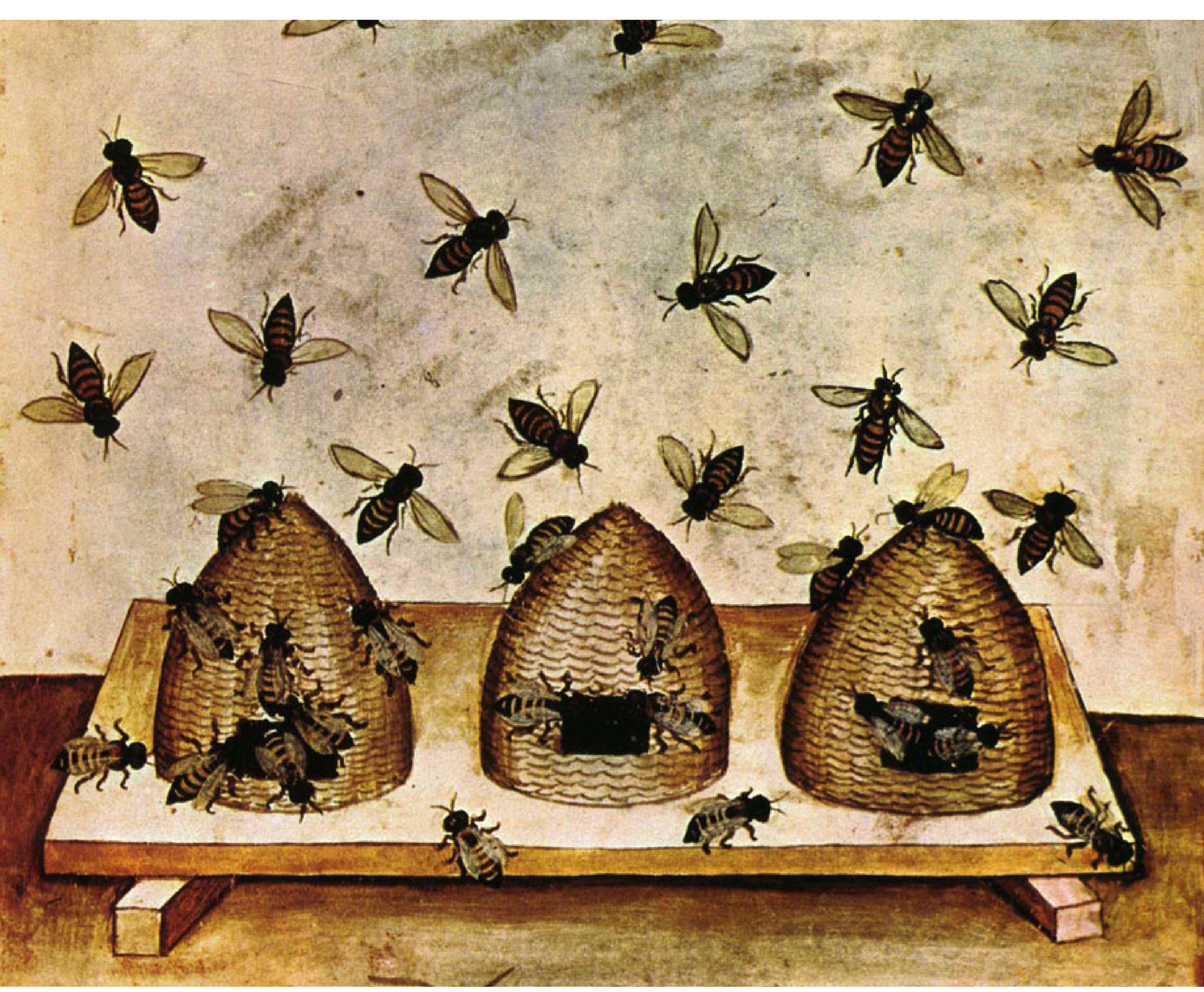
# COMMONPLACE

A Journal of the Catherine Project



**THE DUAL FORM IN ANTIGONE**

2=1 and Other Difficulties in Greek Tragedy

**MONTAIGNE'S BODY**

Fleshing out Learning, Pedantry, and Wisdom

**READING IN COMMUNITY**

A Conversation with Zena Hitz

ISSUE 1

# COMMONPLACE

A Journal of the Catherine Project

Summer 2023

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# An Invitation

BY JORDAN POYNER

Welcome strangers and friends,

This is the first issue of *Commonplace*, a journal of the Catherine Project. The Catherine Project is an intellectual community driven by the love of learning for its own sake. If you've ever wanted to read an excellent book, think about it deeply, and have a serious but friendly conversation with a small band of fellow learners, the Catherine Project is a space for you.

We welcome learners from all walks of life. We don't charge tuition or fees, and we don't award credits or grades. We read great books of literature, science, and philosophy because we think these books have something to teach us. And we come together to discuss these books because we also think we have something to learn from each other.

The Catherine Project is a community of learners who call an incredible variety of places "home." We live in different timezones, have different work schedules, and opportunities for us to congregate are rare. A community needs to be able to communicate and a journal offers us a way to do so. Whether we're publishing news about the Project or sharing the fruits of our learning, *Commonplace* is meant to keep us connected.

We named the journal "Commonplace" because that's what it is: a place or space we have in common. But the word "commonplace" can also be used to describe something as ordinary or unoriginal. Though some might understand such descriptions negatively, we embrace them. What we're doing is rare these days, but it's not original: human beings throughout history have gathered informally to read, think, and learn together. We think learning for learning's sake should be ordinary and shared among people of different ages, occupations, and educational backgrounds.

If you want to explore the deepest human questions in company with other eager learners, join us!

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**Jordan Poyner** is the executive director of the Catherine Project, as well as a newly christened father and amateur soccer player. In the rare moments when he isn't engaged in one of those activities, he can be found reading Plato or apprehensively considering reading anything else. Jordan can be reached by email at jordan.poyner@catherineproject.org.

We invite people from all walks of life to join our community of learning. There are no tuition or fees. We offer three kinds of courses:

## Tutorials

Our tutorials are capped at 4-6 readers each and are led by a tutor. They typically meet for 12 weeks, and are organized around the careful reading and discussion of one or more fundamental texts. Readers write reflection papers on the weekly readings and send them to one another before each meeting.

## Reading Groups

Reading groups are typically peer-led and more flexible in nature. They may focus on a single text or a group of texts, and their length varies. We aim for a core of 8-10 readers and there is no required writing.

## Subject Tutorials

When possible, we organize small group meetings with a subject tutor competent in subjects such as: the art of writing, ancient languages, and mathematics such as algebra and geometry. As with our reading groups, the duration of subject tutorials varies.

# PRINCIPLES

## Hospitality

Anyone may study with us who wishes to learn and who has the basic skills necessary for serious reading and conversation. Our conversations are open-ended and not guided toward particular conclusions. Our students, or readers, are understood to be motivated by their own questions. No one's inability to pay or inability to travel ought to be an obstacle to their opportunities to learn.

## Great Books

We read books of richness, depth, and lasting value that bear repeated re-readings. Such books teach readers at all levels of preparation, and they level the distance between the teacher and the learner so as to encourage collaboration. With a book as a teacher, each reader develops the ability to inquire in depth and to evaluate evidence by his or her own lights.

## Zeal

The desire to learn for its own sake is the primary engine of our work. Accordingly, we prize amateurism. Tutors learn along with our readers and therefore often teach outside of their fields of specialty.

## Conversation

We find conversation to be the best way to cultivate free and independent learners. Discussion and reading are the primary vehicles of the learning we offer: writing assignments are subsidiary. Essays help the reader to think and help to focus the conversations that result from it.

## Self-direction

Our courses help readers to develop as free inquirers. We seek to support independent learners, but we also seek to nurture autodidacts: self-directed, courageous, and honest pursuers of learning in all walks of life.

## Focus

In light of our commitment to simplicity, egalitarianism, and intellectual focus, readers do not choose tutors, tutors do not choose readers, and members of reading groups do not choose one another. Readers choose a book to read or a course of study.

## Seriousness

We go after the deepest and most difficult questions and ask the same of our readers. We do not "dumb down" material.

## Flexibility

We seek to meet the human need for serious inquiry with as few arbitrary constraints as possible.

# The Dual Form in Antigone

*BY FELIX BIENEMAN*

Antigone is a play about doubles. Two brothers have killed each other in combat; two sisters are left with the fallout. One brother, fighting on behalf of his home city, can be buried; the other, having fought against his home, cannot. One grieving sister wants to mourn her dishonored brother vocally; the other does not. Understanding the war between the two brothers and the resulting conflict between the two sisters is essential to understanding the play. This, too, is highlighted by the Greek. Each pair is described as though they were a unit, and yet Eteocles and Polynices find themselves in opposition to each other, as do Antigone and Ismene.

The first time I read Antigone in Greek, every line of the original felt like a discovery. I had read the play in English and watched recordings of it performed, but the Greek text added so much dimension that I had never known to look for. The Greek dual form was one of my discoveries.

English speakers are familiar with the singular and plural: we use the singular to talk about one thing ("I have a cat"), and the plural to talk about multiple things ("I have three cats"). In Greek, there is a rare third option, used to talk about only two things (two hands, for example, or two people in a couple). This is the dual.

From the very first line, the siblings in Antigone are set up in pairs, not just textually but also linguistically, using Greek's dual form. In the first line of the play, Antigone greets her sister with, "*o koinon autadelphon Ismenes kara*." *Ismenes kara*, literally "head of Ismene," functions as a term of endearment, while *koinon autadelphon*, "kindred sibling," emphasizes Ismene's relationship to Antigone. I have translated this line as, "Oh, Ismene, sister, partner from the start," to communicate the importance of the relationship between Antigone and Ismene.

The dual form first appears in line three: "*ar' oisth' ho ti Zeus ton ap' Oidipou kakon / hopoion ouchi noin eti zosain telei?*" or, "Tell me this: which of Oedipus's evils has Zeus / not spent upon the two of us both still alive?" Both *noin* (first person pronoun) and *zosain* (from *zao*,

"to live," here translated as "alive") use the dual form, denoted here by the endings *-oin* and *-ain*. I have translated "*noin . . . zosain*" as "the two of us both still alive" to carry the significance of the dual into English.

Sophocles uses the dual to describe the pair of brothers as well. In line 13, it's used for both in the same breath: "*duoin adelphoin esterethemen duo, miai thanontoin hemerai diplei cheri*," or, "Not since the two of us were robbed of brothers two / who died a double death upon a single day." Antigone and Ismene are a pair, Eteocles and Polynices are a pair, and here they're set up in opposition to each other: a pair of pairs. Sophocles emphasizes this by using the words *duo* (meaning "two") and *diplei* ("double") alongside the dual form of the words for "two," "brother," and "dying" (*duoin, adelphoin, thanontoin*). I carry it into English by saying "the two of us" instead of "we," and by emphasizing the "brothers two" and their "double death."

There is a sense in which the events of Antigone are a result of failed doubling—that is, a single event or person where there should have been two. Oedipus should have had a mother and a wife, but as Ismene points out in line 53, those two words describe the same woman. The brothers should have had separate deaths, on separate days—but they died in the same way, on the same day. Once dead, the two brothers should have been buried together by their two surviving sisters, but only one brother was buried, and only one sister fought to rectify that.

In fact, although Antigone starts the play by invoking her connection to Ismene, she later fully rejects that connection—in line 546, when Ismene is trying to take joint credit for Polyneices' burial, Antigone tells Ismene, "*me moi thaneis su koina*," or, "Don't die in partnership with me." The word *koina* ("common") echoes the first line of the play, and I translate it as "partnership" to reflect that. When Antigone rejects her sister, she and Ismene are no longer a pair, and they will not, like their brothers, die a double death upon a single day. (Still, Ismene disappears from the play at the same time Antigone does. Narratively, it is the same as if she had died: we never see her again. She has disappeared alongside her sister. They are not able to escape their association.)

> "Antigone and Ismene are a pair, Eteocles and Polynices are a pair…a pair of pairs.

How, then, do you communicate the dual form in English? Do you even have to? After all, it is grammatically correct to translate a dual form as a regular English plural. But when I translate Antigone, I want to provide any potential reader with some of the same discovery I felt when reading the Greek—so when I see a dual form, I always try to bring it into English. The translation lacks the concision of the Greek, but it does, I hope, evoke the fierce partnership and fiercer opposition that often characterizes sibling relationships. I want to make it clear: Eteocles rejected Polyneices, and Antigone rejected Ismene, but they are still inextricable from one another. Siblings, and partners from the start.

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**Felix Bieneman** is an aspiring classicist currently residing in northern Vermont. They have been participating in intermediate Greek tutorials with the Catherine Project for the past year, and more recently have been leading reading groups on Greek tragedy.

# Montaigne's Body

BY ALEXANDRA BARO

*In addition to ongoing reading groups and tutorials, the Catherine Project periodically hosts single seminars on short works. These two-hour conversations are a way to get a taste of our approach to group study with minimal commitment. The following essay was inspired by a Fall 2022 seminar on Montaigne's essay "Of Pedantry."*

Montaigne likens the soul to a spiritual stomach. Knowledge, like properly assimilated meat, strengthens the muscles of the ethereal body. Just as some constitutions are finicky, some people are not disposed to learn. In the essay "Of the Education of Children," Montaigne diagnoses this condition as a sort of intellectual dyspepsia: "It is a sign of rawness and indigestion to disgorge food just as we have swallowed it. The stomach has not done its work if it has not changed the condition and form of what has been given it to cook" (134).[1] The pedant suffers a double curse: inordinate appetite and bilious constitution. His learning fails to fortify his soul, and so when he is called to act, he merely twitches. For knowledge to be worth the pains of acquisition, it must become incarnate—that is to say, it must be made meaty. How?

The pedant's dilemma shows that the connection between knowledge and wisdom is oblique. Study can only teach us "*about* wisdom," and knowing about wisdom is not the same thing as being wise (127). If we want to become wise, then we must find some way to get around this troublesome "about."

To this end, Montaigne endorses the education of the Persians, who "taught their children virtue as others do letters" (126). The eldest son in the royal family is entrusted to a team of righteous eunuchs, who first see to it that his body grows sound and strong. When he reaches adolescence, they place him in the care of "the wisest, the most just, the most temperate, and the most valiant in the nation." These superlatives teach him to be pious, "to be always truthful," to control his appetites, and "to fear nothing." When it comes to the

1 Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Everyman's Library, 2003).

formation of character, letters themselves are apparently of little use.

How one would love to see a syllabus from the most temperate man in the nation! As it is, Montaigne leaves us to assume that the prince learns through imitation. Fair enough. Still, teachers are usually expected to do something, not just be something. Montaigne supplements his summary of Persian paideia with a selection from Plato's Laws:

> *The method of their teaching was to ask them questions on their judgment of men and their actions; and if they condemned or praised this person or that deed, they had to reason out what they said; and by this means they both sharpened their understanding and at the same time learned what was right* (127).

Montaigne draws a contrast between this sort of training in practical reckoning and the morbid frittering of grammarians that often passes for instruction. A student ought to learn what to praise, what to condemn, and how to explain his reasoning. He must learn to read human character.

The essay concludes with a celebration of the Spartan virtues at the expense of the Athenian. Away with sophistical playthings—the thing is to "overthrow the threats of fortune and death" (128). Montaigne's lionization of Sparta over Athens reflects a fundamentally conservative view of wisdom. If we are wise at all, we must manage to express it in some recognizable, worldly way. A wise man judges actions correctly; he does not establish a new standard by which to judge. This enables him to act fluidly within an established framework of excellence, rather than courting the evil eye through illegible behavior.

Let's say, then, that for Montaigne the purpose of education is to train the soul to "go at a better gait" (123). The soul should move gracefully and efficiently but, above all, it has to move. Wisdom is less a virtue to be pursued for its own sake than a perfection of the virtues, a state of spiritual health. Pedantry, on the other hand, is an unnatural growth that distorts the figure and impedes its motion. The muscles

## Seasonal Seminars

We periodically offer a day of one-off discussions of a short text. These seminars are a chance to experience the core activity of the Catherine Project community without committing to weekly meetings.

The reading for our 2022 Fall Seminar was the essay "On Pedantry" by Michel de Montaigne. This spring we discussed James Joyce's short story "The Dead."

To be notified when we announce our next Seasonal Seminar, join our mailing list at https://catherineproject.org/contact-us.

"swell" and "inflate" rather than truly "enlarge". They might look impressive in the right lighting, but they won't help you dance.

For Montaigne, the undernourished and overlearned are defined by their impotence. They are like birds who "go in quest of grain, and carry it in their beak without tasting it to give a beakful to their little ones" (121). For all their clucking effeminacy (very un-Spartan), these sterile creatures have no one to feed. Instead, they "go pillaging knowledge in books and lodge it only on the end of their lips, in order merely to disgorge it and scatter to the winds." The pedant's folly is a sort of perversion of nature. Not only does he fail to benefit from study, he somehow leaves the books worse off than he found them. He does this not for personal gain—he gains nothing—but for the pleasure of pillaging. His soul does not stride, but waddles, puffed up to a false fullness.

Montaigne does not count himself among the exemplars of practical wisdom. He accuses himself of intellectual gluttony: "I go about cadging from books here and there the sayings that please me, not to keep them, for I have no storehouses, but to transport them into this one, in which, to tell the truth, they are no more mine than in their original place (121)." His writing is a prosthetic belly in which he deposits the learning of others without successfully incorporating it into his own soul.

It seems unlikely that, in an ideal course of study, Montaigne would include any experience as luxurious as reading the *Essays*. In his opening note to the reader, he cautions, "I am myself the matter of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your time on frivolous and vain a subject". Thankfully, becoming wise requires something more or other than reason. It is the pedant who delights in flights of reason unmoored to any human concern. Montaigne goes on to describe the essays to come as a sort of body, in which his "defects will be read to life" along with his "natural form." If wisdom consists, at least in part, of coming to know the characters of men, perhaps we might become wiser by coming to know Montaigne—not, mind you, by hoarding detachable insights, but in tracing the imprint of the man.

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**Alexandra Baro** has an MA in Classical Studies from UCLA. She teaches English at a private high school in New Jersey and is delighted to lead tutorials in ancient Greek for the Catherine Project.

# License to Remember

BY SUSAN SCHULTZ

My dog Lilith and I were walking in Valley of the Temples cemetery in windward O`ahu, Hawaii the other day, when we passed a Filipino family standing around a fresh grave. Lots of talk, much laughter. I glanced at their parked car. The license plate read "ALTHEA." My first thought was "Truth," but I was one syllable off. That's *alētheia*. A Google search found me the following net: Althea Gibson, tennis player, first Black woman to win a Grand Slam title, also a golfer; Korean skin care product sold in the Philippines, birth control product; and Althea—or *Althaia* in Greek—a mythological queen, whose name means *healer* or *wholesome*. She killed her son in a bizarre fashion predicted by the Fates. A death foretold. Muse to poets, including Richard Lovelace, whose 1642 "To Althea, from Prison" became a Fairport Convention song in the 1970s. The Lovelace poem, written to his lover from prison—which predicts Wordsworth's much less erotic "Nuns Fret Not at their Convent's Narrow Room," in its equation of imprisonment and freedom—ends this way:

*Stone walls doe not a prison make,*
*Nor iron bars a cage;*
*Mindes innocent and quiet take*
*That for an hermitage;*
*If I have freedome in my love,*
*And in my soule am free,*
*Angels alone that sore above*
*Enjoy such liberty.*

No Dead Head, I. But lo, I also find a YouTube video, or several, of the Grateful Dead singing their 1980 song (lyrics by Robert Hunter), "Althea." It's in the voice of a commitment-phobe talking to his lover, Althea. "I told Althea I was feeling lost," Jerry Garcia sings. But this Althea morphs into Hamlet's self-destructive Ophelia, and the lyrics make a bow to Hamlet's "to die, perchance to dream."

I'm netted in the cultural unconscious of Greek culture and language. Its chain has taken me from a license plate to a 40 year old song, with several stops along the way. It ends, perchance, with skin care. Althea of Korea is also a healer, I guess. I took

an introductory Greek course from the Catherine Project. While the grammar reminded me of the kind of mathematics I floundered in, the words were pearls that became the language's eyes for me. We spoke only of grand themes (my teacher only learned to count to 10 in graduate school, she said, because who needs to count change in a dead language?). But the themes all came down to words for truth and beauty (and lots of cynical politics). I learned how much of my intellectual (and emotional) subconscious is Greek. While I'm on the verge of forgetting even the alphabet, months later, I'll never forget the joy of recognition when a word like "*Althaia*" emerged from the page, and how lovely it was to share that joy with my fellow students in their Zoom boxes.

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**Susan M. Schultz** is Emerita Professor of English at the University of Hawai`i-Manoa. She is author, most recently, of *Lilith Walks* (BlazeVox) and *I Want to Write an Honest Sentence* (Talisman).

The Catherine Project builds communities of learning based on conversation and hospitality.

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We seek simplicity, transparency, and open communication in matters large and small.

# My Favorite Mozart Aria?

BY JOHN DEVITT

Often called the greatest of operas, Mozart's comic *Don Giovanni* is an amazing succession of fabulous character-revealing arias, all melodically beautiful and dramatically on target. My very favorite is Don Ottavio's "Dalla sua pace" ("Upon her peace depends my own").

First, an orientation for those who don't know the opera. Don Giovanni—the supreme sexual predator of legend—attempts to rape the noble Donna Anna, then slays her protecting father. When the discarded Donna Elvira furiously denounces his villainy, his servant Leporello acquaints her with the Don's 1,003 conquests. In the next scene, Donna Anna recognizes Don Giovanni's arrogantly seductive voice and powerfully insists that her mild-mannered fiancé Don Ottavio avenge her father's murder.

That's how the scene originally ended in the Prague opening, but for the Vienna premier a tenor aria was requested. So Mozart's librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, fashioned Don Ottavio's lyrics of deeply empathetic love as a dramatic foil for Don Giovanni's uncaring self-aggrandizement—and Mozart sent it soaring with bel canto virtuosity. "When she's at peace, I'm at peace. When she's happy, I'm happy. When she's angry, I'm

angry. When she feels anguish, I'm ready to die."

Such love will empower Don Ottavio to risk death against a pitiless master swordsman. But first there's a little Hamlet-like hesitation suggested—is there enough evidence of Don Giovanni's villainy, can a Spanish nobleman behave so badly?

After all the excitement and chaos of the previous action, we enter four minutes of sublime heartfelt expression, with the truly noble Don Ottavio searching his heart's love and intellect's questioning about the demands of vengeance. Unlike the previous high-powered and buffo person-to-person arias, Ottavio's gentle outpouring is a very internal self-confrontation, utterly focused on his love for Donna Anna and his willingness to die for her honor. Linked in the QR code at the end of this essay is an unusually intimate English-subtitled performance by Ian Bostridge, who normally specializes in the subtleties of lieder. In the opera house, "Dalla sua pace" comes across with more dramatic intensity, as ardently conveyed by Jerry Hadley in a Met production, also linked below.

There are many more fine renderings on YouTube, including Pavarotti's gorgeous lyric version. My favorite is by Luigi Alva in the incomparable 1961 Guilini recording, where the orchestral readings are so much in the tender-witty spirit of Mozart. Yes, the accompaniment does seem to contain a little irrepressible smile!

In *Either/Or,* Kierkegaard presents Don Giovanni as the collision between different modes of life. Today, Don Ottavio's noble outlook finds an echo in increasing outcries against powerful, predatory scoundrels. It's the perfect time to discover or rediscover this sublime work of art.

P.S. To follow the score of "Dalla sua pace" as it's sung, view the "Dalla sua pace" score animation video at the end of the playlist linked in the QR code. For advice to brave tenors on how to sing it, see Jenna Simeonov's "Aria Guides: Dalla sua pace" on Schmopera.com.

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**John Devitt** is a retired ad man. Among his favorite writing projects was being a missionary for classical music. He'd welcome email exchanges on challenging books with Catherine Project readers and can be reached at devittad1@comcast.net. John lives in Montpelier, Vermont with his wife, who arranged to have "Dalla sua pace" sung at their daughter's wedding.

# Reading in Community

*INTERVIEW WITH ZENA HITZ*

On December 7, 2022, *Commonplace* had the opportunity to sit down with our founder, Zena Hitz, for a wide-ranging conversation on the Catherine Project, and how reading—and reading in community—amplifies and deepens our understanding of our actions. The following is a brief excerpt from that conversation, which has been lightly edited for clarity. Check this space in future issues of *Commonplace* for more excerpts from our conversation with Zena.

COMMONPLACE: The Catherine Project aims for conversations based on close reading of texts. I'm wondering if you would elaborate a bit on how such group conversation nuances the primary relationship of reading, which is always the one between the reader and the text?

ZENA HITZ: There are a lot of ways one could answer that question, but let me try this way. When I'm communing with the author, I'm not just thinking about a human being, the author. I'm thinking about whatever it is that the author's talking about; that is to say, there is some third thing which the author and I are looking at together. That's true even when I'm reading Montaigne or Proust or some kind of personal essay. Even in those instances, there is something in the text which is interesting not because it belongs to the author, but because it's something which points to something bigger than that. So there's some third thing to which we're connecting. But that third thing—it can be very difficult to see that clearly. You can get kind of preoccupied with superficial features of the text: terminology, context, all these kinds of things which can be valuable in their place. But those things, they're not the third thing which you and the author are meant to be examining together. In a conversation such as those in the Catherine Project, all of you are trying to get in touch with this third thing that both the author and the audience are meant to be looking at, exploring. And, in addition, you'll be getting different perspectives on it, which in turn will help you understand it better.

COMMONPLACE: I'm glad you brought up that last point about a conversation allowing multiple perspectives, because what you're calling that third thing, it's often something multi-dimensional, don't you think? As a result,you may get hold of one part of it and think that's it, when in fact it's kind of like the elephant and the blind men, each of whom feels only a part of the elephant. In reading with others, you may get hold of this part, somebody else may get hold of that part, somebody also another part altogether and then together you all piece together a much fuller understanding of the text.

ZENA HITZ: Exactly. These texts that we read, they're not just any books. They're

very complicated and you don't always notice everything. You can't really notice everything. And even if you do notice it, you don't always see why or how it might be interesting. So with a group, there is a collaborative project of putting together the different pieces... Suddenly you can see parts of the text you never saw before, and maybe you can even get a sense of what's interesting about these parts and why they matter and how they connect together. And not only connect together with each other, but also how they—as a whole, or maybe just one part—connect to something about which you care, something which is important to you.

COMMONPLACE: So another advantage of reading together over time is you're not just having one stab at the text. You read and discuss, then you read another part and discuss, and over time there is an unfolding process. You find yourself saying, "Oh, now in light of this, that other thing makes sense, especially with what we discussed last week." That process also allows for connecting the text to something in your own life, or something that concerns you. In regards to this kind of connection, a lot of people are on the lookout for what they call life lessons: they want to know what a particular text tells them about how to live. What are your thoughts and reflections on that enterprise?

ZENA HITZ: The first word I wanted to use was reductive, but there's probably a better word. [Pause]. It's acquisitive. It's like, what can I get out of this?

COMMONPLACE: Yes, acquisitive! That describes it perfectly.

ZENA HITZ: What is the payoff, you know? And that's almost never a good question to ask of anything worthwhile in life. It's like your first date: what is the payoff? Am I going to get a a marriage proposal out of this or not? But reading is a leisurely activity. You want to just sit and let the book tell you whatever it's trying to tell you. You want to have a kind of receptivity. I mean, it's a bit of a tension because on the one hand I think you do want to start with your questions, which can be very concrete and essential to you: you know, what role does family play in a good life? What role does philosophy play in a good life? Is there any such thing as justice—and you're asking that not as an abstract intellectual question, but because you work in a political institution which

seems to you always unjust and you can never fix it. I think it's very important to identify the questions that are on your mind at this stage in your life, like what kinds of things do you want to think about? I don't think reading the great book and learning should be this purely academic intellectual enterprise that has nothing to do with anyone's life.

But on the the other hand, once you've determined your questions and you know you're trying to find a path to them through the book—that involves a lot of receptivity.

You have to be listening carefully to what's being said. What may happen to you then is that, instead of getting an answer to the question that you wanted or a practical lesson from the book you're reading, you get an entirely different question that you didn't even realize was a question before. So you can be existentially challenged by something you find, you can end up seeing something about real life that requires attention or something that you need to keep thinking about which hadn't even occurred to you previously. You want to keep open to the possibility that you've somehow been asking the wrong question. Not just that there are more questions, but that you might have been asking the question the wrong way. And so you need to let your question be shaped. That's always been my experience in working with great books and writing essays about them. You think you're going to write one thing. And then you sit down to write it and something totally different happens.

These kinds of books are very resistant to an agenda and that's part of what makes

> You want to sit and let the book tell you whatever it's trying to tell you. You want to have a kind of receptivity.

them so valuable. You never want to forget that. I think it's important to keep searching for something that's real and concrete and that can be lived out, but I also think there's more to life than that and you have to just keep yourself open to whatever the book or the conversation it trying to tell.

COMMONPLACE: That word "receptivity" seems to me to be a very important one. Often when you are looking for those life lessons, you're kind of overlaying a template on top of the text, and that template then keeps you from entering into—or as you said, receiving—the world that the text is creating because you're already trying to tunnel your way through in a particular way. Perhaps another advantage of conversation, of reading in community, is that you run into other people who, perhaps they are tunneling too, but they're tunneling from a different direction. And then perhaps there is also somebody who's not tunneling at all. So reading becomes a different enterprise. The text can work on you in ways you're not always aware of during the reading. At least that's how it often happens for me.

ZENA HITZ: Exactly. They can plant seeds that you're not aware of that then come to fruition years later. I had this experience

in college: at St. John's College we have this class called Sophomore Math where you study the Copernican revolution. The year I took it as a student it was a terrible class. I hardly did any work. But somehow I realized years later—years later—that it had changed the way I thought about the world. It had changed the way that I thought about how science works and the role of culture and science. That's the kind of thing that can happen. Sometimes it's just a phrase somehow that gains meaning and sometimes it's a whole outlook that gains meaning. I think part of the problem with the life lessons view is: what's a life lesson? So it's one thing to say that books matter for life, but books might matter for life because, for instance, reading and thinking are key parts of a good life. Now that's not a life lesson. That's an activity. It's not a bullet point and I think that our publication culture is very into the ten steps and five bullet points. But the most important things about life are not these bullet points, but something else like sets of values or a flavor for what a productive struggle feels like as opposed to a fruitless struggle. What's the difference? There's no bullet point, there's no algorithm that's going to tell you whether this struggle is fruitless or productive. You kind of learn it by a certain kind of experience. It's a way of seeing.

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**Zena Hitz** is founder and president of the Catherine Project, the culmination of a life spent in stubborn hatred of technology. She hoards books, movies, and music in hard copy against the days of zombie apocalypse, looking ahead to the long desert darkness devoid of penguin videos and Twitter. In addition to being the author of Lost in Thought: The Hidden Pleasures of the Intellectual Life and a tutor at St. John's College in Annapolis, she moonlights as an inspirational speaker and stand-up comic.

# Catalog of Offerings: Summer 2023

## Reading groups

To participate in one of our courses, register online at: catherineproject.org/offerings.

All courses meet online using Zoom.
All listed meeting times are in Eastern Time.

*Unless otherwise noted, each reading group meets once a week at the listed dates and times to discuss readings in the listed text(s). If you are new to this kind of study or unsure where to start, you are welcome to email us at: study@catherineproject.org.*

*Please note: our courses are facilitated by volunteers and the changing circumstances of life may require the occasional postponement of a weekly meeting. End dates for all courses are provisional and subject to slight changes.*

**Aquinas, Selections from his political writings**
Wednesdays, 12:30-2:00pm, 5/03 – 7/05 (10 weeks)

**Aristotle, Writings on logic and dialectic: Categories, On Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics, Topics, and On Sophistical Refutations**
Mondays, 7:00-9:00pm, 5/01 – 7/24 (13 weeks)

**Augustine, On the Trinity**
Fridays, 3:00-4:30pm, 6/09 – 8/25 (12 weeks)

**Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity**
Fridays, 1:00-2:30pm, 7/21 – 8/25 (6 weeks)

**Mikhail Bulgakov, The Master and Margarita**
Wednesdays, 8:00-9:30pm, 5/03 – 7/12 (11 weeks)

**Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Alice Through the Looking Glass**
Mondays, 7:30-9:30pm, 6/05 – 8/21 (12 weeks)

**Confucius, Analects & Sophocles, the Theban plays**
Tuesdays, 7:30-9:00pm, 5/02 – 8/15 (16 weeks)

**Dante, The New Life**
Wednesdays, 6:00-7:30pm, 5/03 – 5/31 (5 weeks)

**John Dewey, Art as Experience**
Wednesdays, 7:00-8:30pm, 5/03 – 7/26 (13 weeks)

**W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk**
Thursdays, 7:00-8:30pm, 6/15 – 8/03 (8 weeks)

**George Eliot, The Lifted Veil & Brother Jacob**
Tuesdays, 8:00-10:00pm, 8/15 – 8/22 (2 weeks)

**George Eliot, Middlemarch**
Thursdays, 8:00-9:30pm, 5/11 – 7/06 (9 weeks)

**Old English poetry: Beowulf, The Seafarer, and The Wanderer**
Mondays, 3:00-4:30pm, 6/26 – 8/14 (8 weeks)

**The epic of Mwindo**
Tuesdays, 12:00-1:30pm, 5/30 – 6/13 (3 weeks)

**The epic of Sunjata**
Mondays, 10:00-11:30am, 5/08 – 5/22 (3 weeks)

**E.M. Forster, Howard's End**
Tuesdays, 12:00-1:30pm, 6/13 – 7/25 (7 weeks)

**Michel Foucault, Selected essays**
Fridays, 1:00-2:30pm, 6/09 – 7/07 (5 weeks)

**Sigmund Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams**
Tuesdays, 7:00-8:30pm, 5/30 – 7/11 (7 weeks)

**Luo Guanzhong, Romance of the Three Kingdoms**
Wednesdays, 7:30-9:00pm, 5/03 – 9/13 (20 weeks)

**Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan**
Tuesdays, 8:00-9:30pm, 5/02 – 7/11 (11 weeks)

**Jerome K. Jerome, Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)**
Tuesdays, 8:00-10:00pm, 7/11 – 8/01 (4 weeks)

**Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death**
Thursdays, 12:00-1:30pm, 5/04 – 6/29 (9 weeks)

**Niccolò Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy & The Prince**
Mondays, 8:00-10:00pm, 5/01 – 7/17 (12 weeks)

**Cormac McCarthy, Blood Meridian**
Thursdays, 8:00-9:30pm, 7/06 – 9/07 (10 weeks)

**Nāgārjuna, Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (otherwise known as MMK)**
Mondays, 7:30-9:00pm, 5/01 – 9/30 (22 weeks)

**Nicholas of Cusa, On Learned Ignorance**
Sundays, 6:30-8:30pm, 6/11 – 7/09 (5 weeks)

**One Thousand and One Nights (otherwise known as Arabian Nights)**
Tuesdays, 1:00-3:00pm, 5/02 – 8/15 (16 weeks)

**Erwin Panofsky, Perspective as Symbolic Form**
Tuesdays, 7:00-8:30pm, 5/30 – 6/27 (5 weeks)

**Plato, Republic**
Wednesdays, 2:00-3:30pm, 5/17 – 7/26 (11 weeks)

**Plato, Symposium & Phaedrus**
Mondays, 8:00-10:00am, 5/01 – 7/31 (14 weeks)

**Fernando de Rojas, La Celestina**
Saturdays, 9:00-10:30am, 6/24 – 8/05 (7 weeks)
Este grupo de lectura leerá y discutirá La Celestina en español. Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta o duda en cuanto a su capacidad de participar en el grupo, por favor póngase en con tacto con study@catherineproject.org.
[This reading group will both read and discuss La Celestina in Spanish. If you have any questions or concerns about your ability to participate in the reading group, please contact study@catherineproject.org.

# Subject tutorials

*Each subject tutorial meets at the listed dates and times to study the identified subject. Participants may be given assignments to complete before each meeting: these are given to assist in learning and no grades or credit will be given.*

*Intermediate language tutorials typically involve the translation of Greek or Latin texts and are most appropriate for those who have spent at least a year studying the relevant language.*

*Advanced language tutorials are appropriate for readers who already have some experience reading texts in the relevant language (for example, through recent participation in intermediate language tutorials).*

*For questions about any of our language tutorials, you are welcome to email us at: study@catherinproject.org.*

**Introductory ancient Greek**
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:30-3:30pm, 6/13 – 7/13 (5 weeks)

**Intermediate ancient Greek translation: Lysias, "For the Disabled Man"**
Wednesdays, 6:00-7:30pm, 6/13 – 8/30 (12 weeks)

**Intermediate ancient Greek translation: Book IV of Plato's Republic**
Saturdays, 10:00am-12:00pm, 5/20 – 8/19 (14 weeks)

**Advanced ancient Greek translation: Books 1 & 24 of the Iliad**
Sundays, 9:00-11:00am, 5/14 – 8/20 (15 weeks)
The language component of this tutorial will focus on non-Attic forms and grammar. Readers should feel secure in their knowledge of Attic forms and grammar at the time that they register.

**Introductory Latin**
Mondays & Wednesdays, 9:00-10:00am, 5/01 – 6/28 (9 weeks)

**Introductory classical Syriac**
Wednesdays & Saturdays, 5:00-6:30pm, 5/03 – 8/02 (14 weeks)

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