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DECAY

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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

In a time where the essay, the standard format for academic philosophy and what has previously taken the bulk of our issues, becomes more frictionless to "write," we're seeing how students in our community of inquiry are pushing back. This issue of The Garden of Ideas is unlike any other issue of the past. Our pool of works to select from started off with an unexpected amount of carefully-crafted creative pieces. To retain some clarity of philosophical concepts in pieces, our selection process prioritized creative works that emphasized the philosophy in them, rather than works to make philosophy of. In addition to this change in medium, we'd identified a few common themes of death, existentialism, and self-knowledge. Aptly, this issue will be titled "decay." Upon collectively reflecting on why this is the case, we surmise this is a result of a unified disdain for the conditions we've been subjected to. As such, we hope you, dear reader, can find some solace in these pieces, knowing we are not in solitude grappling with these age-old questions, while enjoying the philosophy within them.

Now that you may understand the unique-nature of this issue, I'd like to move on to thank all of the members who have worked on this Autumn 2025 issue, which includes Abby Yi (Communications Manager), Ayla Miller (Editor), Fevet Fayze Ibrahim (Editor), Sunny Tian (Print Designer), and Ilwad Mahamoud (the best Co-Editor-in-Chief I could ever ask for). Furthermore, I thank Zhenya Shapiro (Editor-in-Chief for Winter-Spring 2026) for her aid in finishing up this issue and I am excited to welcome Shelby Mallard (Editor) for help in the upcoming issue. This autumn issue would never come to fruition if it were not for everyone's efforts. As I reflect upon this Autumn quarter, I am filled with gratitude for our camaraderie and excitement

for what the future of The Garden of Ideas will look like as management is transferred to Zhenya Shapiro.

Sincerely,
Joey Lieng
½ Co-Editor-in-Chief for Autumn 2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON'S
UNDERGRADUATE PHILOSOPHY JOURNAL

Fear and Cosmic Soup

David Bowman

> "One may say, 'There is no death.' What good does that do? When the body decays, so does the mind. Is this not a great sorrow? Is life really this absurd? Am I the only one who sees the absurdity? Don't others see it too?"[1]

Imagine for a moment that soon you will be snuffed out of existence. Erased. In a final moment of terror, you helplessly cling to your proverbial mortal coil as oblivion unsympathetically wrenches mind from body and you cease to exist (for the sake of this argument, we are going to assume that this Big Sleep is final, with no chance for an afterlife). You are now dead. Actually, you are not dead, because that would imply that there is still a you which we can refer to. Rather, you are… not. Sure, there are presumably bodily remnants that once served as the vehicle by which your consciousness expressed itself (that's not to suggest a mind/body duality) but the you-ness that made you yourself no longer exists. The film that was your life is over. Fin. One could ask you how you feel about being dead, but oh yes, I almost forgot— you are dead. It isn't simply that you lack the faculties to express your new state of non-existence; there is no new state of non-existence.

> After death comes
> nothing hoped for
> nor imagined.[2]

[1] Zhuangzi, p. 25
[2] Heraclitus, p. 83-84

As creatures primarily concerned with the business of living, non-existence is generally considered something that we should avoid at all costs, and it is in that aversion that we experience many of our fears. On the face of it, death and dying seem like completely rational states/events to be afraid of— after all, what could be more terrifying than oblivion? And yet, a fear of death is completely irrational— in fact one could go so far as to say that life is a process/event that should evoke far greater fear than death. This is not to suggest that death is a good thing, or that anyone should hope for it to come any time soon, but rather only to point out that the inevitable outcome that each and every one of us face is really not so bad when looked at critically. The point of this essay is neither to praise death nor disparage life; it is to examine the knowns, unknowns and a few philosophical approaches to parsing the polarities of life and death— to answer the question: what is this life we are doomed to relinquish, why is it valuable, and should we fear losing it?

The Certainty of Death

First and foremost, we should state the obvious: death is a certainty. In fact, it may be the singular guarantee that life has in store for us. It is often said that people fear the unknown; and death being that final frontier— the ultimate unknown, seems to fall quite squarely into that category. That said, nothing *in life* is certain either. Our short lifespans and ease of distraction and adaptation confuse our senses with an illusion of continuity, inspiring a faith in life that, quite frankly, is undeserved. It cannot really be known what will happen from one moment to the next. Today, a person might serendipitously bump into their soulmate at a cafe, while tomorrow that same individual could be cartoonishly crushed by a falling piano.

Even the most mundane of days (not to say lifespans) is filled with the unexpected. One receives good news, one receives bad news.

It is a happy surprise when our groceries are on sale, and an unhappy surprise when we stub our toe on a protruding sofa leg.

Mythological beings aside, thus far no human being has defeated death— yet. Some would argue that, due to scientific breakthroughs in anti-aging technology, death's demise is imminent. In the last century alone, the average lifespan of human beings has nearly doubled.[3] Science continues, year on year, to bolster our bodily integrity against the unrelenting siege of time; and some researchers are optimistic that a *cure* to aging can be found in the foreseeable future. Anti-aging researcher Aubrey De Gray has famously declared that humans will soon defeat aging altogether.[4] However, even if the most optimistic hopes for scientific advancement *are* realized— death, although postponed, would still be an inevitability. Each and every one of us is *still* doomed to die from some accident, a catastrophic event, or (in the extreme long-term) from the sheer boredom of living. In the long span of geological time, cosmological decades and eternity, our lives have the same terminus; "Whoever's born on earth arrives, at death with time that passes on; the sun leaves nothing here alive."[5] This fact may feel disquieting, but if the unknown is really something to fear then there should be comfort in the *certainty* of our inevitable destruction— for in its finality the possibilities of life are narrowed down from a bewildering infinity to a more comprehendible nil; and all unknowns evaporate into a certainty, a *dead certainty*. That said, despite the blaring obviousness of our mortality, what death entails remains an enigma; but even this mystery is confined to a very digestible binary of outcomes. As Socrates surmised, "Death is one of two things: either it's like the dead person being nothing at all, and having no consciousness or anything at all, or— so we are told— it's

[3] Illiadi et all, *Healthy Aging- Insights from Drosophilia*, p. 1
[4] Aubrey De Gray, *Ending Aging*, p. 325
[5] Michelangelo, *Poems and Letters*, p. 6

actually some sort of change, a journey of the soul from this place to somewhere different."[6]

Of course what happens after life is completely an unknown, and no amount of appealing to authority will change that fact; but Socrates really *can't* be wrong. Either all cease to exist entirely, or continue on living in some other unknown fashion. If the latter, then given the uncertainty of life, *afterlife* is simply a continuation of an already unforeseeable future— no better and no worse. If the former, then by its very nature non-existence cannot be of any discomfort. As Cicero points out, "if we are going to be miserable after death, we were already miserable before we were born. Yet I don't recall being miserable before I was born."[7] Of course preexistence is as much of a mystery as post-existence, and yet we don't seem to trouble ourselves with the possibility that we may have been miserable before our brief stretch in the material plane. If it was somehow a miserable experience then that would indicate two things:

a. Before this life was not pre-*existence*, but rather pre-*this* ("this" being life, or whatever we choose to call this form of existence that we are all familiar with).
b. Somehow our memory of this miserable pre-life has been erased, and it is as if it never occurred at all.

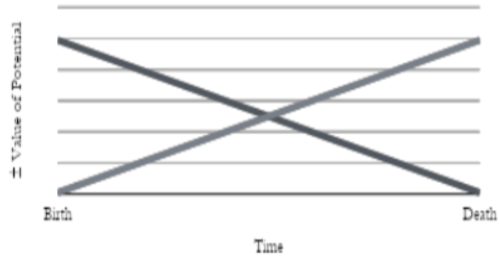
The question of whether or not pain forgotten is akin to pain never suffered is beyond the scope of this essay, but it does bring me to my next point.

[6] Plato, *Symposium and the Death of Socrates*, p. 116
[7] Cicero, *On Living and Dying Well*, p. 13-14

Life and the Misery of Dying

In all fairness, one may contend that the above argument is nothing but a straw man that conflates death with dying. It isn't as if the living simply blink out of existence and become the dead— there is a liminal, transitional state that straddles the border between the two, and it is this transition that really inspires fear. An image of death— something that inspires fear, does not depict *nothing*. What we fear, rather, is *dying*— the act of dying. Despite this pervading fear, no one seems to be able to clearly explain exactly at what point living becomes dying. It is certain that we have limited time, and begin spending this time the moment we are born— and in that sense it seems that life is nothing but one continuous long phase of dying. Every moment that elapses brings us closer to our demise— as Seneca reminds us:

> What man can you show me who places any value on his time, who reckons the worth of each day, who understands that he is dying daily? For we are mistaken when we look forward to death; the major portion of death has already passed. Whatever years be behind us are in death's hands… Since the day you were born you are being led thither. We must ponder this thought, and thoughts of the like nature, if we desire to be calm as we await that last hour, the fear of which makes all previous hours uneasy.[8]



[8] Seneca, *Letter I- On Saving Time*, p. 23, 27

If it is true that dying begins at the same time as life, then the two must be one and the same, or at least must be aspects of a same whole. If indeed this existence begins full of life before a steady decrescendo into death, then that would indicate that living and dying are actually disparate measurements along an axis of time, each the inverse of the other. If that is the case, then living-dying is akin to any opposing pairs which share both X and Y variables, wherein X has a direct relationship and Y an inverse relationship. Take desire and satisfaction, for example: when one is very hungry, *hunger* is at a high value and *satiety* is at a low value. When one is satiated, *hunger* is at a low value and *satiety* is at a high value. The "value" here (what is being measured by these opposing words) is the perceived need or desire along an axis of satisfying that desire (as in eating to satisfy hunger). The main difference between the hungry-satiated spectrum and the living-dying spectrum is in the Y value's perceptibility, and singular direction.

When we are hungry or full, we can feel it; we are aware of just how hungry or full we feel. Whether we are living or dying, however, seems to be mostly imperceptible except in some vague relation to wrinkling skin and aching joints— and for that reason it is difficult to pinpoint just what exactly this Y axis measures. What can be discerned is that once time has elapsed, there is no way to reverse it (here differs the desire-satisfaction analogy— when one is hungry and eats, one becomes hungry again eventually) and that Y's value must represent a ± value rather than a positive or negative. This is because whatever quality it is that living exemplifies, dying must oppose. For this reason, the most likely candidate for Y is simply "potential," as it functions as a neutral term accessible both to positive and negative qualities. In other words, when a person is born, the majority of potential is on the side of living; after a certain amount of time elapses, however, the majority of potential has already been consumed in dying— but living and dying are really just a sort of subjective continuum. At the poles, one cannot be any more *living* than at birth, nor more *dying* than at death.

The point of this thought exercise is not to represent living and dying mathematically or graphically, but to pinpoint what exactly is the essence of this living and dying continuum that spans our lifetime.

All this is to say, "dying" is really no more than an exhaustion of potential, at least in respect to living. To be afraid of death or dying would require us to be aware of either the exhaustion of potential, and/or of something unpleasant past the polarity of death— but clearly that cannot be the case because by its very nature non-existence implies nothing.

Cicero makes a similar argument: "Since after death there's nothing bad, then death itself isn't bad. You admit that the very next moment after death has nothing bad about it. Thus, even the necessity of dying isn't bad, because it's just the necessity of arriving at a condition that we agree is not bad."[9]

At this point you may be rolling your eyes.

What began as a discussion on the fear of death has now devolved into something about potential; all due to semantics and the imprecision of words. Death has become dying, dying has become the exhaustion of potential —but that's not what people *mean* when they say *dying*, they really mean injury, illness, decrepitude, pain and exhaustion. But then, if that's the case, then it isn't that anyone is afraid of death or dying per se, but rather fear the negative aspects of living that tend to accompany dying.

We are afraid of *not living well*, or living in misery— not *dying*.

While no amount of philosophizing will mitigate the apprehension and anxiety experienced at the prospect of illness and old age (and the corollary pain and misery that can accompany each), it is important that we recognize these and all other aspects of dying as what they really are: living. Perhaps it is technically a semantic irrelevancy, but there may be some real power in recognizing dying as

[9] Cicero, *On Living and Dying Well*, p. 16

living and vice versa— for a case and point, I think of the Buddhist "mind-only" theory. Zen Buddhist abbot and communicator, Shunryu Suzuki stressed to his students that "there is no fear of losing this mind. There is nowhere to come or to go; there is no fear of death, no suffering from old age or sickness. Because we enjoy all aspects of life as an unfolding of big mind, we do not care for any excessive joy."[10] The "big mind" that Suzuki refers to has many analogous terms in other religious/philosophical traditions (Sunyata, emptiness or 空 in Buddhism and Hinduism, the "uncarved block" in Daoism, etc) but what he really means is that when examined *in context*, our perception of reality and human experience are really just illusory manifestations of motion in the substrate that we call matter. In other words, all of life's pain and misery (but also its pleasure and joy) are a sort of simulation running in the meat-computer we call our brain, which itself is just one of many anomalous organizations of matter and energy that we call "life." Within the modern age's scientific paradigm, something *like* what Suzuki describes appears to most closely resemble reality and our place within it. Given the fact that in death and dying we lose whatever *this* is (this life, or this reality) it might be worthwhile to examine what exactly it is that we're giving up when we die.

Incomprehensible Reality and Our Place Within It

So, what is it exactly that we're losing when we die? We've already established that dying is the loss of some form of potential— but potential to be applied *to what end* exactly we do not yet know.

The elementary science class answer is that our purpose, as life forms, is to propagate the human species— or at least work towards its continued survival. Despite how commonly spouted it is, this is

[10] Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 16

really a non-answer as it fails to give us a reason, but rather only provides us with a *means* to perpetuate a cycle.

> "In thirty years a newborn boy
> can grow to father him a son
> who grows by then
> to father sons himself."[11]

Why do we need to pass on our genes? Also, if we fail to reproduce, then does that mean we have somehow failed at life? A more thoughtful person might say that human beings are unique in the animal kingdom because often our contribution to future generations is not dependent upon our direct offspring. Because we live in societies, human beings do not necessarily need to directly pass on our own genes to improve the survivability of the human species, we need only contribute some sort of net positive gain in our lifetimes that allows future humans to live better, easier lives that will improve *their* survivability. That is a more thorough investigation into the question, but it still doesn't answer the question of why? If we don't know the point of existence, then what is the point of ensuring future existence? Strangely, it is much easier to pinpoint the purpose of death than of life. From a scientific standpoint, death is the engine of natural selection and thus evolution. Likewise, from a philosophical standpoint, death gives life a sense of urgency, and, at most, gives it a *sense* of purpose, however elusive the purpose may be. But again, looking at the "meaningful" answers that death provides, the question is still left unanswered: *what purpose?* What purpose can be derived from the continuous generation of conscious life? Scientifically, consciousness does not appear to be a *thing*, but is rather an action. Though we tend to identify ourselves with the physical bodies that facilitate this action of awareness, the body is no more a person (in the sense that we define consciousness as personhood) than a USB stick

[11] Heraclitus, *Fragments*, p. 55

that houses a program *is* the program. When you quit and exit a program, the USB stick becomes an inert and inanimate object— it facilitates the running of programs, but the programs really only manifest while running. When no longer running, a program simply becomes a collection of ones and zeros stored on a USB. Similarly, the body which facilitates one's consciousness is not consciousness itself— it is the USB stick that stores the information needed to run the program we call consciousness.

My earliest memory is of seeing my grandmother die; anyone who has ever witnessed a person die firsthand knows how strange it is to see— the person is there, and then suddenly isn't. The thing I *used* to call "abuela" was still there, but the person I knew was gone— the program *abuela_consciousness.ext* had unexpectedly (or rather, expectedly) quit.

Yet her body remained.

Two opposing philosophies seem to both be partially valid here. On the one hand we have someone like Nietzsche, proposing that "body [are we] entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body." [12] This philosophy localizes consciousness in the body, suggesting that the *thing* that is the body is consciousness. On the other hand, the Buddhist concept of self tells us that: "Because each existence is in constant change, there is no abiding self. In fact, the self-nature of each existence is nothing but change itself, the self-nature of all existence. There is no special, separate self-nature for each existence." [13] This sort of philosophy proposes then that consciousness is nothing but a manifestation of the universe— the body does not *drive* motion, motion drives the body. Yet the fact remains that the human mind appears to be confined to expression and perception via the body, and that as far as we know,

[12] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 18
[13] Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 89

consciousness cannot exist *outside* the body. Therefore it is not that the body is consciousness, nor is it that the mind is motion, but rather consciousness is an expression of the body in synchronous motion with the universe. Death is when the body ceases to be an animate manifestation of the universe, and all the potential of our consciousness is spent.

Despite whatever reasoning I have used to establish the above statement, the fact of the matter is that we do not know, and likely cannot know what exactly it means to be alive, and what we are surrendering when we die. If thousands of years of philosophical tradition (and a bewildering number of religions) the world over is any indication, the quest to discover meaning may very well be some aspect of life's purpose— or is at least an interesting feature of our ignorance. Incidentally, there are some philosophers that have taken this feature of living and run with it. The opening passage to Laozi's *Dao De Jing* reads as follows:

> "道可道，非常道; 名可名，非常名."
> The Dao that can be told of is not the Absolute Dao;
> The Names that can be given are not Absolute Names."[14]

While I take no issue with this interpretation, it should be noted that the simplicity of Laozi's language and vagueness of writing loads this passage with several (not mutually exclusive) meanings. My own parallel interpretation would be something to the effect of "the way that is The Way is not always/the only way; the names/words assigned are not the only names/words." Given its placement at the very beginning of his treatise, a more thorough interpretation (though not at all literal) might be: "the *way of understanding* that is expressed in the pages that follow is only *one of many* paths to understanding The

[14] Laozi/老子, Dao De Jing/道德经, p. 1

Dao/reality, and the words/names used to describe such a path are only a small sample of the (infinite) possible words that can be used to express some understanding of the nature of reality." Not only is Laozi telling his reader that his own words are wholly inadequate in describing *pure* reality and purpose, but also (more importantly) that *no words* are able to fully capture the essence of truth or reality— and that a complete understanding of our reality and purpose may be a human impossibility. Heraclitus makes a similar observation in the first of his surviving fragments:

> "The Word proves
> those first hearing it
> as numb to understanding
> as the ones who have not heard."[15]

Socrates also famously scrutinized any claim of wisdom or knowledge, and instead favored the idea that our very purpose is to pose questions: "When he refers to the man here before you— to Socrates— and goes out of his way to use my name, he is using me as an example, as if he were saying: 'That man is wisest among you, mortals, that realizes, as Socrates does, that he doesn't really amount to much when it comes to wisdom.'"[16]

Of course a would-be philosopher, like myself, would surmise that the purpose of all that human potential that is given up upon death is to question everything— but surely there are those (perhaps most) people that go through life without seriously questioning much of anything. To say that *my* life has *purpose* and value while theirs do not would be an incredibly arrogant error. While an interesting facet of the mystery of life's purpose, there clearly must be more to being than exercising a questioning mind. While death creates a sense of urgency in life and motivates humanity to accomplish works, there must be

[15] Heraclitus, *Fragments*, p. 3
[16] Plato, *Symposium and the Death of Socrates*, p. 91

something, some expression of this potential we call consciousness that is worth dying for.

What We Are Giving Up

Despite its many shortcomings, generally speaking, life is good, and we are reluctant to give it up. Its purpose may be unknown (outside whatever purpose we assign ourselves), and it may challenge us with dizzying uncertainty, but for all its philosophical problems— life really is preferable to death. Ironically, the most attractive aspect of death (as absurd as that sounds) is precisely the very thing we hate about it: non-existence eliminates continued individual potential. Assuming that after this life we are met with the neutral fate of complete obliteration, devoid of all potential, be it enjoyable or painful— then life, with all its ups and downs, at least holds the possibility for individual meaning, and gives us the opportunity to interpret and assign meaning to things

and events in the world. Only in life is there meaning beyond the cog and wheel dynamics of natural selection's long game of evolution— even if that meaning cannot easily be defined by language– based philosophical constructs (as Laozi and Heraclitus have pointed out). In death there is nothing, and in dying there is nothing but one of many aspects of life. "Most men ebb and flow in wretchedness between the fear of death and the hardships of life; they are unwilling to live, and yet they do not know how to die. For this reason, make life as a whole agreeable to yourself by banishing all worry about it."[17] We need not fear death because it is nothing, and need not fear dying because it is merely a part of life that we assign meaning to— it has no intrinsic value on its own. It, just like every other experience we have, is just living. We assign living and dying with meaning, as we do with everything else. There may be no intrinsic meaning in a particularly beautiful sunset, or in holding a newborn child for the first time, or in playing with a puppy, or in any and all the art, music, poetry and expression our species has generated— it may all be objectively meaningless to the void that is the reality outside ourselves; and therein lies the crux of precisely what makes life so very precious. Without a living mind capable of discerning their meaning, words are just scribbles and sounds, sounds are only vibrating waves of a compressed medium, and all mediums are simply atoms, subatomic particles, and energy in an uncaring continuum in continuous flux. Though it makes little sense to fear losing what we cannot sense losing, it makes all the sense in the world to value what thoughts and sensations we do have in life. We cannot find life's meaning because life itself has no meaning— life is an opportunity, life is potential to find and generate meaning in the little corner of space-time that we call here and now. Outside of our individual and agreed upon criteria— outside the mind,

[17] Seneca, *Letter IV, On the Terrors of Death*, p. 26

there are no clear designations for anything. Wang Yang Ming once said,

> Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in a state of indeterminate context [silent vacancy]. When you see them, the flowers as particular actualized foci and your mind as creative context are mutually manifesting and realizing. From this you know that these flowers are not external to your mind.

On its own a flower is only a nameless collection of matter and energy arranged geometrically into a form that performs, in respect to its surroundings, everything that a flower performs. *We* call it a flower and we assign it beauty. Without an observer there is nothing bad or wrong about the flower, it's just that without an observer the flower isn't beautiful— and it may not even be a flower. Without the living potential of the mind, everything is just *stuff* in a cosmic soup of other stuff— it's not bad, but it has no purpose, no meaning, no love, no beauty, no joy, no sorrow, no story, no imagination, no wonder, no boredom, no ecstasy, no pain, no reason, no spontaneity, no friendship, no remembering days long passed, no dreaming of the future, no taste of chocolate, no smell of fresh laundry, no relief at the end of a long day of hard work, no grooving to music, no laughing at mistakes, no celebrating triumphs, no flip-flopping on life and death arguments, and absolutely no philosophizing in poorly written, longwinded papers about unanswerable questions.

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One's Self

Zoraida Carrillo

On Self, Time, and Reflection

Hanqiu Zhong

Zhuangzi met his future self, asking:

Elder Zhuang, are you the same person I am today?

Elder Zhuang didn't look up:

If you see your own reflection by the lake, throw a stone.
What do you see?

Ripples, and the shattered self,
Zhuangzi answered without hesitation.

Elder Zhuang continued:

Would that person still be the same?

Zhuangzi felt confused:

That is only my own reflection at this very moment.
Why wouldn't we be the same?

Finally, Elder Zhuang looked up to Zhuangzi in his eyes, saying:

No current moment is shown;
all you see is your past self.

Before Zhuangzi wondered aloud, he continued:

When you look at the star with bare eyes, you are seeing the star as they were in the past. When you see your reflection, you are seeing yourself as you were behind you.

Zhuangzi asked:

Is my past self in the reflection the same person I am?

Elder Zhuang paused:

This question is yours to answer.

When I see you, I see all my past experiences,

all the steps that I walked through to become me.

You will always be a part of me,

but I am only a possibility for you.

Zhuangzi frowned:

I feel lost in it.

Why does the reflection matter when I ask whether we are the same?

Elder Zhuang sighed:

When you ask this question, haven't you already been looking at me as your reflection? Why does this question even matter?

If the answer is the same, are you satisfied? Will you stop making an effort in life? If the answer is different, what effort will you make to become me or escape me? Why does it matter?

You see me as your future and your end goal, nothing more.

I see you as a part of me in the past, and I still see my future.

When you see the reflection, you see no more than your past.

When you see me, you see no more than your future.

When can people stop being short-sighted!

Waking from the dream,

Zhuangzi saw himself mirrored in the still water of the washbasin.

Staring for long, he wanted to say something,
but didn't know what to say.

Under the moonlight, his reflection became a butterfly.

Emptiness

Andreea Coroi

Oedipus Rex

Abraham Guo

[At center of a dark stage there lies a reed bed where upon Oedipus sleeps; a crack of door opening was heard and thin mist rolls in to cover the floor; he rises]

Oedipus:

By Apollo, what has befallen here, where once a place of comfort and warmth now swallowed by sombering darkness. Oh the coldness, the moist, tis dost not belong to the realms of mortals! Hath the wretched hands of Thanatos touched me in my slumber casting me away from the kingdom over which I once reigned?

And who are thee lurking in the shadows? I hear the creekings of the floor beneath thy feet, I feel the faint vibrations of thy stuttering breaths, dost thou know where upon thee stood, and whom upon thee look?! I pronounce myself to be Oedipus Rex, king of Thebes, and slayer of the Sphinx. Thou stand upon my kingdom in all of its glory.

Speak now of thy deeds! Or else hath thine innards be spilled upon the glittering moon for all gods to bear witness! Kneel fore the king!

[An old man approaches in a shepherd's gown]

Shepherd:

Dear Oedipus Rex, once I carried thee to a land far away, wrapped in soft wools at an age where the memory could not reach. Now I carry thee into the lands between, wrapped in jewels to a place where the sunlight could not shine.

Oedipus:

Blasphemy! How could a man in his zenith meet this begrudging end so unassumingly? Such an irony that a shallow death shall meet a man of depth where only upon his heart knows the true

nature of his mark. Yet thou wreak of death's foulness, suffocating the perfumes of life.

In defiance there creeps fear. Much was asked of me, my kingdom, my children, and my wife… A man of humble beginnings ushered to an empty throne. What songs would be sung then, what epics written in the ages to come, I dost not know. Upon all where I have built my legacy, there lingers a feeling of emptiness, a senseless sensation which even when all is but crumbled away, remains still. A man hath not faced his true self until after a glimpse of his fleeting mortality. A while now I hath fought, knowingly or not, against foes of flesh and blood or forces beyond comprehension and yet unaltered I remain, only to be carried away in my dreams.

Why then all the struggle for life when all culminates in death? To embrace death is to have renounced life of its essences, alas, least grant me consolation in death, let me repent my regrets.

Giveth me thy shoulders, for I fear to meet the gaze of the judge whom shall release the subjects of my cruelty.

[Oedipus walks off with the Shepherd; stage remain dark;
they come across a cross road]

Oedipus:

Didst road rouses memories of a life long past. The young man learned of his dreadful fate, fought against it in a desperate attempt to escape; far from Corinth he wondered the earth, resting beneath the stars, sucking the freshness of the morning dews and air, tasting that sweet honey-like fruits, glittering in the sun, ripe for plucking, and feeling the warm sun's lovely embrace upon his cheeks. Ah, yes, in poverty I found simplicity and peace, one I hath long lost. Why then with all the riches of a kingdom, all the grave feasts, one still yearns for more? Against the backdrops of an avalanching crowd and suffocating fumes, deep within his rebellious heart, the king of Thebes felt the unyielding dread of nothingness. In death I now hath seen what I was blinded from in life, that all in sooth shall be forgotten, yet all was well,

in poverty and in wealth, only desire rang the knell. Oh! Dost thou hear those galloping hooves, see the thundering dust? The royal chariot approaches yet upon it who sits traveling the lands of the dead?

[An old man in royal gowns approaches with a few royal guards covered in blood]

Oedipus:

Heavenly fathers, why must thee remind me of such dreadful moments?! 'Tis were subjects of my cruelty, my wrath, and my arrogance. The undeserving victims of a vicious crime forgotten, the reminder of that dreadful visage beneath the kingly facade. Alas, I hath for winters now lay awake at night dreading for the moment of the unbearable truth be revealed, though long hath I made peace with my mistake and remained open for the judge and penitence. To deny others' will to live is to erase part of thy humanity, a sin forever carried and never released. A dent in the soul 'ere every monet reminded me of its absence.

What then is thy plan of vengeance, old man? Art thou willing to strike me down as I did thee and thy companions, or to let divinity taketh its course by gently witnessing my descent into the abysmal void?

[Shepherd whispers into his ears]

Thou speak of another sin for which I must repent, one carried out in accordance to my prophecy? For what more ties bind me to this old man whom I met at this crossroad long ago, and whose intolerable demeanor drove my blade? A senseless murder demands no ill intention!

[Shepherd hands him a mirror]

Oedipus:

Oh by Apollo! I curse thy cruelty, thy wretched and wicked prophecy. The wrinkles, the beard, the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the face. What more proof dost I need?! Fore me, stands not Oedipus son of Polybus but Oedipus son of Laius. My valiant escape against fate

wrought the very hands that drove this blade into my forebearer's chest! How futile it all seems now! Those fleeting moments of fictitious victory against the gods, against my own nature, what hath I achieved then if not my own destruction?! How powerless it all feels now against the imperishable plans of the gods, of fate itself. What then remains of me, of this wretched kin-slayer if not full acceptance of his fate and his sin?

Fear's hands alone hath guided me upon this journey, not with kindness but with a cruel indifference. From the beginning, fear of my own fate planted the seeds of a long march from Corinth to Thebes. Fear of losing control fueled the length of the journey in which every step I took solidified a rebellious grin on my face. Then upon this crossroad, fear of weakness drove a senseless murder and created a king. Finally, fear of incompetence reigned over me as I reigned over Thebes. I hath commanded, and am commanded. Defiant as I was, the feisty rebel was nothing but a boy terrified of losing everything he's come to love. Each breath I drew, a rebellion against silence, a futile scream reverberating into the endless void. In my deepest dream I hath hoped that love would transcend this dread yet what love can withstand the suffocating fumes of death?

Alas, a love of life! In my last defiance against fate, against death, let me live fully again, sans the unrelenting worries, sans the unyielding pain, and sans the ever-present fear whose hands hath been tightly held against my throat. Oh why hath I been so petrified of death that I failed to see the way I led my life was no different than death! Time wasted in life remained as regrets in death, oh life hath slipped through my fingers like water through a cracked pot.

Yet sombering words could not lament bloody deeds, for I am riddled with sin, and through that the shores of salvation lie ever so out of reach.

Shepherd:

Thy confession is commendable, and as thou said: a senseless murder demanded no ill intention. For that, thy punishment is knowledge, what thou seek in life shall now haunt thee till death. The blood soaked cloaks of a kinslayer shall never be cleansed, yet thou shall decide how to carry that nauseating shade of wounding redness. He who is without sin? Those claimed to be guilt free are yet to have their consciousness fiddled by its ghoulish touch. Consider thee lucky.

Oedipus:

Lucky?! What hearsay dost thee proclaim now? The punishment of such an absurd burden alone shall crush a man's arching back, least of all the guilt, regret and hatred! I was lucky to have been shielded against such dreadful influence by perpetual fear yet to be given the chance to live all over, I shall have chosen a different path. A path of acceptance, a path of love, a path of gentle indifference. Yet alas, no more choices await me now upon my dying breath, the unyielding yields, as the darkened night sky closes in, the mud thickens, the blood boils, in the grand finale, I praise thee to hath given me what I feared to grasp: my fate.

The judge becomes the penitence, the conqueror becomes the vanquished, and alas I carry but a tarnished spirit, graceless, faithless.

Shepherd:

Thou story dost not end here, tarnished warrior. Much was asked of thee yet more remains to be asked. 'Tis a trial of character, of its strength and flaws, of thine arrogance renounced, and heritage restored. 'Tis a journey into thyself, a glimpse into the inconceivable, and a revolt against the absurd. What requires of thee now lies within. With the weight of knowing, and thy cry for a life relived, art thou willing to comply or will thou continue to defy? I am naught but a humble servant of thy mind, a messenger to a suppressed voice. Alas, look around thee, tis the land between, neither above nor below, a land not between life and death but a land between wake and sleep.

[Shepherd loosens his gown, underneath, he is wearing the same cloth as Oedipus]

Depart now I must, 'ere a new dawn rekindles the spirits of those once lost. Another day awaits thee, be borne again by the currents of fate, thou shall wander but never be lost. Consider thy propositions, let not the burden of knowledge wrought despair but a gentle reminder of the ceaseless absurdity those call life. Alas, all is well.

[A ray of light shines through the ceiling, mist dispersed, and Oedipus walks back towards his bed]

Oedipus:

Now I must bid farewell to myself, to my reflections in the mirror and to the benign facade I so desperately upheld. I thank thee for thy guidance. Against the low hums of a vibrant life, chirping of the birds, rustling of the branches, and the unrecognizable voices in the memories of a lingering past, thy voice remains sharp. Oh dost thou feel it upon thy skin, within thy stomach, through thy hair? The suffocating fumes retracts, the indifferent clutches of fear loosens, and above all, the sombre tunes turn to soft melodies. Oh how beautiful is life when thou live it.

[Epilogue]

Time is a strange concept. It permeated eons past and eons to come, yet it remains ever so short for those unconcerned with its passage. Oedipus became one of them. With an acceptance of his unchangeable fate, where the unavoidable used to ceaselessly haunt him, life became bearable again. Sure that time slipped through his fingers like fine sand but least he once held on tightly to them, and better than most, he knows now of his mortality. Evidently, life was not better, nor worse, but filled again with passion and love.

God was cruel to him but he was not without tricks. The second half of his prophecy involved incestious relationship with his mother, one which unfortunately realized. But now fulfilled, he spit on fate one last time by divorcing her, sparing her the knowledge he now

must carry. Tragic or not, this is an ending nevertheless, one he has agency over.

Decades gone by, now as he lay weak, and old, with wrinkles as deep as emotions have carved it, the shepherd comes to him again. They are identical, like brothers, like friends, but with a strangeness you can only find by looking into a mirror. Shoulder to shoulder, they walked away, into that beautiful nothingness at the end of life.

What choice did he make, one may ask? Both, and neither. He has chosen to comply with life but to defy against his own nature.
All is well in the end, or isn't it pretty to think so?

Writer's Memo

First and foremost, this piece is heavily inspired by the brilliant French Philosopher Albert Camus and his work on *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. I wanted to compose a piece with matching philosophical prominence by introducing heavy existentialist and absurdist themes into the all time classic Greek tragedy Oedipus Rex. To me it was a perfect vessel due to its prominence yet undeveloped characters that gives me ample room for creativity. With an intention to preserve the original dramatic flavor, the language chosen is deep with symbolism and emotion, and a touch of Shakespeare (with whatever knowledge I have of Old English grammar). I shall elaborate as much as I can regarding the inspiration, setting, themes, character choices and structure of the play.

1. Inspiration

Existential crisis is probably something that all of us have experienced to some degree in life. That feeling of emptiness, the worry of leaving nothing noteworthy behind, of failing our families or ourselves, is what permeates throughout the play. These are emotions that have hit all too close home for me and are what inspired me to transform the original story into a play that is in some sense: a dialogue I have with myself. I casted shadows of myself within this defeated version of Oedipus, a sort of self-pity and reconciliation. To a degree, it is a story written by and for me, albeit weirdly therapeutic.

Of course the other major influence is Albert Camus who has given me unique insight into the nihilistic dread I have so befriended. Absurdism as he has defined it, is an acceptance of the absurd from which we gain revolt, freedom, and passion. All three are themes and emotions that Oedipus inevitably goes through from his journey within his own psyche, and will be thoroughly discussed in the sections to come. But before that, we must first define the Absurd, one which Oedipus has come to confront. He calls it: "the divorce between the

mind that desires and the world that disappoints" (Camus 50)[1]. Oedipus desired a level of control over his life, one that inevitably was robbed from under him at birth. His confrontation with the absurd thus becomes the climax of the story where he learns of his deeds and his transformation from defiance to acceptance is the core focus of the adaptation. To some sense, mirrors my own struggle in life.

2. Setting

Albeit not specifically told during the play, this all happened in his dream. I don't want him to die so that I can give him a chance to learn and the best way is through a "near-death-experience". The bed serves as the divide between wakefulness and slumbers, with some clever lightwork, it might become more obvious. This dream state is very subtly foreshadowed actually in the very beginning as the shepherd describes it as: the land between, not the land of the dead, or the land under, but in between.

The crossroad, another major part of the story, is also packed with symbolism. Firstly, it is where he met and killed his birth father, unknowingly, which serves as the perfect spot for a good old fashioned confession time. But more importantly, it is also where he is in life, a crossroad where choices matter. All his life, Oedipus has felt like walking along a straight path, already paved but now a dirt crossroad foreshadows him regaining his agency over where he travels forth.

3. Themes

Moving from broad to narrow, firstly we have the umbrella terms that best defines the overall tone of the play: Existentialism. Just simply the idea of being, weighs heavily on both Oedipus and the audience, which inevitably leads to the big question at the end of the play: "How would you live?" What I have explored here also resonates with themes from

[1] Camus, A., *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays,* Translated by O'Brien, J., New York: Vintage Books A division of Penguin Random House LLC., 1991.

the original, the idea of fate vs. free will, in which I argued that fate is an inevitable, immovable force exert on all of us but we all have the agency to handle it in our own terms; the first part of the journey is recognition of said strength, a rather stoic resolve.

Another major aspect of the play is its extensive use of introspection. Like I mentioned before, I created it as a dialogue within myself and Oedipus's change throughout mirrors that. Funny enough, this is exactly the sort of stoic/absurdist approach I wanted for him, since technically, he is the only character within the play and to have free will over what he chooses his ending to be, he's already beaten fate. Another aspect shown is the idea of a judge/penitence relationship with himself in which he judges his own past while simultaneously confessing.

Now onto the big three of absurdism: Revolt, Freedom, Passion. Firstly we see revolt as an established character trait; he was defiant, rebellious, and even downright arrogant, proclaiming his kingship and prowess with the slightest incursion. The revolt, as the layers peel off, reveals to be a product of fear, a sort of desperate attempt to assert control. But through this change, and subsequent confrontation with the Absurd, Oedipus shifted his rebellious nature from the imperishable plans towards his own nature. He is now critical with himself, liberating him from his own dominance. Freedom is hence the result, as he now feels the grasp around his neck loosen, the air breathable again. It also literally serves as the "resolution" of the main tension for the audience, a form of catharsis that is like ambers, no flame but all heat. Despite fate still looming over him, with his now newly gained knowledge of his past, he is free to choose his own ending, free to live life however he wants. This freedom bridges us to the final theme: passion. Despite being in a dream, the idea of death deeply haunts Oedipus, blinding him to be fully present. Through his self discovery and realization of the futility of his old way, he can let go of that worry now. This feeling is perhaps best shown in his last

monologue where he finally understands the meaning of a meaningless world, and in the epilogue (the existence of which I will cover in the structure section) where he greeted death like an old friend, literally.

4. Characters

I don't think further elaboration on the character of Oedipus is necessary as the above sections hopefully gave him a well-rounded appearance. Instead our focus would be on the role of the Shepherd, which if you are familiar with the original story, is the one that saved Oedipus's life as an infant by carrying him to Corinth to be adopted. In the play, he is a mirror (which became literal in the climax) of his own psyche, a voice of guidance, a familiar feeling in a strange world, a source of comfort and reflection. It is treated as an internal dialogue a person might have with himself that becomes the devil and angel on the shoulder, but in this case, a voice of rationality over Oedipus's overly emotional appearance.

He is the thread that ties it all together for Oedipus, to finally give him the courage to face his past, and subsequently be liberated from it. He is him.

5. Structure

Last but not least, it is not too difficult to spot the lack of dialogue in the play. It is waves of monologue after monologue, but it is not without reason. As we have covered, this is practically a solo play, all in his mind, so any form of dialogue would provide no unique resolution to the situation as Oedipus is literally talking to himself; all he's come to realize, he already knows so to throw in any form of new information off-beats the tone and makes very little sense. Another reason is the level of introspection demands a self-exploration, to put it simply, the formula i have composed for these monologues consists of: "I first believe in x, then oh no this happens, I wonder why I was

wrong, I now believe in y", intuitively, it is our own thought process, just out loud.

The inclusion of an epilogue might seem like an odd choice but one I have deemed necessary for an ending without altering the tone of the story. I wanted to give the audience a sense of unfulfillment right after that supposes catharsis, reminiscent of life's unrelenting challenges. They are deliberately left in the dark as to what Oedipus would do after he wakes up, but I do not want to dwell on this unfulfillment. The epilogue serves as a direct message from the writer to his audiences, like an ominous narrator that provides a sense of closure without taking away too much the audience's ability to interpret the ending on their own.

Bibliography

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Parasite

Andreea Coroi

Double Yellow

Jessica Ahrens

Black and white stripes on the road,
reclaimed, though not
for the studio's delight, nor
crazen glaze-fired bisque,
rich with flamingo content,
creamy roux.

Black and white stripes on the road,
lost to prison pinstripes, man
who the young one did not know, but only
from a pane.
Contrast spirals stain your eyelids,
disillusioned trance weeks thereafter
the crimson code.

Where did the good Samaritan go?

Knuckles white aghast held the cycle tight,
unwoven threads at the cuff—
        body at the cusp of mother's doorstep
once again, pleading
        please unheard.

Black and white as your screen was once said
to go, circum virtute build upon

a flashing line, underlined blue wrong;
red flashed siren saw
the shape was awry, unfavored
for the clutch of an opposable thumb.

How many
more come knocking
at your door?

Many more.

How many for blood to flush rosen
your flexed flaxen face, waxen
with glee for making the child cry?

Many more.

Weight is needed in once-heated sandbags to
hold your tightrope taut to walk across,
then bow to the applause,
licking the conglomerate's brogue cleat.

Grey.

Is not gray till you wave your flag,
tossed tea bag over perfumed case, littered
by *drosophila* who know.

But your screen runs on RGB,
not discrete greytone, ashen
as your angora coat, warming you
while your kicking stew fades your light for life.

Candle wax clots your ear,
fueling the metal that becomes your mould:
arsenic to Autumn's core.

A Conversation with Professor Charles Ives

Garden of Ideas Editor Team

Prof. Ives: Come on in! Sit down. How's it going!?

Ilwad: There are so many books in here.

Prof. Ives: These are all pre-pandemic. They were for the first chapter of my book on Plato's "political physics." I should probably take them back. I'm not sure I need most of them anymore.

Actually, I wish I still brought a stroller to school. I used to use, it was like a giant, green running stroller, I used to use that stroller like a wheelbarrow to move books back and forth from the library. And I think, right now, I'm at the limit–they'll only let you have like two hundred books at a time. In fact, now that I think of it, the library should just have wheelbarrows.

In any case, what are we doing here? Are you just going to record this and then transcribe it? And, then, can we just make stuff up if we want? Or what's going on?

Ayla: I don't know about making stuff up. But, as I explained over email, we've got some questions; and, yes, we'll record everything and transcribe it.

Prof. Ives: Wait…we're not going to embellish this at all?

Ayla: Well, let's just see what happens.

Prof. Ives: Okay.

Ayla: Fevet is going to start.

Fevet: So this question, we talked about it in some form in our *Philosophy in Literature* class.

Do you think all literature is somehow inherently philosophical–

Prof. Ives: Real quick, didn't we more or less answer "yes" to this one in one of the last discussions we had?

Fevet: I think that's right. But I think, and I had this thought at the time, that there are at least two more options we should be thinking about along these lines, and we touched on them a little, too: is literature only philosophical when there is a philosophical claim in the writing, like when the author explicitly makes a statement about the philosophical merit of the text; or is literature philosophical because the person who's reading it has a philosophical orientation that just makes them see philosophy in it?

Prof. Ives: Yeah, okay. I think I now like the last one best. In fact, the philosophically-minded reader can make philosophy not only of literature, like a short story, but maybe even of any written work–like even an owner's manual for, like, a fish tank or something. In fact, I think this quarter especially, I was saying that we should change the title of the course from "Philosophy *in* Literature" to "*Making* Philosophy *of* Literature." Because, regardless–and now I feel like I'm mixing up the second and third questions–even with something like Le Guin's, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," where she obviously has philosophical intentions or subject matter, still we have to work to bring that philosophy out, to make that philosophy explicit. She's certainly not doing the work for us.

Though, now that we're talking about it, it sounds like a fun experiment to try to write a story that no one can make philosophy of– you wake up, you eat breakfast, you go to work, and come home. Make philosophy of that! But, really, I guess you could do some philosophy

that glorifies this kind of super ordinary stuff. Or something like Kafka's, *The Metamorphosis*. The only significant thing that happens is–the guy's a bug. Otherwise, you just have people trying to get by. And that's the story. And I think this kind of thing is the best candidate for the story you can't make philosophy of–the story of an absolutely ordinary life. And that's why I am not going to teach that book anymore. It just doesn't produce good discussions.

In any case, when I write literary stuff, I'm doing philosophy on purpose. When I'm writing, I have a plan, and I already have an idea to care about and to try to weave a story around. So, in that sense, whatever I do is probably going to be philosophical, because I meant for it to be. In other words, no one will likely mistake my stories for anything else; like, even if you didn't know what philosophy was, and you read the book, you're going to end up considering, at least for as long as it takes to move your eyes over the words, ideas about reality, knowledge, or value.

Now, again, to say that you or readers can make philosophy out of any proper literary story or book there is–I'm not sure I would ever have that as a principle that guides my writing. But maybe that's another goofy imaginary book. Like, just write a bunch of stories that are just stories, where I'm not doing philosophy on purpose; but simply put the word philosophy in the title of the book; and people would be like, "Oh, yes, of course, these are philosophical stories." And we could make up a nice, snarky preface for all the stories–"None of the stories contained in this volume are intentionally philosophical, but, given the fact that there is philosophy in the title, I assume that you should make them so, so here you go. Enjoy making philosophy of this purely narrative exercise of mine."

Right. So when I do it, I have a philosophical idea that I want to write about. But I want to be sneaky about it; but if I'm too sneaky, relevant to the second question, I think we lose some of the edge of a potentially, "inherently" philosophical story? Like, first comes the

philosophical idea, and second the story meant to represent it. And this pairing, I guess, could be the inherently philosophical story, which not all literature could be, I think; and this is where we lose the edge of the most robust, "inherent." But perhaps you're right; it needs to be clear that something about metaphysics, epistemology, or ethics is at stake. In other words, "inherently" philosophical literature needs to be transparent enough for readers to see that the work is philosophy on purpose; and perhaps this is the challenge of my sneaky style. Or maybe that's the problem with Kafka–he's too sneaky.

But, what is the question again? Can you say what you said again?

Fevet: So how I wrote it is… is all writing inherently philosophical; or is it only so when there's a clear, explicit philosophical connection or message that the author intended to put there; or are we just reading philosophy into literature?

Prof. Ives: Alright. Okay. I guess we've said "no" to the first? But I think we can still agree that we could make philosophy of anything, even the owner's manual for a fish tank; or the closest you could get to philosophy "inhering" in the text would be what I do, and maybe this covers the second question–the stories I write are meant to represent a philosophical idea that is sufficiently visible to readers, but, like I was saying about Le Guin, it's an idea you'll still have to do some work to pull out.

Does that work? I'm sorry. I guess I just kind of want the answer to be "yes" to all of them.

Joey: Ha! No worries. For the next question, I'm just wondering why people are writing so much poetry these days, when they want to do philosophy.

Prof. Ives: Like, "I want to do philosophy, so I'm going to write a bunch of poems"? Is that what you mean?

Joey: I'm not exactly sure; I just know that over half of our submissions this year were poems. It's not standard. We usually get more academic essays.

Prof. Ives: How would I explain that? For me, when I was younger, in my twenties, I was certainly writing poems to do philosophy. But, for me at that time, poetry really just meant short-form writing. I think that was ultimately because I felt like I didn't have essay-length thoughts and certainly not book-length thoughts. This was the case when I was an undergrad, too–I didn't have twenty-page or two-hundred-page long thoughts. But a poem is the right size. A poem is short and easy, like photography. Everybody thinks they can do it. What kind of poetry are you getting? Like, sonnets? Are you getting the whole gamut? Are you just getting short things, and the short things, we'll just call them "poems"?

Fevet: A lot of prose poems.

Ilwad: A lot of imagery of nature.

Prof. Ives: That's certainly what I was doing in my poems was images. I just wanted to make this nearly-incomprehensible image that invites you to figure out the puzzle of the poem. And then that's the philosophical edge. There's some idea floating in there, and it'll be almost impossible to pull it out of there unless you spend some time with it. And the trick is making the poem enticing enough that people will want to spend time with it. I'm not sure how much nature I had in there, though; I don't know. But I don't want to trash the nature people either. In any case, and I'm kind of trashing myself here, the fast and easy way to feel like you're doing something profound is to write

something short with an image. Yeah, I don't know. Poetry, short-form writing is just easy.

But at the same time, I've been looking at some of the stuff from my twenties lately, and I was thinking that it's not just "easy" to write, but it's easy for the reader, at least in some sense. Especially if you've got it right there; you can see the whole thing right in front of you; you don't have to go for, like, two hundred more pages or even ten. It's right there, it's like two plus two equals four; Descartes talks about that. Why is that so great? Because you can just see it, it's all right there. So maybe, that would be the more generous answer–this new cohort of poets are lovers of clarity.

The first thing I think of when I think of poetry, however, is not clarity–and now I'm starting to feel like I'm contradicting myself. But, I do like the idea of a small thing that does the work of holding philosophy; and it's like candy, you just read a bunch of them; you're gonna read tons of poems. I read a book of poems in an hour. It's super fun. And if it pulls you in, then you read it a hundred more times and get a lot out of it.

Or perhaps, with all these poems, we're picking up on a larger trend. We've got our finger on the philosophy and literature pulse! All of a sudden, poetry's back! Because at some point in time, poetry was, like, where novels are now. I think in the Anglo-North American context at least, the story I have in my head–which may be false–is that, at some point in time, poetry is tops. It was the most popular thing to be reading; and I'm like, what!? No way, because, again, though I like to write poems, I don't know that I'm really good at reading them. They're not clear, I think; or, at least the good poems aren't clear; they're dense or something; but not like Charles Bukowski, or something like that–poems about waste management; but, then, again we're back at ordinary, everyday life.

But if there is a resurgence of poetry, I want in! I want it to come back! I want to try again.

Because when I think about literary stuff that's top-notch, I just think of novels. Short stories even kind of suck, as far as uptake is concerned. Like my friend who writes short stories, he's not gonna get a lot of interest in his volumes, and his short stories are great. He's getting write-ups in *The New York Times* and everything–he's tops; but he's like, "Alright, if I'm really gonna make waves, I have to write a novel." And he wrote one and didn't like it; so now he's back to the less popular genre of the "short story collection."

But maybe this could be the turning of the tide! All of a sudden, now novels are being usurped by poetry. And that would be nice, but…

But I mean, the poetry you are receiving, is it good? Like is it a poem about Kant or something like that? Or there's not anything like that? What was that story we read, May Sinclair, "The Finding of the Absolute"? There's not anything like that? Like a poem that's a conversation with Kant about his notions of space and time?

Ayla: There was one like that, right? The future self one, that has a conversation with…who?

Ilwad: With Zhuangzi.

Ayla: But most of them are just images of nature.

Ilwad: Or something relating to personal self-discovery and such. I don't know if it's a sign or trend with some weird feeling of needing to escape. I don't know if it's the era that we're in or what's going on in the world that's making people want to create images of beauty and such. But I think that's what we're seeing.

Prof. Ives: But perhaps that's philosophical, maybe. If you're seeing poetry that's self-discovery, that's kind of the original Socratic-

philosophical project. I want to know myself. And poetry is, perhaps, a good medium for that.

Although, when I was in San Francisco, and going to poetry readings, I didn't necessarily get that, exactly. I got mostly people thinking that poetry is just like, "I'm going to tell you about my painful life; and I'm going to focus on how much it sucks." And, like, that's what it means to write poems, or at least that is how it felt–it felt like a sort of striving to "have suffered." It was genuine stuff about their life, so it's not even "technically"..."creative"–that is, they're not making it up? It's more so simply a moving and, in a number of cases, beautiful report on their terrible feelings. But is that what my own poetry should be doing? Do I need more autobiographical and aesthetically alluring gloom? Is that what poetry is supposed to be about–how your life sucks in some beautiful way? And then people are supposed to be entertained by that? That sounds sort of creepy–"Only pain is intellectual, only evil interesting"; but that's what people were doing. But I think all of us were more or less novices or at intermediate skill levels.

In any case, let's say that poetry's a good medium for reflecting on yourself. I say that kind of disparagingly, but I respect the project of self-reflection. I guess I'm trying to get to know what kind of thing I am, in some sense. And, for what it's worth, I think that is the real focus of the Socratic "know yourself" project–what *kind* of thing are you? It's not necessarily autobiographical. I don't know.

Fevet: There were some poems that also reflected on society. There was one about a car accident on a road and a person who didn't stop to see what happened. And this one was not only a reflection *on* society, but also seemed to be a reflection *of* society.

Prof. Ives: I mean, I'm not some poetry buff, but a poem immediately comes to mind; and a poem that is both a reflection *on* and, at least in

a "metaphysico-moral" sense, a reflection *of* society; and also is an image of nature to boot. Jeffers' "Birds and Fishes." There's this crazy scene of seabirds swooping down, cliffside, like with waves splashing up on the cliff and everything, or at least that's how I see it. But there is a frenzy of these seabirds feeding on these little fish, as if it were the height of terror and gore; and the punchline is; and let me read it; just a second; it's right here on the internet:

"What a filling of pouches! the mob

Hysteria is nearly human—these decent birds!—as if they were finding

Gold in the street. It is better than gold,

It can be eaten: and which one in all this fury of wild-fowl pities the fish?

No one certainly. Justice and mercy

Are human dreams, they do not concern the birds nor the fish nor eternal God."

And, like, what is happening here? Is the question: Is bird-eat-fish violence, as analogous to human violence, exposing the moral emptiness of human violence? Or is it some sort of strange exhortation: "The birds and fishes don't seem to have a problem with it, so why do we?"

But, regardless, perhaps the point is that the world is ugly, and morality is a "human dream."

Especially in the United States, I feel like an uptake for a lot of people is that the world is ugly, and it would be nice if the pushback is, like, instead of being all, nothing matters or morality is just a dream, we get a bunch of beautiful nature poetry, like the poetry you're getting in droves at the moment. But also, as if there's a lot of nature stuff that actually acts within the polarized framework, ugly society/beautiful nature; I like that and want to be in league with the reactionaries and be like, "Let's just go all beautiful nature on it!" And it would be interesting, too, if we could concoct, or find in relatively recent history,

a pattern or trend that suggests, when shitty stuff is happening, people start writing, not just about any old beautiful thing, but about beautiful nature.

It's cliche—that's bad. But, yeah, you might be able to see people doing that in times of political or cultural upheaval; and so, in some ways, that would be interesting if somebody's just like, this is a human nature thing. And, my god! That's the answer! Why is there so much imagistic, nature, self-reflective poetry being submitted this year? Because humans *qua* humans are reacting against an ugly world.

But now I'm like, shoot. I've never written about nature and beauty, have I? I don't think I have. Maybe I should start. That was a great question.

Joey: Poems are certainly in stark contrast to how we do philosophy academically. Why is it, do you think, that essays are still the dominant form?

Prof. Ives: I think, again, because they're easier to do? I don't know. For instance, Ayla, did you do, not poems, but a story for our class?

Ayla: Yeah.

Prof. Ives: But you were one of maybe four people. Did you write a story, Fevet?

Fevet: No, I did an essay. But you gave us the option!

Prof. Ives: This quarter I'm teaching the *Philosophy in Literature* class, and out of thirty-seven people, four or five will do a short story; and, rarely, does anyone do any poems or anything like that.

Um, but, yes. It might just be easier to write an essay. But the reason that it's easier is likely because that's what we've been doing the whole time. Our education, on the whole, is not inviting us to make up meaningful fictions as final products to be evaluated on. I don't know. Perhaps it's also because philosophy, professional philosophy, is led by philosophers who are lovers of clarity, and, for them, the essay is just the clearest thing around. The best essay, in this case, is perhaps the one where you just read it once and it's glued to your mind forever, and you don't ever have to recall it; because it's painted on your brain forevermore. That's clarity!

But real quick–if we're gonna disparage the exceedingly clear essay, the claim must be that clarity doesn't really make the reader work, and philosophical literature, at its best, is about making readers work or…think.

In any case, from the perspective of the professor, like in a school context, it might also be a time issue. Let's say I'm a busy professor. I don't have time to roll your ideas around for a week or so. Your ideas need to galavant mellifluously into my grading mind. And I think maybe y'all know if it doesn't–it shows in your grade. In this sense, the essay is thought to be the most efficient vehicle of the idea, the most efficient way to deliver a message.

But isn't the question, why is it *still* essays? Like, why is it *still* a matter of delivering a message directly to the reader? Because I feel like, again, if you're gonna write some poems, if you're gonna write a short story, or at least write them the way I would, it's going to be sneaky. And sneaky is hard to evaluate. It takes more time.

And maybe the question is: why are people not making all their assignments short stories instead of essays? I don't know. Is the answer: That's just not philosophy? Philosophy is straight prose? At most, it's creative non-fiction?

Or it's stuff like what you find on *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. It's gonna be a research and citation thing. Um, but again,

isn't that philosophy these days, though? Some kind of field thing, with peer review, etc.? Plato, of course, wrote dialogues–and he invented philosophy. But, that was really the last time anyone as prominent as him really took that form seriously or at least as seriously as he did. And then, from thenceforth, everybody just writes clear stuff that says, "I think this, and this is why"; and perhaps that is also part of the fact that, as a writer of philosophy, you're supposed to be trying to persuade other people of your position. I don't know. The story is gonna persuade you of anything? Really? Are stories even making claims? Or, are *good* stories making claims? But, maybe that's it! The lovers of clarity are also the lovers of making claims. And the good story, as I'm now seeing it, invites the reader, in particular, in more or less indirect terms to be the one developing claims–the one doing the work. And, ultimately, then, do we want our education or literary exercises to be more often like this? Reader, professor, you do the work!

Are y'all into that? Like, if you rolled into philosophy class next quarter and loudly announced: "The essay is dead! And now we will all only write short stories!" And the professor was like, "Well…Oookay! I strenuously agree!" Would you be like, "Hooray! This is exactly what we signed up for! This is gonna be awesome! No more being clear and definitely no more making claims!" Would you be happy about that? Or do you think it should be essays?

Ilwad: Personally, I'm graduating this quarter. I've been through a fair share of philosophy classes. I do wish that there were times where there was an option to do a short story, rather than it just solely being essays, because often it's kind of hard to talk about something that's so philosophical without it being put into stories. But it could just be me, I think. Sometimes essays just don't make sense to me or just don't seem well-matched to the subject matter.

Prof. Ives: My god. For thirty years of my life, it's been non-stop essays…and books…I'm just so tired. They make too much sense!

But yeah, alternatives? Or if we're like, I want to do something different, well, why don't you just start by interviewing somebody? A student in my education class once called her grandma and just described to her grandma, in a sort of conversational style, a few of the kinds of things we talked about in class. She recorded the conversation, and then just polished it up. I was like, there you go. That's it! This looks great! But then I was like, to be good, it has to be dressed up a little; and that's exactly what she did. But that's sort of what Plato does or at least one idea about what he might have been doing with some of his dialogues. He goes out and he hears people having this discussion and he goes home, and he's like, "Hmm…I don't like that; let's change this; and let's make the setting something meaningful," and so on. So he takes some real stuff and then embellishes it, but I don't know if that…if that kind of thing suggests that the philosophical dialogue is some sort of creative non-fiction; but in the sense of being a short story about a conversation; and it really happened; I talked with people; but the finished product is what the discussion was about…*at its very best*. This is teleological–this is what the discussion was striving to be, and in the end, as an author, I just helped it get there, helped it to be its best…after the fact.

Though, isn't this also kind of what an autobiography is? Isn't it? Creative non-fiction? If I ever write an autobiography, I'm totally not telling the truth. It wouldn't be any fun. You have to put some sauce on these sorts of things. You can't just tell the truth.

Fevet: The next question, we also talked about it in class: why do you think that metaphysical questions are worth contemplating even though they're epistemologically limited? And we should also try to tie this back into the literary focus in one way or another, if we can.

Prof. Ives: Okay. My answer is not good. Metaphysical questions are just entertaining! In particular, speculation is just super fun. It's truly my favorite thing to do. The epistemological limitations–I don't think I care so much. I'm more so simply into creating accounts. What's the question again, though?

Fevet: Why do you think that it's worth…doing this, like, worth creating metaphysical accounts, even though we all ultimately know that epistemologically speaking, we don't have the kind of knowledge and capacity to arrive at real answers?

Prof. Ives: Okay. Again, my answer is gross though. Metaphysics is just pleasant. That's its value.

But with respect to epistemological concerns, I think there's a sense in which, if I were to write metaphysics in a pleasant style, it could still be persuasive. I'm certainly not going to *prove* my metaphysics. I'm going to try, instead, to make it beautiful enough that it "tricks" you into an experience of its quasi-veracity. And, for what it's worth, I hope to do this primarily through literary means, broadly construed as including rhetorical means.

In any case, the metaphysical accounts I have adopted don't prove anything and there are no real arguments concerning them. Nevertheless, I still adopt them; and because there is something pleasant about doing so. It's an enticing metaphysics, not a true one. Its worth as a metaphysics, then, in this case, is in its aesthetic appeal, not its factuality. And this is just a fancy way of saying it's fun.

But, worthwhile, like, as a pursuit?

I used to say, metaphysics was not worthwhile, and that's why it's awesome. Why is metaphysics so great? Because it's useless. And the people who say that would never say I'm not right.

I mean, that's such a great question. Like, metaphysics doesn't allow you to have knowledge through it, so does it lose its

philosophical value? Is that a way of putting it, too? Like, you can't…I can't know this kind of truth, and because I can't know 'x' metaphysical claim to be true, it risks losing its philosophical value.

Fevet: I mean, you can still argue that it's valuable.

Prof. Ives: And that's what I'm trying to put my finger on. How can I think it's valuable, other than, like, the gross answer? Like, it's just fun. Um…or it's valuable merely to be thinking about the nature of reality?

Fevet: Or maybe because it has some other implication.

Prof. Ives: Yeah, and the only thing I'm thinking of is ethical things, as implications along these lines. Something that contributes to the quality of your life to have this kind of intellectual experience on your own. If I write my metaphysical account, that might not do anything for y'all. But surely it does something for me. Are there some things that are, in their own right, valuable to contemplate, like contemplating "the way things really are"? Where you're like, "Hey, that's part of a good life." I'm not sure it's a necessary part, however. I think you could be happy without thinking about whether reality's solely mental or not, for instance. But that's at least one of the alternatives for good lives.

And, it's just so pleasant to write that stuff. But again, I don't like that answer. It's worthwhile, because it's pleasant? Nobody believes that, right? That sounds like you could immediately just be brushed off as being silly. I mean, I guess it's just another way of saying it's valuable in its own right, when you do it for its own sake, which could mean you do it for the sake of pleasure and nothing else.

But, I wish I had a cooler sentence or claim than that. But let me say it one more time. If you can't know 'x,' is it still philosophically valuable to think about 'x'? I feel like it's valuable in my own heart. But that's a greeting card, not a real answer.

Do you have an answer?

Fevet: Well, you could say that it's valuable to each person's own heart, and therefore it's valuable to the collective, and you have a better world.

Prof. Ives: Maybe that is true, the collective and better world part, especially if you look to something like gender metaphysics–for example, like, the social construction of "woman." There are some gender metaphysicians who say, "I'm not even saying this metaphysics is true; this is just a political move." So it's valuable in that sense. A feminist metaphysician can make women's lives politically better just by putting a metaphysics out into the world, challenging the idea that there's really a thing called, "woman," and, in turn, challenging everything "woman" entails.

In fact, just give me a second…this one piece I used to teach by…here it is, Natalie Stoljar. She more or less suggests at one point that she's not necessarily arguing for the truth of any metaphysical view about women. It's more like a raw political project. So, even though she's not proving that there's no such thing as woman or that there is such a thing, the point is still valuable: to improve political conditions for women by challenging the current metaphysical narrative that controls their lives.

And, in some abstract sense, maybe this is a literary angle too–for some folks pushing views like this, it's all about narratives and counter-narratives. Metaphysics, in this sense, is like…practical political literature. It's about destroying public stories or replacing them with new public stories; and perhaps only using the language of truth or untruth in some practical way.

But, I don't know. I guess there's some part of me that wants a metaphysics that is absolutely not practical.

Fevet: It makes sense, because metaphysics is not supposed to be practical?

Prof. Ives: Yeah…I feel like practical metaphysics is a recent phenomenon? Because I want to say the old-timey people explicitly say that philosophy is not gonna get you political power or money. It's just gonna get you knowledge. Period. And this is another way to say that you do metaphysics for its own sake. This is its value. But if you're right, and we can't *know* any given metaphysics to be true, then what's left for the philosopher? It's just pleasure. I guess that must be my answer. I'm done!

Fevet: Made your case! The next question is also metaphysics, but a very specific style of metaphysics–Plato's metaphysics. Do you think that his forms serve as sufficient causal explanations for the instantiations of physical phenomena in the real world? And maybe we can try again to steer it back somehow into literature.

Prof. Ives: I think it's popular to say that the forms do not explain these sorts of things. I guess I would also say they don't. But I'm not sure that it's a thing I care about when I'm caring about the forms; and this is likely a methodological thing on my part. I'm not ever reading Plato to see if what he's saying is right. At base, I'm just trying to understand what he's really saying about these "forms" that supposedly cause the properties of the things we see with our eyeballs.

If, however, I were to think about the truth of the theory of participation, and that is how I interpret the question about forms causing phenomena in the real world, in the visible world–this is the theory of participation; if I were to think about the truth of the theory of participation, I would first wonder about what experience I could have that might corroborate it. And the strange thing is that, in the *Phaedo*, it seems that Socrates is saying you can have an experience of it. In the *Phaedo,* folks are hanging out with Socrates in jail because he's

about to be executed. And they're sitting there talking about what's going to happen in the afterlife. And, as part of this discussion, Socrates brings up the theory of participation and claims that, "This is something we've certainly all experienced." And everyone present quickly agrees on the fact as well as the associated values the theory carries. That is…these philosophers have all had an experience that suggests there are invisible forms that are responsible for the features of the things we see; and, moreover, that participation happens because the visible things are striving to be like their superiors, the invisible things. In other words, the instantiation of phenomena in the visible world is a product of visible things striving to be the best they can be–the visible world is trying to be the best version of itself. So, again, this is mostly where I stop–this is an understanding of what Plato means by participation. I don't then go on to ask if the theory is true.

As close as I get to considering the truth of the theory is…instead of thinking of about truth, I think I'm more interested in trying to figure out how I could have the experience that Socrates et al. have had. And, perhaps, I think you can have some basic experience of Plato's metaphysics or at least the divided line metaphysics of Book VI of the *Republic*. I mean…I'm not sure that all Plato's stuff is pie in the sky or even the requirement of some obscure argument Plato has. In short, if you just reflect on your own perception, sense-perception, or intellectual perception, etc., I think you can have an experience of visible red, imaginative red, mathematico-conceptual red, and intellectual red, and, perhaps, kind of reasonably conclude that reality stacks up in this sort of four-tiered way. But, I'm still not at all sure how to have an experience of intellectual red being the "cause" of or an explanation of visible red, let alone the cause of the other two. I've tried, and it just isn't working out for me. I'm obviously doing something wrong.

Fevet: Oh. As I read Plato, I didn't think that it was some kind of thing that I see. Like the form of "redness" is not really something that I see when I close my eyes. I thought that what he was saying was that, because the soul is immortal, it'll recognize red when it sees it, not that I have to think about it and close my eyes and try to think about it.

Prof. Ives: Yeah, I feel like that's a *Phaedo* interpretation–the forms are things that you experience in between lives; you somehow retain them in memory; and whether you're conscious of it or not, they're informing your experience of "red" right now. The "redness" that you came to know while un-embodied is allowing you to identify red in the visible world.

Fevet: Yeah, that's what I thought he was saying.

Prof. Ives: But, perhaps, this is, again, the way we could start to corroborate participation. First, I will die; and, then, see the forms; and then return to tell the tale? But this might be getting away from participation; or perhaps this epistemological-perceptual story is one that presupposes the truth of participation? That is, because redness is the cause of red in the visible world, then knowing redness will enable one to identify red.

Fevet: Or do you think, because of its abstract practicality, you can't necessarily have the experience of participation. It's too fundamental to how we experience the world. So you can't verify that it's true. Regardless, could participation still provide sufficient causal explanation for some amount of phenomena?

Prof. Ives: At most, as we just said more or less, as a metaphysics, it could explain accurate sense-perception of phenomena? I'm not sure.

But, again, I guess I've never been concerned about whether or not the theory of participation is a "sufficient causal explanation." I think I'm curious instead about why Plato is so focused on explaining the features of visible things. This is ultimately what participation is supposed to do, I think; so, of all the things he might want to explain about the visible world, why does he focus on the *features* of visible things? Even the particular that holds them, he doesn't seem to be interested in that too much, at least until the *Timaeus*, where there is really only one particular–all of "space." It's the only "this." Everything else visible is just a feature of it, a "such-like," as one translator puts it.

But, honestly, in the end, all of Plato's arguments are terrible, and on some truth-y level, I really can't take any of it seriously. But on a story level, I love it. Plato's metaphysics is a great story. Plato is a great story. His account is just so sparkly and shiny.

Fevet: I know! But it's so hard to take any of it seriously. But still, more generally speaking, do you think there's some sort of metaphysical, abstract cause of the things we see around us?

Prof. Ives: If I were to believe in such a thing, at least in spirit, I would go to sociology–like "race" might be some abstract thing that's "acting" on me, and in that sense, it seems to be some sort of independent thing. It's an abstract concept that's out there somewhere. Extending this sort of relation to things like redness and red seems somehow harder. I don't know.

But I would say, just aesthetically, I like the attempt. And, the idea that concepts are acting on us, as if they're floating around, that's way more enticing than whatever I feel is natural to think–like the Aristotelian view of features "inhering" in things. But again, race and gender, as sociological characteristics are things floating around acting on us–they don't inhere in us. If you go to the most extreme, sociological concepts are also acting on the quality of my life. As what

I take to be a sort of "lefty" metaphysical sentiment, there's an independently existing "whiteness" making my life good in our present society. And it's not necessarily me, Charles, the particular. It's whiteness as a "thing." It's floating around in society giving me dividends. But if you get bigger than that, and start talking about red, or a form of justice, it just seems harder to believe somehow.

Much of the time, Plato's views just seem so strange if we think of them as attempts at truth claims.

Fevet: I think it's because our modern world is so far ahead or prominently secular? I feel like if we all went back to the ancient Greek world, it would feel more natural to believe in obscure entities that exist independently and cause the features of the things we see with our eyeballs.

Prof. Ives: Oh! Alright. That's great! The Olympian gods are causing stuff from afar; and just like the gods who live in the heavens, there is a heaven where ideas live; and these ideas, these forms have as much remote influence as the gods do! There are these invisible entities that not only cause trouble in our lives–the gods; but there are also their invisible cousins that cause the features of things we see with our eyeballs–the forms. So maybe that's right. Greek intellectuals already have that kind of "causation from afar" vibe going on in their theo-mythical worldview.

But on the whole, you would think I'd have a bunch of say about forms, because Plato's most famous stuff is, in some sense, the forms. But I just typically stay away, because I'm just like, bleh. And perhaps this is the story part again. When I write about the forms, I typically write about them as part of a political project–they're Plato's practical political literature, just like we were saying with gender metaphysics. In the *Republic*, for instance, the reason to care about the forms is that they are part of making the best rulers possible. We want to get philosophers to experience the forms, the "truth" of the theory

of participation, etc., because we want folks who will not care about ruling, who will not think the life of ruling is the good life; and who will rule, when they do, only out of obligation or because we make them. They'll also have knowledge of justice, etc.; but mostly folks who have had an experience of participation will have no concern with the kinds of things that typically make rulers bad–money, sex, etc. Lovers of the forms don't care about that kind of stuff; and again you're trying to make rulers who don't care about that stuff; because, ultimately, that's how you get a good society. So, we tell rulers the story of the forms, because we want them to have certain lives and, in turn, for the citizens they rule to have certain lives–happy lives.

So, what else we got? More metaphysical digression?

Ayla: No. Not at all. Our concluding question is very light-hearted, so don't worry. What's your favorite piece of literature, and what philosophical notions stand out for you?

Prof. Ives: My favorite piece of literature…alright. Well…maybe it doesn't really have anything to do with philosophy, or at least not obviously? I don't know–*A Movable Feast*? It's Hemingway, and he's writing about his time in Paris with F. Scott Fitzgerald, and all these people are there like Picasso, Dali, Aleister Crowley (the "diabolist"), T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein, and, perhaps most importantly, Gertrude Stein. I feel like she's one of the bigger players in the story.

But I'm not really sure that it's literature, at least not in the sense I was assuming from the question; like, it's not a novel or a short story. It's more like non-fiction, or here we go with the creative non-fiction again–it's an autobiographical account, though, maybe that's the philosophical edge of it. Right. Maybe, that's it. I really loved this book because it offered a vision of "a life," and one that looked really attractive to me at the time–the struggling, young writer's life. For me, this was the life to pursue as *the* good life: being broke in a big city with

other talented people, but writing for a living and not having another job. Like, being a part of a cool, burgeoning art-y "scene."

But I'm not sure I really like that answer. Or, honestly, I'm not sure I really read that much literature, which is a pretty weird thing to say as someone who teaches a class called, "Philosophy in Literature"; though, I guess, maybe that's false. I just finished reading all the extant Greek tragedies! Those must be literature, right? Like theatro-literary stuff. And maybe Euripides' *Bacchae* is a candidate. That one's great! Do y'all know that one?

Ayla: Nope.

Prof. Ives: It's certainly my favorite of the thirty plus plays I just read. It's like a hilarious horror movie that's creepy and deep or deep enough. But I guess, now that I think of it, the thing that pulls me into that one, other than worship of Dionysus, is, like, how can I do that? I'm into the *Bacchae* because it's the kind of thing I want to write–a creepy, deep story that's also light-hearted and fun. I'm not even sure I liked reading it. So, it's not my favorite in that sense, though I guess it must be pleasant on some level. It's more so that I look at it as something to figure out, methodologically speaking. Again, the feeling is: how can I write that?

But, I guess I'm not really feeling like that fun of a person along these lines. I don't ever read books for fun. It's either so I can write about them, like with my scholarly stuff, and that's why I just read three thousand pages of Greek plays; or I'm reading books so I can learn how to write something interesting. In fact, I'm not really sure I have a "favorite piece of literature"?

Maybe Borges is another candidate? "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"? That one's awesome. But, again, I kind of just like that one because I write stuff like that. Ha! Maybe that's it! "What's your favorite literature, Charles?" "My own stuff!"

But, honestly, I'm not sure I really have a favorite. I'm definitely going to have to embellish this answer.

What about y'all?

Ayla: *Hour of the Star*, Clarice Lispector.

Fevet: Yeah, *Hour of the Star* by Clarice Lispector. We both recommend that.

Prof. Ives: Is it long?

Ayla: No, it's like eighty pages.

Prof. Ives: Excellent. It's on my next syllabus. Victory!

Fevet: Yeah. So that one immediately; and *Fugitive Pieces*, but it's not by Clarice Lispector.

Prof. Ives: What's *Fugitive Pieces*?

Fevet: I read it a while ago, like five, six years ago. But it's still my favorite. I haven't read it since, but it made me cry. Wait, search up the author. Michaels.

Prof. Ives: Yeah…Anne Michaels. Did you cry because you were happy?

Fevet: No. It was pretty upsetting.

Prof. Ives: Oh geez. I'm sorry.

Fevet: No, it was a "good" upsetting.

Prof. Ives: What about y'all? You got a favorite book?

Ilwad: *The Hearing Trumpet* by Leonara Carrington.

Prof. Ives: How long is that one?

Illwad: It's a novella.

Prof. Ives: It's on the syllabus. Thanks for the tip!

Joey: I don't think I have a favorite.

Prof. Ives: I know! It's so hard to have a favorite. I'm on your team.
Ayla: You should replace Sartre with *Hour of The Star*. It's existential.

Fevet: But he likes Sartre.

Prof. Ives: Well, "The Wall," that one's crazy. But that story, I don't really love it. The ending, though, is so, so awesome, and again, I'm mostly interested in how to do that. It's such a great ending! Like Ted Chiang's, "Hell Is the Absence of God." A truly great ending; and I like it almost entirely for the ending. And again…I really only like these stories as a study in great endings. Like, how do I do that!?

Fevet: That's a great instinct. I wish I had that.

Prof. Ives: But you see me wishing that I was just like, "Hey man, I just like this." The closest I get to that is, *A Movable Feast*. I was just in love with that, but again, because I wanted to be that; though I don't think I want to be that now. I mean, living in Paris would be fine. But I don't want to be broke. I did enough of that in my twenties, and I really hope I'm done with that.

But, alright. Is that it?

Ayla: Yup, I think we're done. Thank you so much.

Prof. Ives: Joey, did you press record!? Oh no! You didn't press record! Now, we'll have to reconstruct the whole thing from memory. We'll really have to embellish it now! Hooray!!!!

Joey: I did! I pressed record! I swear!

Prof. Ives: Oh. Thank god. I'd super hate for us to have to make this whole thing up. Well, anyway, thanks so much y'all! I sincerely appreciate the opportunity. I really learned a lot. Thanks so much!!!

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