sup>112</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 9.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Sacks's paragraph on writing and creativity (cited above in note 32) for a similar formulation of this happy "paradox".

<sup>114</sup> As further outlined in following sections. (It is no coincidence that an affection for the sources themselves makes it difficult to abuse the past or use it in bad faith to defend less-than-compassionate contemporary ideas. Legitimate emotional investment precludes the sort of scholarly abuse that winnows possibility. One cannot use history as a clean-up rag or an excuse when it means more than nothing.)

epistemological goods, allowing us along with Machiavelli to "become[ ] completely a part" of our subjects, to "see" (as do Lewis and Quevedo) "with others' eyes".

The result of this empathetic historical self-projection follow both an individual (i.e., internal/personal) and an intellectual track. One can understand Lewis' thesis in primarily psychological terms—as he writes, "[o]ne of the things we feel after reading a great work is 'I have got out'", I have escaped—or in light of its more expansive exploratory effects. From the "other point of view", our goal is to "g[e]t in", to "pierce[ ] the shell of some other [world] and discover[] what it is like inside."<sup>115</sup>

Good [study], therefore, though it is not [singly] an affectional or moral or intellectual activity, has something in common with *all three*. In love we escape from our self into another. In the moral sphere, every act of justice or charity involves *putting ourselves in the other person's place* and thus transcending our own competitive particularity.<sup>116</sup>

Once again, as Tsunetomo tells us, "[l]istening to the old stories and reading books are for the purpose of sloughing off one's own discrimination and attaching oneself to that of the ancients."<sup>117</sup> Oliver Sacks himself argued in a monumental (and pathbreakingly interdisciplinary, and wonderfully humane) account of twentieth-century *encephalitis lethargica* patients that it is "the imagination of other people's worlds—worlds almost inconceivably strange, yet inhabited by people just like ourselves, people, indeed,

who might be ourselves—that forms the centre of [this work]. [...] Other worlds, other lives, even though so different from our own, have the power of arousing the sympathetic imagination, of awakening an intense and often creative resonance in others. We might never have seen a Rosie R. [one of Sacks' neurological patients], but *once we have read of her we see the world differently* [cf. Lewis: it "has done things to us", and we "are not quite the same men"]. [W]e can imagine her world, with a sort of awe, and with this our world is suddenly enlarged.<sup>118</sup>

It is precisely this admission of strangeness and even danger that is most critical—and most challenging. Adam Smith's understanding of Sacksian empathy is framed in almost entirely negative terms; for this Scot, it is "by the imagination [... that] we conceive ourselves *enduring* all the same *torments*" suffered by a given subject.<sup>119</sup> Walt Whitman includes criminals and outcasts in his imaginative inquiry-list—

I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,  
The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box,  
He who has been famous and he who shall be famous after  
to-day,  
The stammerer, the well-formed person, the wasted or feeble  
person.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 4-6.

<sup>116</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 4-6 (emphasis mine).

<sup>117</sup> Tsunetomo, *Hagakure*, 12.

<sup>118</sup> Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxxviii; see also Lewis, *Reading Life*, 111 (emphasis mine).

<sup>119</sup> Adam Smith and Amartya Sen, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2009), 13-5.

<sup>120</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1958), 331-2.

—and although this poetic projection appears almost easy, its moral message is not without weight. Indeed, the core challenge addressed by Tsunetomo and echoed by so many others is linked with a willingness to invest in challenging moments, in questionable subjects—and in affinities of *thought* as well as emotion. Lewis' meditations on personal empathy are followed by a consideration of their larger ethical-intellectual effects:

We therefore delight to enter into other men's beliefs (those, say, of Lucretius or Lawrence) even though we think them *untrue*. And into their passions, though we think them *depraved*.<sup>121</sup>

(Housman's poem charts a parallel path.)<sup>122</sup> In "coming to understand anything", Lewis continues, we are divorcing ourselves from our own proprietary perspectives: we "are rejecting the facts as they are for us in favor of the facts as they are."<sup>123</sup> We "come home modified, thinking and feeling as [we] did not think and feel before."<sup>124</sup> *Thinking and feeling*. The result of such affective study is that we are able to perceive, to the fullest extent possible, historical ideas as it were *in their own sauce*. We can thus "go beyond the first impression that a [source] makes on [our] modern sensibilit[ies]. By study of things outside the [source], by comparing it with other texts, by steeping [ourselves] in the vanished period, [we] can then re-enter the [writing] with eyes more like those of its author" (and its contemporaries).<sup>125</sup>

Admitting emotion and engaging in research for individual joy are not incompatible with trustworthy or worthwhile historical analysis. (Nor, for that matter, is poetry, as Housman's own work implicitly acknowledges.)<sup>126</sup> Indeed, the eminent Egyptologist Richard Parkinson argues that we must remember "to read [...] for pleasure, while appreciating the conventions of [our subjects'] different world." From this vantage, the canny scholar should "aim not only at a critical reading—a distancing process—but also at a creative act of reconstructing".<sup>127</sup> Emotion is thus a methodological necessity that births benefits both psychological and interpretive, a symbiotic tool which bolsters each half of our overarching exegetical equation. The presence of pathos does not imply a neglect of logic: indeed, full feeling demands its own measure of thought. (Cf. Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 16: "Even our sympathy with the grief or joy of

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<sup>121</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 4 (emphasis mine).

<sup>122</sup> Poem # 110 operates along similar lines, with an additional emphasis on the relieving nature—especially for a homosexual man in Victorian England—of identifying yourself both in ancient ideas, emotions, and mores. See Housman, *Shropshire Lad*, 110:

"Loitering with a vacant eye / Along the Grecian gallery, / And brooding on my heavy ill, / I met a statue standing still. / Still in marble stone stood he, / And steadfastly he looked at me. / Well met, I thought the look would say, / 'We both were fashioned far away; / We neither knew, when we were young, / These Londoners we live among.' // Still he stood and eyed me hard, / An earnest and a grave regard: / 'What lad, drooping with your lot? / I too would be where I am not. / I too survey the endless line / Of men whose thoughts are not as mine. / Years, ere you stood up from rest, / On my neck the collar prest; / Years, when you lay down your ill, / I shall stand and bear it still. / Courage, lad, 'tis not for long: / Stand, quit you like stone, be strong.' / So I thought his look would say; / And light on me my trouble lay, / And I stepped out in flesh and bone / Manful like the man of stone."

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 4-6.

<sup>124</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 119-21.

<sup>125</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 119-21.

<sup>126</sup> See note 122.

<sup>127</sup> As Parkinson puts it: such "beauty demands not only scholarship but also responsive love" (Parkinson, *Egyptian Poems*, 17).

another, before we are informed of the cause of either, is always extremely imperfect.") For Lewis himself, 'getting out' and 'getting in' are almost entirely synonymous.

### **a. searching for sympathy**

From this affect-informed perspective, there are then two core 'prongs', two central ways to think about the role of sociality and sentiment in humanistic inquiry. The first, which is an outgrowth of Montaignian methods, demands that we identify the presence of emotion *within our sources*. Searching for and considering the role affect plays in particular historical contexts may seem like an obvious step, but its absence is intimately tied with a specific sort of distorting analysis.

My own work on Late Bronze Age Mesopotamian materials attests to the relevance of pathos-centered analysis. Allowing for an inquiry into ancient affect, when understood (as far as possible) on its own terms, can help guide research toward non-anachronizing historical conclusions. In large part, this perspectival boon results from the increased sensitivity to *contingency* that emotion can encourage. An ability to engage with the social aspects of written inter-state correspondence, for instance, decreases the likelihood that a contemporary observer will impute all motives contained therein to those upheld by reductive and transhistorical theories about human economic behavior. In the second-millennium Amarna letters,<sup>128</sup> compound affective-economic trades made between powerful Near Eastern states are only legible for what they are when their emotive function, their relational function, is considered.

What, for example, is to be made of this letter, EA 19, which frames ostensibly (and ostensibly *exclusively*) 'economic' activity in familial terms?

As far back as the time of your ancestors, they always showed love to my ancestors. You yourself went even further and showed very great love to my father. Now, in keeping with our constant and mutual love you have made it ten times greater than the love shown my father. May the gods grant it, and may Tešup, my lord, and Aman make flourish for evermore, just as it is now, th[at] mutual love of ours.<sup>129</sup>

How might this next missive be understood as evidence of something other than merciless second-millennium material intent?

I read and reread the tablet that he brought to me, and I listened to its words. Very pleasing indeed were the words of my brother. I rejoiced on that day as if I had seen my brother in person. I made that day and night a festive occasion.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> To pick but one relevant example...

<sup>129</sup> William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>130</sup> Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 47.



Other eras produce related examples; the medieval Indian Ocean, for instance, gives us this remarkable exchange between business partners:

I was glad when I looked at your letter, even before I had taken notice of its contents. [...] You mentioned, my master, that you were longing for me. Believe me that I feel twice as strongly and even more than what you have described.<sup>131</sup>

To the casual observer, the role of relationships within these three texts is more than obvious. But that same key set of affective takeaways is not always recognized quite as readily as one might assume. A number of critical epistolary features (primarily those involving interpersonal bonds) become effectively invisible when viewed from one specific sort of pseudo-empirical vantage.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, an intentional search for emotion is necessary to enable inquiry into each exchange's social significance. According to the precepts of formalist economic thought, for instance, everything *but* the math is mere couching, totally transparent, that fails to mask a fundamentally economic core. One must look for affect to see affect; in the absence of such an effort, rich troves of idiosyncratic cultural mores become flattened into unimportant niceties that are packed around each letter's 'true'—i.e., purely material—essence.

In basic terms, then, a sincere engagement with emotion *in* sources allows for less reductive cultural analysis. More specifically, interaction with affect encourages inquiry into the particularized (and culturally specific) mores that mediate human interaction. Armed with these temporally situated and contextually contingent insights, even the most conciliatory scholar will have a hard time reconciling their conclusions with those drawn by formalist thinkers.<sup>133</sup>

## **b. using sympathy**

The second 'prong' of this paper's applied emotional method-thesis foregrounds our own internal weather. It is clear that an ability to mobilize empathy allows investigators to inhabit other eras and 'borrow' other eyes (skills that help, too, to enforce a necessary degree of emotional separation between any given scholar and their own immediate *modern* context).<sup>134</sup> It is this affective ability both to recognize in-source pathos and to temporarily *participate* in said pathos that allows us to better understand which aspects of human activity are universal, transhistorical, and which are malleable, influenced at each era by different organizations of cultural force.

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<sup>131</sup> Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (London: Granta, 2012), 18.

<sup>132</sup> See subsection b. below for more on this modernist lens.

<sup>133</sup> And demanded by transhistorical theories of immutable avarice—i.e., academic schemas which seek to make the modern moment universal. See below.

<sup>134</sup> Once again, cf. Lewis, *Reading Life*, 119-21: "[I]t would seem to me to be a waste of the past if we were content to see in the literature of every bygone age only the reflection of our own faces."

Reading the Amarna letters always reminds me of Walt Whitman's *The Sleepers*, a poem that serves wonderfully to remind us of the *privilege* which we as observers possess—and the humility we must carry with us as interlopers in another world:<sup>135</sup>

I wander all night in my vision,  
Stepping with light feet, swiftly and noiselessly stepping and  
stopping,  
Bending with open eyes over the shut eyes of sleepers, [...]   
Pausing, gazing, bending, and stopping.

How solemn they look there, stretch'd and still,  
How quiet they breathe, the little children in their cradles.<sup>136</sup>

*This* is how it feels to explore the archives. Historical inquiry gives us access to this most extraordinary of activities; and it allows us, at its best, to view our subjects as sleepers, to suspend condemnation or evaluation so that we might (once again) "enter into [their] beliefs, though [ ] we think them untrue, [and] their passions, though we think them depraved."<sup>137</sup>

Montaigne's 1580 essay *Of Cannibals* is an apt demonstration of this time-bound attempt to 'step out' of one's contemporary self. Writing of the Tupinambá people indigenous to present-day Bahia, Brazil, our early-modern Frenchman claims that "[t]here is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told,

except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice; for indeed it seems we have no other test of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and customs of the country we live in."<sup>138</sup>

Affective analysis allows us to acquire other 'tests'.

Curiosity, a virtue abundant in *Of Cannibals*, illuminates yet another benefit produced by Whitman's immersive technique. Humanistic inquiry permits us to pause time and wander at our will, stepping and stopping, but the remove we enjoy does not (as Whitman himself suggests) preclude personal attachment.

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<sup>135</sup> For a dramatic example of the ecstatic moments that attend archival discovery, see George, *Gilgamesh*, xxiii re. George Smith's rediscovery of the Epic: "Smith took the tablet and began to read over the lines which Reedy [the conservator who had cleaned the tablet] had brought to light; and when he saw that they contained the portion of the legend he had hoped to find there, he said, 'I am the first man to read that after two thousand years of oblivion.' Setting the table on the table, he jumped up and rushed about the room in a great state of excitement, and, to the astonishment of those present, began to undress himself!"

<sup>136</sup> Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 331-2.

<sup>137</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 185. This train of thought continues on pp. 95-6: "Is there any opinion so bizarre [...] that habit has not planted and established it by law in the regions where she saw fit to do so? [...] Barbarians are no more marvelous to us than we are to them, nor for better cause; as everyone would admit if everyone knew how, after perusing these new examples, to *reflect on his own and compare them sanely*."

Indeed, a pure and joyful desire to learn is one of the most impactful tools that can help separate us from our own enculturated cognitive frameworks.<sup>139</sup> It demonstrates, at the very least, a willingness to try.

But it is difficult work. Enjoyable, often, and sometimes beautiful—but never easy. Even with all the right emotional and methodological pieces precisely in place, phenomena abound which require great effort to accept or even understand. It is for this reason that an ability to engage in suspended disbelief must also join our growing methodological toolkit. Because every contemporary exegete's automatic interpretive horizons are limited by those outcomes that appear plausible today, an openness to the possibility of ostensible impossibilities—*human* impossibilities, that is, not scientific or mathematic ones—must preface every inquiry. (*Mistletoe blooms.*) Such investment does not preclude the eventual rejection of uncertain historical hypotheses, just as Whitman's sleepy 'relativism' does not make moral judgment moot, but it does enable engagement with more possibilities than might otherwise be the case. As Montaigne writes:

indeed, I set down more things than I believe; for neither can I affirm things that I doubt, not suppress what I have heard.<sup>140</sup>

Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu (henceforth 'Montesquieu') furnishes us with an ideal example of this principle's necessity, writing that because "most [antique nations] lived under governments that had virtue for their principle", when this virtue "existed in its full vigor, they performed actions unknown in our time, and which astound our petty souls."<sup>141</sup> The message from both Montesquieu and Montaigne is that humans as a species are capable of extraordinary feats, many of which would be considered rare at any chronological point—but some of these options are understood to be more or less imaginable depending on the era. With the right interpretive 'eyes', though, pessimistic misperceptions can be overcome. As Montaigne says, "[t]hese examples from strange lands are not strange if we consider what we regularly experience: how much habit stupefies our senses."<sup>142</sup>

In essence: expect the unexpected. Mistletoe can bloom.

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Cicero, *On Obligations*, 7: "This is why, when we are free from unavoidable business and concerns, we are eager to see, hear, and learn things. We reckon that the acquisition of knowledge of hidden or remarkable features is necessary for the happy life."

<sup>140</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 875.

<sup>141</sup> Montesquieu, *Selected Political Writings*, trans. Melvin Richter (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1990), 138.

<sup>142</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 94.

In what applied analytical sphere are both above-outlined halves of this affective method (finding feelings in sources, using feelings to interpret them) most critical? Most needed?

My Amarna work is once again relevant. The primary epistemological 'enemy' of exploratory emotion and its contingent conclusions centers on the interpretation of economic conduct. Many of the transhistorical assumptions so loathed by Lewis involve, in our current world, universalizing ideas about human behavior and human nature. The most poisonous of all derive their dogma from monetary hypotheses. David Hume, for example, declared all humans greedy "knaves" and built a philosophy upon it; David Warburton and Steven David claim quite similarly that contemporary economic 'laws' apply equally well to every era.<sup>143</sup> Montesquieu, however, counters Hume's sweeping claims about the "natural depravity of mankind" by asserting instead that

[m]an is a flexible being. [...] He is equally capable of learning what is his own true nature once it has been made clear to him; and of losing even his awareness of having a nature, if this knowledge were to be concealed from him.<sup>144</sup>

Indeed, demonstrating great faith in the positive potential of human culture, Montesquieu states that it is "unreasonable [even] to impute to men [...] the desire to subjugate one another. The idea of [...] domination is so complex and depends upon so many other ideas"—in other words, is so *contingent*—"that it could not be the first to occur to men."<sup>145</sup> From this vantage, voracious oppression and unhindered avidity are to be understood as *cultural developments*.

Cicero and Xenophon provide similarly optimistic inputs. Writing on the nature of ethical obligation, our public-minded Roman claims that "the [humanly attainable] foundation of justice is good faith".<sup>146</sup> Xenophon, discussing the Persian king Cyrus, emphasizes opportunity, arguing that positive community "does not belong among those tasks that are impossible, or even among those that are difficult, if one does it with knowledge."<sup>147</sup> From this vantage, an attempt to employ carefully 'credulous'<sup>148</sup> (rather than pessimistic) assumptions allows investigators to identify textual reflections of common humanity, discourages reductive overgeneralization, and can even (by extension) promote the creation of less limiting economic theories. But an unwillingness to consider affect and its unexpected implications traps cognition in an ever-shrinking cell of self-referential 'logic'. *Not* assuming a Humean, Warburtonian, or

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<sup>143</sup> See David A. Warburton, *Macroeconomics from the Beginning: The General Theory, Ancient Markets, and the Rate of Interest* (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 2003); Steven David, "Realism, Constructivism, and the Amarna Letters," essay, in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 54–67; and David Hume, *Political Writings*, ed. Stuart D. Warner and Donald W. Livingston (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994).

<sup>144</sup> Montesquieu, *Political Writings*, 108.

<sup>145</sup> Montesquieu, *Political Writings*, 112.

<sup>146</sup> Cicero, *On Obligations*, 10.

<sup>147</sup> Xenophon, *The Education of Cyrus*, trans. Wayne Ambler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 10 & 22.

<sup>148</sup> (Or maybe 'open'.)

Davidian 'natural depravity' empowers us to craft better communities, to hold less dispiriting beliefs; making overstated materialist arguments based upon flawed and circumstantial tenets leads only to the unhappy end we have already achieved.<sup>149</sup> Determinism is a teleological tool.

It seems, as one becomes older,  
That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere  
sequence—  
Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy  
Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,  
Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past.<sup>150</sup>

It is clear, then, that the admission of emotion can be understood as an almost anthropological proposition. Avoiding Humean overgeneralization requires uncovering evidence to the contrary—and the most salient sort of evidence (cf. subsection a.'s Amarna letters) demands emotion as an epistemological prerequisite. How lucky, then, that this undertaking encourages positive perspectives in us, in we, the examiners. As above, it is an ability both to search *for* sentiment and to experience investigative pathos which allows for better ends.

The generalized benefits of such an approach are not easy to miss. But what, in a more schematized form, are those most salient goods provided by affective inquiry?

### **1. Logical**

Our first and most traditional intellectual outcome foregrounds logic and its proper use. Like any set of historical assumptions, 'logical' assumptions are likely, if not made carefully, to draw some of their explanatory power from concepts that are not in fact universal. In describing the pitfalls and exigencies of contemporary historiography, Van De Mieroop (see also Part One above) cautions that, while a "core requirement for our writing of history is that we present what we think we know [...] to our audiences in ways that are logical", it is not uncommon for us to "weave a narrative that simply seems to make sense of what we have observed about the subject of our inquiry.

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<sup>149</sup> For the inadequacy of materialist, algorithmic thought, see Sacks, *Awakenings*, 226-7. High-quality analysis demands both mechanical/quantitative and metaphysical approaches, but larger understandings (qualitative frameworks) must 'come first':

"Both types of discourse are complete in themselves; they can neither include nor exclude one another; they are complementary; and both are vital in understanding the world. [...] Leibniz stresses, however, that metaphysics comes first: that although the workings of the world never contravene mechanical considerations, they only make sense, and become fully intelligible, in light of metaphysical considerations; that the world's mechanics subserve its design."

<sup>150</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 39.

Here lies the greatest danger, however. What seems logical to us is informed by our own vision of the world, a vision that derives from our [particular, current] historical condition. Much of that vision is unconscious, and we often become aware of its limitations only due to external influences.<sup>151</sup>

In this attempt to avoid fallacy, extra-'logical' emotion—so often construed as an enemy of reason—is the central factor which protects one's ability to build historically sustainable arguments.<sup>152</sup> Whitmanian (or Machiavellian) self-projection serves as the primary practice that gives us access to Van De Mieroop's "external influences", to escape from Montaigne's "hoary beard" of "custom".<sup>153</sup>

## 2. Personal/Perspectival

At its best, affect-sensitive exegesis can produce positive cognitive results both for twitchy people like me *and* for all those who are willing to engage in good investigative faith. Non-anachronizing humanistic or historical inquiry encourages optimism via 'Machiavellian' means—that is, by promoting meaningful contact between humans of different eras,<sup>154</sup> by highlighting cultural possibilities, by contradicting Hume's dark vision of eternal avarice, and even by showing us how *not* to study (cf. Montaigne's miserable Plautus-speller).<sup>155</sup> It is this expanded view both of personal/academic as well as collective options which allows us to imagine different and better worlds. A commitment not to diminish ourselves by excluding interpretive affect prevents us from diminishing the past, from narrowing a historical phenomena to fit within the confines of a contemporary *Weltanschauung*; and this refusal to limit history in turn disallows the collective diminishment of our present potential, our common civic or political paths.

## 3. Civic

*Not diminishing ourselves [i.e., making ourselves emotionless] --> not diminishing the past; not diminishing the past --> not diminishing ourselves.*

This final step is especially necessary now, in an age of jaw-gapingly horrible headlines, at the end (in the middle? the beginning?) of an era marked by unprecedented human catastrophe. That historical study can actually alter our cognitive processes is one of the most powerful bits of knowledge that serve to anchor me whenever our cultural hurricane is at full howl. Lewis' insight into the ways such study "do[es] things

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<sup>151</sup> Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts*, 164.

<sup>152</sup> I.e., arguments based only upon those claims which we have determined to be either specifically applicable or (truly) humanly universal.

<sup>153</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 101-2.

<sup>154</sup> Some of whom will find the only available images of their particular sensibilities reflected in a side-corridor of human history (cf. Housman's poem).

It is also (often) positive contact. Cf. Adam Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 13-5: "[But... n]either is it in those circumstances only, which create pain or sorrow, that call forth our fellow-feeling. Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator."

<sup>155</sup> Think once again of Stoppard's Housman, for whom a whole day's work can be filled by continually removing and re-inserting the same disputed comma...

to us" that allow us to "get out" of our own time, to "get in" to another era, and to return home better and wiser feels like redemption.<sup>156</sup>

But the things that study 'does' are yet more expansive, and indeed can claim both psychological, perspectival, *as well as* practical import. As Lewis writes,

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. [...] All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook—even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it. Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually *assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny*. They thought they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united—united with each other and against earlier and later ages—by a *great mass of common assumptions*. [...] None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern [texts. ...]. The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading [old sources]. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. *But not the same mistakes*. [...] Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction.<sup>157</sup>

What a perfect way to tackle Hume—and what a perfect way to illustrate the most compelling reason for doing so. If there is one single means by which we might avoid the most egregious civic pitfalls and collective errors, the dullest mistakes and least helpful trials, it is this: a thinking engagement with our human past. Self-government—to pick a critical example—demands it.

Mary Beard writes in a 2019 Hertford lecture that "one of the greatest and [most] mind changing intellectual rewards of studying [ancient history] is this it [...] turns us into analysts and anthropologists, not only of it, but of ourselves."<sup>158</sup> It is not only for inquiry's sake that we engage with the past; it is not only for our own internal benefit that our thinking is reshaped. Indeed, it is for the collective ends envisioned by Lewis that a culture's nearsightedness must be "palliated", balanced out by the addition of other (and older) minds. Good judgment requires a "clean sea breeze" of historical possibility.

#### 4. Civic ramifications

The achievement of such carefully clarified judgment is an essential goal, although a goal which requires further explanation. It is not this project's intent to argue that any part of the human past should be used as a cut-and-paste sourcebook for civic decision-making, nor does its author seek to advocate for triumphalist exercises in historically 'derived' self-rationalization. Humanistic inquiry can act as a

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<sup>156</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 111.

<sup>157</sup> That is, if they've been differentially enculturated. Lewis, *Reading Life*, 46-8.

<sup>158</sup> Beard, "What's the Point of Classics?"

wonderful boon to civic life not because it provides positive instruction but because it enforces intellectual humility—and because it demands an expansion of perspectival horizons. There is nothing more conducive to the creative conception of public solutions than a generous approach towards historical understanding. Indeed, Machiavelli's excerpt about "the malignity of [his] times" depends upon this very view. For our Florentine, it is "the duty

of a good man to teach others the good you yourself were unable to accomplish due to the malignity of the times or to fortune, so that among the many people capable of such actions, some of those more favored by heaven may accomplish it.<sup>159</sup>

Who better than us? Without a projected audience of future scholars, Machiavelli's hopes fall flat on their face.

As is implied by this above-invoked passage from the *Discourses on Livy* (see also section 4), the 'good' that we are meant to accomplish can also impart more granular lessons.<sup>160</sup> The core of our task as historical exegetes is indeed to discern overarching patterns and expansive possibilities, but Machiavelli's goal prods us too towards increasing affective specificity. Livy himself wrote that "[t]his is the particularly healthy and productive element of history:

to behold object lessons of every kind and model as though they were displayed on a conspicuous monument. From this, you should choose for yourself and for your state what to imitate and what to avoid as abominable in its origin or abominable in its outcome.<sup>161</sup>

Montaigne understands the past in similar terms, and argues quite explicitly that historical chronicles are "a nursery of ethical and political reflections" best used "for the provision and adornment of *those who hold a place in the management of the world*."<sup>162</sup> Cicero's definition of *prudentia* employs similarly historico-civic terms; for him, the past provides "knowledge of things to be sought and things to be avoided."<sup>163</sup> Wisdom, here, "embraces concern for the community", while mere knowledge lacks a shared or common use.<sup>164</sup>

None of these lessons, however, are helpful if they act merely to reinforce contemporary understandings. A nursery of ethical and political reflections—things to be sought and avoided—is only advantageous if it

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<sup>159</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 152.

<sup>160</sup> And positive precepts!

<sup>161</sup> Livy and Valerie M. Warrior, *The History of Rome: Books 1-5* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 2006), 3-4.

<sup>162</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 873.

<sup>163</sup> Cicero, *On Obligations*, xlix. Indeed, Cicero allows us to further define Livy's focus: in *Obligations*, the *whole point* (the *entire telos*) is the common—the community's—good.

<sup>164</sup> Cicero, *On Obligations*, xxi. Cf. xlix: "Wisdom: The search for truth is to promote happiness and useful knowledge. It should not divert us from service to the community. Service to the community takes precedence over knowledge. But such service is performed by teaching and by writing." Cf. Smith, *Moral Sentiments*, 275 on the use of learning: "The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher can scarce compensate the neglect of [...] active duty." Cicero goes so far as to say that "to be diverted from public service by enthusiasm for research is denial of one's duty" (9). Indeed, philosophers risk "fall[ing] into that other trap, when their zeal for learning proves an obstacle, causing them to abandon the persons whom they should defend." Such scholars "are guilty [of injustice] by becoming deserters from the life of the community [and the wellbeing of their field/study], for they contribute none of their pursuits, efforts or skills to the common weal" (11).



presents us with something new. To this end, Livy emphasizes the positivity which must accompany inquiry, the emphasis on alternate *ways of being* that must form the initial focus of our investigation. A dedicated analysis must allow the past to impart unexpected ideas about "the *kinds of lives* men lived; what their moral principles were; by what individuals and by what skills" their virtue was born and grew.<sup>165</sup> The imperative here is to *know* these humans, to learn from them: a task which requires empathy and openness, a Whitmanian willingness to inhabit others' lives.

Indeed, the sloughing off of temporal provincialism advocated by Lewis (see sec. 5, subsection 2) acts as a prerequisite for Livian learning. Machiavelli claims that historical insights are used in many fields—medicine, entertainment, law—but laments the sad reality that "no prince, republic, or military leader can be found who has recourse to the examples of the ancients."<sup>166</sup> History is not used for public derivation of possible values. But why? Because Machiavelli's audience searches for facts alone, for grime and grit and glory; because it does not have "a true understanding of the histories, so that in reading them, [it] fail[s] to draw out of them that *sense* or to taste that *flavor* they intrinsically possess."<sup>167</sup> As Montaigne argues, our goal must not be to seek data or disenchantment but rather "to bring back knowledge of the *characters* and *ways* of those nations, and to *rub and polish our brains by contact with those of others*."<sup>168</sup>

After all, the object of inquiry is wellbeing; in truth, "either reason is a mockery, or it must aim solely at our [health], and the sum of its labors must tend to make us live well."<sup>169</sup> This, says Montaigne, is "the most valuable of the arts":<sup>170</sup> in fact, "the true mirror of our discourse is the course of our lives".<sup>171</sup> That Montaigne's collective vision is primarily affectional should be no great surprise; as Montesquieu wrote, even government "is like everything else in this world: if it is to be preserved, it must first be loved."<sup>172</sup> Affect in its humanistic role mirrors affect in its civic role: for each, an expansion of self and a temporary suspension of discrimination allow for more productive final judgments.

It is indeed clear that 'stepping out' in an empathetic way does not preclude condemnation. Such actions serve, instead, to marry Montesquieuan love with something that James Baldwin might call 'critical virtue'. Inquiry demands love, just as government does, and a historical vantage makes both possible—as well as their healthful inverse. (An ability to critique is... well... *critical*.) In the end, Montaigne's

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<sup>165</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 15.

<sup>167</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourses*, 15 (emphasis mine).

<sup>168</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 136 (emphasis mine).

<sup>169</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 67.

<sup>170</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 151.

<sup>171</sup> It is an assertion that rings especially clear when understood in collective civic terms.

Montaigne's p. 144, understood as a Leviathan metaphor, is also apt: "The soul in which philosophy dwells should by its health make even the body healthy. [...] The surest sign of wisdom is constant cheerfulness." Cf. p. 146: "it is philosophy that teaches us to live".

<sup>172</sup> Montesquieu, *Political Writings*, 138-9. In full: "Such love is particular to democracies. Only in them is government entrusted to every citizen. [...] Such a love, demanding the constant preference for public over self-interest", is self-effacing. [...] In republics, everything demands upon establishing such love."

argument about cannibals has a comparative limit; instead of condemning others, we should first avoid condemnation—and then condemn *ourselves*.

I am not sorry that we notice the barbarous horror of such acts, but I am heartily sorry that, judging their faults rightly, we should be so blind to our own.<sup>173</sup>

So too with Baldwin, who writes that he "love[s] America more than any other country in the world"—and that it is "exactly for this reason [he] insist[s] on the right to criticize her perpetually".<sup>174</sup> History cannot be used only as source for fear and terror, for judgment and shame, but the critical process Baldwin prioritizes is not incompatible with less limiting methodologies. Indeed, the best tool available for contemporary discernment (even censure) is a fully varied and only partially positive past, a realistic *and* unfamiliar example against which we might more clearly contrast our current selves.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 189. Cf. (once again) pp. 94 & 6: "These examples from strange lands are not strange if we consider what we regularly experience: how much habit stupefies *our* senses. [...] Barbarians are no more marvelous to us than we are to them, nor for better cause; as everyone would admit *if everyone knew how, after perusing these new examples, to reflect on his own and compare them sanely.*"

<sup>174</sup> James Baldwin, *Baldwin: Collected Essays* (New York, NY: Library of America, 1998), 291.

<sup>175</sup> This process also allows us to 'step in' to the shadow of unsettling historical actors/eras—an exercise which is necessary both to allow for positive discoveries *and* to serve as a cautionary measure, a way for us to realize that we are perhaps capable of frightening things, and to avoid exonerating ourselves before the fact. Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 52-4, 69, 126, 251-2.

## 6. COMMUNICATIVE GOALS

How, then, do I propose that the products of such study—transmitted well, approached with affect, used for collective civic ends—should be formulated and conveyed? How ought we *write* the results of this emancipated (and interdisciplinary, and multi-modal) inquiry?

Once again: art and affect are the keys that unlock the emotion that unlocks the non-anachronizing analysis that unlocks the historical possibilities that make our outlook better—and our human horizons less confining.

But if art and affect are so central and so critical, what is to be done with the disciplinary strictures that dictate academic composition?

Marc Van De Mieroop begins his own concluding chapter on the *Writing of History* with a quote from Paul Veyne, the great 'narrative' historiographer, which describes history as "a creative art" and historiography as "a true novel".<sup>176</sup> Montaigne likewise combines similar categories of composition, opining that both history and "poetry, which I love with particular affection", belong together.<sup>177</sup>

Even Cervantes emphasizes the affective aspects of ideal humanistic scholarship. In his tongue-in-cheek (and semi-satirical) account, "reading [...] history

should move the melancholy to laughter, increase the joy of the cheerful, not irritate the simple, fill the clever with admiration for its invention, not give the serious reason to scorn it, and allow the prudent to praise it.<sup>178</sup>

The goal in this instance is not merely to produce valid knowledge via affect-enlightened exegesis but also to *transmit* that knowledge in ways which mirror its beneficial Montaignian core. Indeed, Cervantes' aspiration is to create literary and intellectual offspring that "fill the world with wonder and joy".<sup>179</sup>

If there is one belief common to Veyne and Cervantes and Montaigne, it is that humanistic writing must be just that: humane. Doing with scholarship what is often achieved via poetry or even music lies at the core of each author's compositional outlook. Pathos and art must be not only items of historical consideration (i.e., categories of evidence admitted to the analytical table) but also characteristics of our own inquiry, as argued above, *and of our writing*, as this section hopes to contend.

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<sup>176</sup> Van De Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts*, 161.

<sup>177</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 129.

<sup>178</sup> Cervantes, *Quixote*, 8.

<sup>179</sup> Cervantes, *Quixote*, 3. (This statement stands in stark contrast with the false and facile erudition that our Spaniard satirizes throughout his world-historical text. See esp. pp. 6-7)

Livy, for one, states that we "should begin with good omens and, if we had the same custom as the poets, with prayers and entreaties to the gods."<sup>180</sup> The aesthetics of academic prose are not inconsequential; much the same can be said of such text's approach towards pathos. Accessing affect and engaging in Lewisian 'palliation' are activities best encouraged by the presence of lively writing. What, in the absence of emotive composition, might allow us to unlock Sacks' glorious state of creative flow?<sup>181</sup> How are the insights gleaned from good-faith study to be communicated in civic spaces—public spaces—if they are obscured by impenetrable prose? It is

[E]very phrase  
And sentence that is right (where every word is at home,  
Taking its place to support the others,  
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,  
An easy commerce of the old and the new<sup>182</sup>

which allow for actual understanding. The *absence* of such skill both disallows affect and discourages those important benefits (personal, psychological, public) that emotion can provide.<sup>183</sup> As Sacks claims, those "pallid, abstract, [and] medical" writing styles preferred by our current academy are incompatible with any real attempt at "know[ing] and lov[ing], recogniz[ing] [subjects] as people."<sup>184</sup> Bad writing centers charts and facts in a way that deadens the "sense" or "flavor" which Livy upholds.<sup>185</sup> It precludes access to the civic benefits conferred by holistic comprehension. And, as Lewis complains, this means that it "is possible to 'do History' for years without knowing at the end *what it felt like* to be an Anglo Saxon eorl, a cavalier, an eighteenth-century country gentleman."<sup>186</sup>

Sacks continues in a similar vein by lamenting that

One mulls over whole libraries of papers, couched in the 'objective', styleless style *de rigueur* in [his field]; one's head buzzes with 'facts', figures, lists, schedules, inventories, calculations, ratings, quotients, indices, statistics, formulae, graphs, and whatnot; everything 'calculated, cast-up, balanced, and proved' [...]. And nowhere, *nowhere* does one find any colour, reality, or warmth; nowhere any residue of the living experience....<sup>187</sup>

Montaigne's complaints are strikingly similar, and act also to unveil the damage done by lifeless scholarship. This is, it emerges, an injury inflicted not only upon comprehension and communication but

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<sup>180</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, 4. See also p. xx for the idea that historiography could have been (for Livy) almost indistinguishable from genre-categories like poetry and oratory.

<sup>181</sup> What else could transport us into that wondrous mode in which the doctor feels he "can bypass or transcend much of [his] own personality, [his] neuroses"? (Sacks, *Awakenings*, 147).

<sup>182</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 58.

<sup>183</sup> Poor quality historiography pays no heed to its stylistic substrate.

<sup>184</sup> Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxvii.

<sup>185</sup> See note 168.

<sup>186</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 28 (emphasis mine).

<sup>187</sup> Sacks, *Awakenings*, 230-1. It is a crisis in the sciences, but an even more unnecessary and thus disappointing trend in humanistic fields.

also upon the continued public relevance of a given discipline. In these pages, Montaigne writes, "we find thorny and unpleasant precepts and empty and fleshless words that you cannot get a hold on,

nothing that rouses your mind. [...] It is a strange fact that things should be in such a pass in our century that [my field], even with people of understanding, should be an empty and fantastic name, a thing of no use and no value, both *in common opinion* and in fact.<sup>188</sup>

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What is to be done? What actionable paths might be available? What examples of effective *affective* writing can be identified today?

Interdisciplinary or even genre-bridging styles seem to be the most common and compelling answer to Montaigne's lament. Amitav Ghosh's 1992 *In an Antique Land* serves as one excellent sample, including as it does aspects drawn from allegorical, biographical, anthropological, historical, scientific, and even literary approaches.<sup>189</sup> Sacks himself can also be understood as a potential remedy; writing of his own struggle to find a literary-epistemological home, he claims that

no model [...] seemed to suit my requirements—for what I was seeing, and what I needed to convey, was neither purely classical [or quantitative] nor purely romantic, but seemed to move into the profound realm of allegory or myth.<sup>190</sup>

Reconciling the demands and limitations of different fields is no small feat,<sup>191</sup> a challenge which is only amplified by the interconnected nature of writing and thinking.<sup>192</sup> It has already been argued that the central benefits accrued by humanistic inquiry cannot be conveyed via mechanistic prose.<sup>193</sup> That the opponents of this approach take exception both to the style *and content* of such scholarship is, then, only to be expected. (Sacks relates that his own 'allegorical' articles appeared to elicit "a sort of epistemological [...] anxiety [or] rage".)<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 143 (emphasis mine). Cf. Ghosh's *Antique Land* (236-7) for scientific inquiry as part of a tragic, hegemonic, history-erasing discourse.

<sup>189</sup> Ghosh, *Antique Land*, jacket blurb: the book is "a mixture of history, travelogue, social anthropology and personal memoir. Ghosh skillfully draws our attention to parallels and contrasts to both [...] medieval and [...] modern stories."

<sup>190</sup> Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

<sup>191</sup> See Sacks, *Awakenings*, 287 re. A.E. Housman's poetry-vs-philology point: "When I was young, I was torn between two passionate, conflicting interests and ambitions—the pursuit of science and the pursuit of art. I found no reconciliation until I became a physician."

<sup>192</sup> See Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxxi, for Sacks' description of the realm beyond which academic writing is not often permitted to wander: "I enjoyed writing [untraditional] letters, and as far as I could gather, readers of these journals enjoyed reading them too. There was something about their format and style that allowed me to convey the wonder of the clinical experience [...] in a way that would have been quite impossible in a medical article."

<sup>193</sup> See (once again) Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxvii.

<sup>194</sup> Sacks, *Awakenings*, xxxii.

If ways of writing are ways of knowing, this question of composition also entails a related inquiry into the *kind* of information that is sought. Like Livy, my goal in this project is to seek a 'sense' or 'taste', to "rub and polish [my] brain[] by contact with those of others."<sup>195</sup> But there are other options. What sort of truth does one desire? The truth that is in numbers, or the truth that is in facts, or that more universalizable type of 'truth' which reveals certain insights about the human experience?<sup>196</sup> In the words of Oscar Wilde, transposed into an imagined conversation with Tom Stoppard's A. E. Housman: is it all true?

On the contrary, it's only fact. Truth is quite another thing and is the work of the imagination.<sup>197</sup>

It is this emphasis on imagination which loops us back to the horizon-widening power of humanistic thought. Montaigne's approach to historical truth involves an accent placed on possibility, a focus designed to resonate with Wilde's "work of the imagination" (work that is not, in fact, necessarily counterfactual). "[O]f the different readings that histories [...] give," Montaigne says, "I take for my use the one that is most rare and memorable. There are authors whose end is to tell what has happened. Mine, if I could attain it, would be to talk about what *can* happen."<sup>198</sup>

Mistletoe blooms.

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<sup>195</sup> Livy, *History of Rome*, 136.

<sup>196</sup> See David Nirenberg and Ricardo Nirenberg, "Knowledge from Pebbles: What Can Be Counted, and What Cannot," *KNOW: A Journal on the Formation of Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (2018): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1086/696970>; see also Jill Lepore, "Facts, Numbers, Data: A Brief History of Evidence", accessed June 10, 2023, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/jlepore/presentations/facts-numbers-data-brief-history-evidence>.

Barry Kemp's *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2006), 4-5 contains a similarly relevant discussion: "In saying 'charting progress' we are aligning ourselves to a particular belief: that mankind is set world-wide upon a course towards the universal triumph of western reason and values, and that old ways generally are superseded by new ways, which are better. We can accept that this is true for technology and for the rational understanding of material phenomena. But rational knowledge has proved to be far more fragile than knowledge about the deeper meaning of things that people feel is conveyed by religion. The latter has a staying-power and a vigour that suggest it lies close to the heart of the human intellect."

Also cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973): "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not a [...] science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning."

Hume's pp. 101-2 contain an inverted assertion: "So great is the force of laws, and of particular forms of government, and so little dependence have they on the humours and tempers of men, that consequences almost as general and certain may sometimes be deduced from them, as any which the mathematical sciences afford us"

<sup>197</sup> Stoppard, *Invention of Love*, 92. Cf. Dickinson, *Envelope Poems*, 92: "But are not / all Facts Dreams / as soon as we put / them behind / us—"

<sup>198</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 91.

## 7. CODA

The last core ingredient necessary for successful written inquiry is, as introduced above, a healthful dash of intellectual humility. Given that the central goal of this compound undertaking is to access an intangible sort of perceptual good, rather than a set of specific facts, it might appear as though our project has a greater likelihood of attaining its ultimate ends than does, say, a needle-in-the-haystack search for obscure material data. But the challenge inherent in any attempt to holistically inhabit an unfamiliar worldview is not to be underestimated. Circumstantial cognitive parameters are wickedly difficult to escape.<sup>199</sup> What additional methodological considerations might help us avoid overconfidence?

A focus on process over product can shift thinking away from traditional models of historical certainty and towards an acknowledgement of contingency. As Eliot writes:

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.<sup>200</sup>

Placing increased emphasis upon the importance of *investigation*, viewed as a verb, reduces the pressure to produce Final Results: cut-and-dry conclusions that tell us Measurable Things about Human History. One might note here that Livy's 'sense' or 'flavor' is entirely compatible with interpretive ambiguity,<sup>201</sup> that Machiavellian (or Quevedean) conversations with the dead do not demand mathematical reports. Indeed, a move away from conventional conclusions leaves more room for the sort of expansive exploration that undergirds (say) Lewis' thesis about civic benefits. In the words of our beloved Montaigne: we are "born to quest after truth; to possess it belongs to a greater power."<sup>202</sup>

For most of us, this is the aim  
Never here to be realized;  
Who are only undefeated  
Because we have gone on trying.<sup>203</sup>

As is true of artistic work, or of musical performance, the act of preparing—of *thinking* and *reading*—must be given its proper value. Seeing the 'approach' as a goal of itself is a productive choice in methodological terms, in that it discourages hubris; viewing means *as ends* also allows for greater immersion in the material at hand, a processual benefit which likewise supports psychological goods. Montaigne himself goes so far as to claim that

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<sup>199</sup> Cf. Montaigne's "hoary beard" of custom (cited in note 14, among others).

<sup>200</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 27.

<sup>201</sup> Livy's willingness to cite multiple versions of a given story (and to acknowledge the presence of uncertainty) is especially salient.

<sup>202</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 860.

<sup>203</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 45.

in all the pleasures that we know, [...] the pursuit [most] pleasant. The attempt is made fragrant by the quality of the thing it aims at, for it is a good part of the effect, and consubstantial with it.<sup>204</sup>

In the end, then, the question "is not who will hit the ring, but who will make the best run at it."<sup>205</sup> The "most perfect" participants have "been quite content to aspire to it and to approach it, without possessing it."<sup>206</sup> But if ends are synonymous with means, can we truly say that we have not achieved our goal? "Did you think would never arrive where you never ceased going?"<sup>207</sup> As Montaigne tells us, the right perspective on human study allows us to "get there", to tell us "the way".<sup>208</sup>

There may be no endpoint, no perfection. "Every time we 'win' we shall know that our victory is impermanent." But if we "insist on asking for the moral of the story, that is its moral: a recall from facile optimism and wailing pessimism alike, to that hard, yet not quite desperate, insight into [the] unchanging predicament by which heroic ages have lived."<sup>209</sup> In Eliot's eyes,

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost  
And found and lost again and again: and now, under  
                  conditions  
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.<sup>210</sup>

The search is not always joyful, the insights not always good. Our human tale is not an easy thing to know. But "[a] people without history / Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern / Of timeless moments"; and "[t]he past", writes historian Jill Lepore, is both "an inheritance, a gift[,] and a burden. [...] You carry it everywhere. There's nothing for it but to get to know it."<sup>211</sup>

Behind "your father's face", as Baldwin told his nephew, "are all those faces which were his." And to ignore those faces and facts is to ignore a burden that is also a gift.

There is nothing for it but to get to know it; there is no good to be done without it. It is an inheritance, an obligation, the faces behind faces behind faces. Reckoning with ourselves through the study of our past keeps us honest and humble. It is both a personal necessity and a collective imperative—a shared practice

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<sup>204</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 68.

<sup>205</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 860.

<sup>206</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 68.

<sup>207</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 80.

<sup>208</sup> Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, 146.

<sup>209</sup> Lewis, *Reading Life*, 109. Cf. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York, NY: Ballantine Fantasy, 1973), 104: "There was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valor, and great deeds that were not wholly vain."

<sup>210</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 31. Cf. Machiavelli's excerpt on preserving knowledge for future generations (note 92). See also Susan Cooper, *Over Sea, Under Stone* (New York, NY: Aladdin Paperbacks, 2000), 222-3: this—as well as what Lewis describes—is "the battle that [is] never won but never totally lost."

<sup>211</sup> Lepore, *These Truths*, xx.



of the utmost importance. "Humanly speaking," wrote Hannah Arendt, "no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation."<sup>212</sup>

It is a bitter thing, so terribly bitter—

*In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
Who, squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said, "Is it good, friend?"  
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;  
  
"But I like it  
"Because it is bitter,  
"And because it is my heart"<sup>213</sup>*

—and yet simultaneously so sweet.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 233.

<sup>213</sup> Stephen Crane, "In the Desert," Poetry Foundation, accessed June 10, 2023, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46457/in-the-desert-56d2265793693>.

<sup>214</sup> For the positive effect that such an honest recognition can have upon our investigative abilities, cf. Lewis, *Reading Life*, 114: "I think it is possible to be strengthened by the image of the past without being either deceived or puffed up."

Hidden in a darkling tree there lies  
A golden bough, blossoming gold  
In leaf and pliant branch, held sacred  
To the goddess below. A grove conceals  
This bough on every side, and umber shadows  
Veil it from view in a valley dim.  
No one may pass beneath the earth  
Until he has plucked from the tree  
This golden-leaved fruit. Fair Proserpina  
Decrees it be brought to her as a gift.  
When one bough is torn away another  
Grows in its place and leafs out in gold.  
Search it out with your deepest gaze  
And, when you find it, pluck it with your hand.

- Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.175-200

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