

Ecquid est vita sine amicitiae consolatione?

Andrzej Wierciński

University of Warsaw

President, International Institute for Hermeneutics and

Agora Hermeneutica

Jesus, in John's Gospel J 15: 15, says straightforwardly, "I have called you friends" (δέ εἶπα φίλους). And he goes patiently through the different levels of the intrinsic relationship between the vine and its branches, stressing the imperative of remaining (μείνατε, *manete*, J, 15: 9)¹ in this essential, and thus life-giving, belonging together. The call to friendship is a call (*Ruf*) to a caring response (*Antwort*). This calling emphasizes the power of naming. The divine word encompasses the capacity of describing and creating (דָּבָר *dabar: Wort und Ereignis*). The compelling interplay of being called (*persönliches Angesprochensein*) and responding to this call includes the dimension of a claim of friendship (*Anspruch*). However, Jesus's claim, albeit proclaiming friendship and creating it, thus making it happen, does not deprive his disciples of their autonomy and freedom. A friend, φίλος, is an Other, who not only preserves the irreducible alterity but, in friendship, discovers and lives his/her own identity and alterity.

Jesus's relationship to his chosen one, apostles, forms, and transforms them into friends. Thus, those who are loved (and chosen) and who love in response to being loved create a new community of friends. In his Farewell Discourse (*Abschiedsrede*, High Priestly Prayer, J 14–17), Jesus discloses the essence of being a friend:

¹ In J 15: 9, Jesus says: "μείνατε ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ τῇ ἐμῇ," "Manete in dilectione mea."

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (Jn 15: 12–15)

Jesus's exposé on friendship uncovers the language of friendship and love that are interchangeable. For him, friendship and love are the ultimate relationship with God and one another, also with oneself as an Other. Jesus lives out his friendship and love through his life and death as a friend and commands his followers to do the same. Since Jesus's death is not the final rapture of his relationship with his friends, but, on the contrary, receives in the promised Paraclete its fulfillment, we can see Jesus's friendship in its perfect enactment (*der Vollzug der Freundschaft*).

The Farewell Discourse helps us better grasp that this belonging together is also longing to remain with, and in a new mysterious eucharistic way, in the beloved. Eucharist is not the matter of welcoming the known, over and over again the same, but a matter of receiving a guest in a gesture of friendship (*Gastfreundschaft*). In our concrete circumstances, the guest comes to us at the very moment (*Augenblick, hic et nunc*) and is transformed by the most intimate conditions of a personal union. God's entering this union with and in us, in a physical way, is the radical excess in every possible sense of the word. The mutual risk is obvious: There are no criteria of being worthy to receive God. It is precisely this event that puts us at the radical risk to say humbly, "I am not worthy," and with the same breath, express the wish for God to come. God risks coming where he is welcome. The human invitation marks the opening to the future, which has healing power. Divine presence (*presentia*) is the healing power (*potentia medicatrix*), healing in its most transformative form (*salutis eventus*). The possibility of hospitality to God gives us the power to decide on the side of undecidability, unsettling, and uneasiness. Taking the radical risk, we express our welcome. Please come: *Adveniat!* The genuine not knowing can be read as radical emptying oneself (κένωσις) from any claim and preparing the space for God to enter. Eucharist is the epitome of hospitality since the invitation from Jesus is open: "Take, eat, and drink" (*Accipite et manducate et bibite*) and is not reduced to inviting those who meet the specific criteria (*Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes! Accipite et bibite ex eo omnes!*).

Invited is everybody (*omnes*). What remains open is the human response to host the divine guest.²

It would be delightful to go through The Farewell Discourse's complexity of meaning and analyze the linguistic, translational, spiritual, and existential aspects. However, we instantly realize that while reading and thinking about this passage, something is happening in us and to us. This is the very essence of hermeneutics. Hans-Georg Gadamer reminds us that we need to take the "scientific" integrity of our commitment to understanding seriously: "My concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing."³ The core of hermeneutics is the happening of understanding (*Geschehen der Wahrheit*): Something is occurring in us and to us, and it affects the whole of our experience of the world. This very happening is not that dependent on our desire to know and the wish to understand. It is much more the nature of what needs to be understood that makes the eventing of understanding not only comprehensive but universal (*der Universalitätsanspruch der Hermeneutik*).

The Gift and Challenge of Friendship

Povera, e nuda vai, Filosofia,
Dice la turba al vil guadagno intesa.
Pochi compagni avrai per l'altra via;
Tanto ti prego più, gentile spirto,
Non lassar la magnanima tua impresa.

Philosophy, you journey naked and poor
As the crowd cries—yearning for base profit
Not many friends will join you on your way
O gentle spirit, fiercely I beg you
Do not forsake your magnanimous endeavor.⁴

² To understand the complexity of the human response, Aquinas addresses *intentio*, *synderesis*, and *conscientia* by trying to reconcile Aristotelian *συντήρησις*, as the expression of the innate potentiality of the human mind to know the first principles of the practical and moral order without recourse to discursive reasoning, and Augustinian teaching on the free will (*De libero arbitrio*). See Patricia S. Churchland, *Conscience: The Origins of Moral Intuition* (New York: Norton, 2019); Peter Cajka, *Follow Your Conscience: The Catholic Church and the Spirit of the Sixties* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000), xxv–xxvi.

⁴ Francesco Petrarca, *Sonnetto VII*. My translation, however, without following the rhyme scheme.

In the final lines of *Love and Friendship*, Allan Bloom, a prominent herald of the “closing of the American mind,” recalls his return to the lecture hall at Cornell:

When, after an absence of over twenty years, I recently gave a lecture at Cornell University, a group of students unfurled a sheet that they hung from the balcony with the following message, “Great Sex is better than Great Books.” Sure, but you can’t have one without the other.⁵

Bloom’s response to the students indicates that, primarily through his meticulous examination of Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche and their disciples, he understands the intercourse as the engagement of the whole human being and not as the particular kind of erotic activity of people involved. Thus, the complementarity of the body, mind, soul, and imagination is the condition *sine qua non* of our being in the world as persons who act, suffer, desire, and enjoy intimacy, pleasure, love, and friendship.

Philosophy of friendship is not so much the matter of condensing the reflection on friendship to a meaningful interpretive content (*Sinngehalt*), i.e., establishing the theoretical background and conceptual framework for the analysis of the phenomenon in question, but an attempt to elucidate it while putting friendship into work (*Ins-Werk-setzen*) by getting on the path of exploring/living friendship (*Ins-Leben-rufen*), and, thus, making possible to see its realization (*Geschehen der Freundschaft*). In order not to get lost in the specifics of the different narratives of friendship, it is apposite to remain on the way toward an understanding of friendship. To get an insight into the meaning of friendship, we need to listen not only to how friendship speaks (*die Freundschaft spricht*) in individual occurrences, but to its self-revelations and self-manifestations in the concrete lives of concrete people. Speaking and listening is not predominantly about knowing something about friendship and taking it into account. Still, it is a matter of understanding the way we *are* as we *are in the world with others* as thinking listening (*das denkende Hören*) and listening thinking (*das hörende Denken*). Listening to this belonging together (*das Hören der Zusammengehörigkeit*) of who we are

⁵ Allan Bloom, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 546. The slogan on the banner refers to Bloom’s assessment of students who have lost the practice and the taste of reading the Great Books: It is “very difficult for them to have a passionate relationship with the art and thought that are the substance of liberal education. . . . Rock music provides premature ecstasy and, in this respect, is like the drugs with which it is allied. It artificially induces the exaltation naturally attached to the completion of the greatest endeavors—victory in a just war, consummated love, artistic creation, religious devotion, and discovery of the truth” (*The Closing of the American Mind* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987], 79–80). Reading Bloom’s critique of modern movements in philosophy and the humanities reminds one of Petrarca’s prophetic vision of the solitude of the philosophers: “*Pochi compagni avrai per l’altra via.*”

and who we are in the world with others discloses something fundamental about friendship as a mode of being in the world. Thinking of and living friendship cannot be separated. To understand what it means to be a friend and to have a friend requires a profound sense of the concrete person with its experience and concerns: It is to have an insight into the human condition. Thinking of and living in friendship is always a very personal act of *l'homme capable*, which takes a particular form of lived experience not only in the individual life but in the life with others (*Mitsein*).

In classical authors, the word *φιλία* refers to all kinds of bonding between people, from erotic love to various forms of partnership. However, it was Aristotle and his followers who elevated friendship between mature/responsible human beings to the highest form of human love. For Aristotle, friendship is the ultimate expression of moral life, when virtue and happiness come together.⁶ His discussion on friendship happens through careful reading and offering the supplement to Plato's *Lysis*, seeing friendship as the unique human capacity grounded in our need.⁷ In *Symposium*, Plato writes, "Only those who love wish to die for others."⁸

Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, addresses the unconditionality of friendship:

But it is also true the virtuous man's conduct is often guided by the interests of his friends and of his country, and that he will if necessary, lay down his life in their behalf. . . . And this is doubtless the case with those who give their lives for others; thus they choose great nobility for themselves.⁹

The intimate relationship between friends is of particular importance when it comes to being truly alive. The genuine closeness does not overwrite factual distancing. On the contrary, a possibility of cherishing the "pathos of distance" is the true characteristic of the noble people and is remarkably perceptible in friendship, as Nietzsche says in the section entitled "What Is Noble?" of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

⁶ Aristotle deals extensively with friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books VIII and IX, and also *Art of Rhetoric* 6. 2. 4. Cf. Anthony Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), especially ch. 1: "Friendship and Desire in the *Lysis*"; ch. 4: "Perfect Friendship in Aristotle"; and ch. 5: "Aristotle on the Varieties of Friendship." In discussing *Lysis* in great detail, Aristotle develops his understanding of friendship as a wide range of human relationships held together by reference to a specific type of being together.

⁷ Cf. Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁸ Plato, *Symposium* 179 b, 208 d.

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IX. 8 (1169 a 18–25).

If one wishes to praise at all, it is a delicate and at the same time a noble self-control, to praise only where one does not agree—otherwise in fact one would praise oneself, which is contrary to good taste:—a self-control, to be sure, which offers excellent opportunity and provocation to constant misunderstanding. To be able to allow oneself this veritable luxury of taste and morality, one must not live among intellectual imbeciles, but rather among men whose misunderstandings and mistakes amuse by their refinement—or one will have to pay dearly for it!—“He praises me, therefore he acknowledges me to be right”—this asinine method of inference spoils half of the life of us recluses, for it brings the asses into our neighbourhood and friendship.¹⁰

Living in friendship is an invitation to live among people whose presence will sharpen our sensitivity and intellectual capacity, taking into account the possibility of “eternal misunderstanding” as the task to be taken and courageously fulfilled.

Volo ut sis

In one of (many) poetic and philosophical love letters to his (many) lovers, Martin Heidegger writes to Hannah Arendt:

Thank you for your letters—for how you have accepted me into your love—beloved. Do you know that this is the most difficult thing a human is given to endure? For anything else, there are methods, aids, limits, and understanding—here alone everything means: to be in one’s love = to be forced into one’s innermost existence. *Amo* means *volo, ut sis*, Augustine once said: I love you—I want you to be what you are.¹¹

¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “What Is Noble?” in *Beyond Good and Evil*, <https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/PHIL101-5.3.3.pdf>, section 283. For fascinating analysis of the relationship between philosophy, art, and the art of life (*die Kunst des Lebens*), see Babette Babich, *Nietzsches Antike. Beiträge zur Altphilologie und Musik* (Berlin: Academia Verlag, 2020); *Nietzsches Plastik: Ästhetische Phänomenologie im Spiegel des Lebens* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021).

¹¹ Martin Heidegger writes to Hannah Arendt on 13 May 1925: “Ich danke Dir für Deine Briefe—daß Du mich in Deine Liebe aufgenommen hast—Liebste. Weißt Du, daß das das Schwerste ist, was einem Menschen zu tragen gegeben wird? Für alles sonst gibt es Wege, Hilfe, Grenzen und Verstehen—hier nur bedeutet alles: in der Liebe sein = in die eigenste Existenz gedrängt sein. *Amo* heißt *volo ut sis*, sagt einmal Augustinus: ich liebe Dich—ich will, daß Du seiest, was Du bist” (Hannah Arendt/Martin Heidegger, *Briefe 1925–1975* [Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1998], 31).

Nothing in this letter is coincidental. Heidegger quotes St. Augustine freely to express his deep gratitude for being accepted (*accipere*) as the beloved of Arendt, who, a few years later (1929), took her doctorate in philosophy on *Love and Saint Augustine*¹² under the supervision of Karl Jaspers at the University of Heidelberg. In the Augustinian spirit, Heidegger touches upon one of the major existential struggles: *I am a question to myself: factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio*.¹³ To accept the Other and be accepted as the beloved in this horizon of struggle is “the most difficult thing to endure.” The lovers strive toward the highest degree of reciprocity in wanting to realize themselves in the way they discover and discern as the ultimate development of who they are. The benefit (*bene facere*) of this mutual endeavoring is the openness to the happening of love: Love is the eventing of “incalculable grace,” which forms and transforms, shapes and restores, the best of who we are, and discloses to us the unpredictability of our interhuman efforts and the blessing of “supreme and unsurpassable affirmation” of the Other (also oneself as the Other). Love is unequivocally the event captured within the factual history of love (*Geschehen der Liebe*). This history can be unearthed and comprehended only with the utmost care (*cura personalis*) through the narrating of the actualization of love (*Verwirklichung der Liebe*) by paying concentrated attention to the high times of love (*Hoch-zeiten der Liebe*) and its startling lows (*Tief-zeiten*), always with much-needed trust (*mit dürftigem Vertrauen*). This urgent concern (*brennende Sorge*) and necessity (*Notdurft*) call for our responsiveness to the fundamental question: What are lovers for in a destitute time?¹⁴ Like in Rainer Maria Rilke, “in the end, it is our unshieldedness (*Schutzlossein*) on which we depend.”¹⁵ It is something very flawed yet

¹² Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹³ St. Augustine, *Confessions: A Text and Commentary* by James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 4. 4. 9. In *Confessions* 2. 10. 18, we read: “*factus sum mihi regio egestatis*,” and in 10.33.50, “*me, in cuius oculis mihi quaestio factus sum, et ipse est languor meus*.” St. Augustine speaks of *regio egestatis* (region of lack), *regio dissimilitudinis* (region of unlikeness, similar to Plato's ἀνομοιότητος ἀπειρον, land of unlikeness, *Statesman*, 273d), and *regio ubertatis* (region of abundance). The various regions are essential to St. Augustine's journey to self-understanding by living his conversion.

¹⁴ Friedrich Hölderlin asks in his poem “Bread and Wine” the question about the nature of poetry: “I do not know what to do or say in the meantime, and what is the use of poets in an impoverished age?” See Martin Heidegger, “Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” in *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2015), 248–320.

¹⁵ Dies schafft uns, außerhalb von Schutz,
ein Sichersein, dort, wo die Schwerkraft wirkt
der reinen Kräfte; was uns schließlich birgt,
ist unser Schutzlossein und daß wir's so
in's Offne wandten, da wir's drohen sahen,
um es, im weitsten Umkreis irgendwo,

necessary for life. It is precisely love, which is “like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears” (Oz 6: 4. 6). This love costs life but is also life-giving by bringing us into the infinitely resourceful horizon of possibility and making us eager to embrace our thrownness into the Open.

Arendt returns to the phenomenon of love throughout her whole life and takes from it the inspiration to be vocal against tyranny and various dehumanizing forms of totalitarianism:

This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given to us at birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, “Volo ut sis (I want you to be),” without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation.¹⁶

The sensual longing for comm-union with an Other with a large vision is, in itself, an immense personal fulfillment. Understanding and experiencing that for a friend is enough that you might be the greatest gift, which gives us the courage to be authentic in all life stages and circumstances.

Two Ways of Friends Parting: The Goodbye before Separation and the Final Farewell

There are various ways of addressing the phenomenon of friendship in its complexity and life-giving efficacy. Looking at friendship from Karl Jaspers’s *Grenzsituation*, a boundary or limit-situation allows for seeing the depth of meaning of friendship in its immense richness. The strikingly compelling spectrum of possible interpretations offers the approach to the formative and transformative experience of friendship from the perspective of parting, temporary or final.

Since Plato, we are convinced that an unexamined life is not worth living: ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπων.¹⁷ It is not a question about decision-making but

wo das Gesetz uns anrührt, zu bejahren. (Rainer Maria Rilke, “Improvisierte Verse,” in *Späte Gedichte* [Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1934], 90).

¹⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2009), 301. “What is saved, moreover, in this transformation of his earlier conception is the Will’s power of assertion and denial; there is no greater assertion of something or somebody than to love it, that is, to say: I will that you be—Amo: Volo ut sis” (*The Life of the Mind: The Groundbreaking Investigation on How We Think* [San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1978], 104).

¹⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 38 a, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

about living life as the interpretive existence (*existentia hermeneutica*).¹⁸ When Jaspers, in his ground-breaking *Psychology of Worldviews* addresses various psychological phenomena as a human being in the world lives them, he opens up an insight into human existence which can shine forth (φαινέσθαι) especially profoundly in the experience of and in limit-situations.¹⁹ By marking out the limits of our life, he enables a careful examination of the being of human being, with particular attention to the being of the human mind.²⁰ For Jaspers, to experience limit-situations means to be a human being in the world.²¹ In the chapter, “Life of the Mind,” he thematizes the experience of the limit, which constitutes the essential aspect of Dasein, and is indispensable for Dasein’s experience of oneself. Jaspers’s insistence on the importance of understanding the human being from the perspective of the boundary situation motivates us to look at the phenomenon of friendship from the experience of parting, both temporary and final, to elucidate the fundamental respect with which we are called to face the inexhaustible experience of the Other. The reverend approach needs to be lived through, even if it will not bring any resolution or solace but only more troublesome questions, like those congenially summarized by the Psalmist: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (*quoniam quae perfecisti destruxerunt; justus autem, quid fecit?* Ps 11: 3) What can you do when the Other is *not* anymore?

The Pain of Parting (*Trennungsschmerz*): Rembrandt’s *David’s Farewell to Jonathan*

Rembrandt’s *David’s Farewell to Jonathan* (1642, since 1882 in the Hermitage) is a hermeneutic event (*Ereignis*).²² Rembrandt van Rijn offers the interpretation of the biblical story of friendship between Jonathan and David (1 Sam 18–20).²³ His

¹⁸ Cf. Andrzej Wierciński, *Existentia Hermeneutica: Understanding as the Mode of Being in the World* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2019). See also Małgorzata Holda, “The Welcoming Gesture of Hermeneutics: In Conversation with Andrzej Wierciński’s *Existentia Hermeneutica*,” *Phainomena* 29, nos. 112/113 (2020): 335–67.

¹⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen* (Berlin: Springer, 1919). See also comments on Heidegger’s critical review on Jasper’s lack of differentiation between philosophy and worldview: Karilemla, “Heidegger’s Contrasting Notion of Worldview in the Early, Middle, and Later Writings,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 43, no. 3 (2015): 250–66.

²⁰ Cf. Matthias Bormuth, *Life Conduct in Modern Times: Karl Jaspers and Psychoanalysis* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006).

²¹ Raymond Battegay will say that to experience the limit-situations and to exist is the same (*Grenzsituationen: Wege aus der Bedrohung* [Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 2005], 11).

²² Cf. Régis Burnet, “Rembrandt and the Iconography of David and Jonathan,” *Die Bibel in der Kunst / Bible in the Arts* 2 (2018): 1–16.

²³ Rembrandt van Rijn, *David’s Farewell to Jonathan*, <http://www.wikigallery.org/>.

originality in painting lets the viewer participate in the hermeneutics of friendship in enactment (*Hermeneutik im Vollzug*). Slightly bent David finds his refuge in Jonathan's arms, and his free-floating hair and attire in rich golden colors shine as illuminated through a divine light. Jonathan, in an olive robe and a coat embellished with gold thread, wears a turban with an egret feather. The artistry of placing the friends in the forefront reminds of the burning bush (or the unburnt bush on Mount Horeb, Ex 3: 1–4: 17) and is exceptionally effective in creating the divide between men in love in front and the city in the background. The interplay of pain and hope is expressed through the exposition of parting friends and the depiction of Jerusalem's temple as the privileged environment for the heartbreaking story.



Rembrandt's *David's Farewell to Jonathan* is a congenial interpretation of friendship and its meaning in people's lives. Approaching the significance of friendship from the boundary experience of parting, Rembrandt draws attention to the formative, transformative, and eschatological power of friendship through embracing mutual affection and sorrow. Friendship's constructive and creative potential discloses itself not only through the foundational experience of closeness, compassion, and growing together. In the pain and suffering of parting, temporary or final, the deepest meaning of friendship is revealed.²⁴ Rembrandt's choice for parting to depict the importance of friendship allows him to represent friendship in its testimony to itself and to the friends who live it. Friendship's witness to itself and to friends discloses permanence in time. Despite the development of the identity of friends and the bonding power between them, they are always the same and not the same friends, and the friendship is also the same and not the same. This permanence in time opens up toward the eschatological time, which, in Rembrandt's case, is powerfully represented by the holy city. Friendship's permanence in time does not come to hold in parting, not even in the final separation in death, but receives its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. Rembrandt offers a brief theology of friendship in his painting, which through the trust in God allows friends to experience friendship in the realm of salvation.²⁵

The existentially painful subject of parting and death brings the viewer to the horizon of eschatological hope. This horizon is accessible only in faith; it requires a specific vision, which the divine illumination can empower to look at the present disaster from the future to come. Only thus, despite the ill-starred (*astrum*-star) event, the hope does not vanish since the Messiah is coming. This hope lives and flourishes in his expected presence, *παρουσία*.²⁶

For Rembrandt, the pain of parting seems to be an excellent opportunity to break with the well-established patterns of representation. The painting is not a simple illustration of the biblical story, but its interpretation in a dramatic horizon of the personal suffering of the painter after the death of his wife, Saskia van Uylenburgh. The face of grief caused by parting embraces all the emotions a left-behind friend needs to deal with.

²⁴ Cf. Howard B. White, "Rembrandt and the Human Condition," in *Antiquity Forgot: Essays on Shakespeare, Bacon, and Rembrandt* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 137–59.

²⁵ Cf. John I. Durham, *The Biblical Rembrandt: Human Painter in a Landscape of Faith* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004).

²⁶ Cf. Hugh S. Pypers, "Love beyond Limits: The Debatable Body in Depictions of David and Jonathan," in *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007), 38–59.

Jonathan is standing with an almost stone-like face, in which the pain and suffering are engraved. Embracing David aggravates the drama of parting. We do not see the proverbially beautiful face of David because Rembrandt either did not want to captivate the viewer's concentration on David's beauty and lessen the expression of drama or wanted to spare David exposure of the terrible pain of parting. One of the expressions of true love is the wish not to make public the intimate tension beyond bearing. The lover does everything possible to offer a hiding space for the beloved, even if it is so little as to hide the beloved's face in his embrace. This protection from the exposure of pain and suffering of the beloved is the expression of the power of love, which does not boost the exposure of emotions of the beloved. When we know that newly widowed Rembrandt pictures himself as Jonathan, the painting becomes the symbol and expression of the pain of parting.

The pain of parting is the privileged mode of recollecting the past and the opening for hope coming from the future.²⁷ The presence of the (future) temple, the eschatological temple yet to be built, is the expression of this hope when the direct

²⁷ See Jacques Derrida, "Uninterrupted Dialogue: Between Two Infinities, the Poem," trans. Thomas Dutoit and Philippe Romanski, *Research in Phenomenology* 34, no. 1 (2004): 3–19. Similar to the meeting of Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger in March and April of 1929, only on a smaller scale, Jacques Derrida and Hans-Georg Gadamer met in the Paris Goethe-Institute in April of 1981. I personally never heard of Derrida being called like Heidegger a peasant (as opposed to a gentleman Cassirer), but the critique of his way of talking to Gadamer was very damaging. In the Paris meeting, apparently everything was incompatible: the way of understanding an understanding, the interpretation of writing, the notion of language, etc. However, even at that time, it was evident that Gadamer and Derrida were passionate about an understanding of language and the interpretation of texts. After Gadamer's death in 2002, Derrida delivered a Gadamer lecture at the University of Heidelberg, "*Dialogue ininterrompu: entre deux infinis, le poème*," in February of 2003. With a haunting reading of Celan, Derrida meditates on the impossibility of the possible. The conversation with Gadamer beyond its last interruption could ultimately turn into an "uninterrupted dialogue," which death makes impossible. The melancholy of the philosopher is mingled with the inspirational readings of Celan and remembering of the friend, who is gone. Derrida beautifully sketches the perspective of a conversation beyond the interruption, and the memory of the first interruption. And with his heart broken, turns again to Celan to remind us that we must carry the world of the Other by carrying the Other and his world, even if this world vanishes and turns into a world without world. "*Die Welt ist fort, ich muss dich tragen*." Compare here Derrida and Heidegger, whom Derrida treated as his *contremaitre* against whom he was developing his way of thinking. "What is 'past'? Nothing else than that world within which they belonged to a context of equipment and were encountered as ready-to-hand and used by a concerned Dasein who was-in-the-world. That world is no longer. But what was formerly within-the-world with respect to that world is still present-at-hand. As equipment belonging to a world, that which is now still present-at-hand can belong nevertheless to the 'past.' But what do we signify by saying of a world that it is no longer? A world is only in the manner of existing Dasein, which factually is as Being-in-the-world" (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962], 432).

dwelling with God will end the early kingdom of death. The power of love is strong as death:

Set me as a seal upon your heart,
 as a seal upon your arm;
 for love is strong as death,
 passion fierce as the grave.
 Its flashes are flashes of fire,
 a raging flame.
 Many waters cannot quench love,
 neither can floods drown it.
 If one offered for love
 all the wealth of one's house,
 it would be utterly scorned. (Song of Songs 8: 6–7²⁸)

Is David unbearably unaware of his own beauty and the impact of his famously stunning appearance on Jonathan? Does Jonathan recognize in David in an ecstatic moment of magical realism the coexistence (συνύπαρξη) of beauty, wisdom, and being God's chosen one?²⁹ Jonathan gives David his garments:

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (1 Sam 18: 1–4)

Jonathan is willing to hazard serious engagement with David, despite the foreseeable consequences regarding his personal relationship with his father and his own personal and political future. Moreover, he enters the friendship with a clear declaration: “You should be the first, I will be the second.” Jonathan's friendship is full of longing and

²⁸ “For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the Lord, who has compassion on you” (Is 54: 10). “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine” (Song of Solomon 1: 2).

²⁹ St. Paul describes the relation between the grace of God and human freedom as cooperation, *συνέργεια* between the coworkers, *συνεργοί*: Θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί (1 Cor 3: 9).

devotion to the friend, and its fulfillment is achieved through sacrifice. The omnipresent danger does not diminish the joy of friendship. On the contrary, it discloses the whole amplitude of the soul, which connects the depths with the heights of being a human being in the world.

Heartbreaking is the biblical narrative of Jonathan and David's parting:

David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city. (1 Sam 20: 41–42)

Only a great poet can render the intensity of feelings with such intensified emotional tension and captivating beauty. The intimate bond between Jonathan and David that was sealed before God was a genuine relationship between two human beings. It engaged the whole person of Jonathan, who loved David as his own soul (1 Sam 18: 3). Here, it is easily possible to differentiate between the two fundamental ways of desiring to be with the Other: *cupiditas*, a form of longing for the Other for the sake of self-love and possessing the Other by means of domination and misuse of power; and *caritas*, a desire to be with the Other, because it is good to be together. The possible tension or even conflict of those different kinds of desire call for the recognition of our interdependencies, not as a question of the subject's autonomy, but the acknowledgment and appreciation of the dependence on the Other toward enrichment and enlargement of self (*un soi enrichi et élargi*).

In his expression of love for David, Jonathan profoundly proclaims that he wants David to be (*volo ut sis, ti voglio bene*). This affirmation of love longs for the independent and free existence of the beloved. Jonathan is far from wanting any domination over the beloved. On the contrary, he wants David to be his kingdom's first. Instead of any totalitarian temptation toward the destruction of the individuality of the Other and making the Other anonymous and interchangeable, he declares his subordination to the beloved. Jonathan's desire has a concrete name, David, and his longing is turned toward belonging together. It is important to emphasize that the friendship becomes covenantal, and not just a kind of spiritual connection: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to

me was wonderful, passing the love of women” (2 Sam 1: 26). They call each other friend, the beloved.

Friendship is a matter of promise, of being able to make a pledge with the good face of keeping the promise. Friendship, like truth, is, as Derrida would say, “promised beyond all proof, all perception, all intuitive demonstration.”³⁰ Friendship is a matter of trust. The dynamic possibility of friendship calls for being expressed in lived relationship. In that respect, the possibility of friendship is a movement toward existence. In Leibnitz’s language, it is *complementum possibilitatis*.³¹ Thus, lived friendship is the completion of the possibility of friendship.

Jonathan was well aware that he lives what Derrida calls “unconditional hospitality,” always in-between two imperatives of knowledge and action, coming and welcoming, giving and forgiving. And, at least to some degree, he negotiated between the possibility of welcoming the friend and losing his father. This impossible possibility makes the gift of friendship so precious. Jonathan’s virtually impossible desire for David’s love makes it actually happen. By naming his own desire (you will be the first), Jonathan makes his wish reality beyond any human capacity for reciprocity and exchange.

Jonathan’s invitation to friendship is genuine and pure. This purity is based on its absolute unconditionality. He gives himself to David without asking for reciprocity. It is the highest risk that confirms its ingenuity and purity. This givenness has a sacramental character of confirmation (*con-firmatio*). By giving himself to David, Jonathan exposes himself, and in this exposition (*ex-positio*), he keeps the present open to the possibility of the event. The gift of friendship is the matter of giving himself to David. What is eventing is precisely this giving himself to David. Jonathan needs to replace himself. Understanding is always connected, or even more, *is*, in itself, the repositioning (*ex-positio*) oneself within ever-changing and fusing horizons.

In their friendship, Jonathan and David are equally the people of the impossible. Their mutual love was without measure. This might be the secret access to the mystery of friendship, to making the impossible possible. The possibility of

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002), 98. “In fact, *status viatoris* connotes not so much moving toward a designated place to be reached, but the very structure of a human being as a temporal and historical being with all the ‘not yet’ dimensions of a finite being. What is fascinating in human history is the possibility, or even more, the reality of hope in this ‘not-yet’ of the eschatological promise. The criterion for the validity of an interpretation of his hope in the ‘not yet’ is not its falsifiability but its compellingness” (Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*, 20).

³¹ In the debate between Wolff and Leibnitz, we learn Wolff’s definition: “Existential definitio per complementum possibilitatis.” For Wolff, it means simply “die Ergänzung der Möglichkeit.” See Mark Sinclair, ed., *The Actual and the Possible: Modality and Metaphysics in Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

friendship, the invitation, and answering is the matter of taking a risk, of not knowing where we will need to go. Exposing ourselves to risk, to danger, is not a matter of a resolute decision, but the gift, which cannot be a matter of knowledge and certainty: “For thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee” (Jer 1: 7–8). Again, beautifully rendered in the Kings James Bible.

The incredible testimony of friendship finds its ultimate meaning in helping each other in finding strength in God: “And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God” (1 Sam 23: 16). This finding strength in God is an expression of making the unimaginable and impossible possible. It is the unthinkable happening because the radicality of friendship, which crosses all kinds of boundaries, is not merely man-made. The eventing of radical and boundary-crossing friendship unites people in seeing a friend in the Other and loving him as his own soul. True capability for inspirational friendship is not a matter of overcoming vulnerability and dependence but finding real strength and happiness in radical and risk-taking interdependability in love.

David’s lament after Jonathan’s death is one of the strongest declarations of deep and undying love:

Saul and Jonathan—
 in life they were loved and admired,
 and in death they were not parted.
 They were swifter than eagles,
 they were stronger than lions.
 How the mighty have fallen in battle!
 Jonathan lies slain on your heights.
 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;
 you were very dear to me.
 Your love for me was wonderful,
 more wonderful than that of women. (2 Sam 1: 23, 25–26)

The friendship between Jonathan and David reminds us of yet another great friendship between two powerful women—Ruth and Naomi, Jewish mother-in-law and Moabite daughter-in-law. In her radical declaration of love, Ruth happily promises: “Where you will go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried” (Ruth 1: 16–17). The profound commitment of friendship binds the souls of the partners to each other

and makes them love each other as themselves. Such radical and revolutionary friendship demands great sacrifices, but they come freely and willingly from the hearts of the lovers. In these passionate and dramatic stories, it is difficult not to hear the ultimate story of friendship and love offered by Jesus for the reconciliation of the world with God.³²

The immediacy of falling in love with David was a great wisdom of love, wisdom that made Jonathan go against his father in order to be David's friend for life. For Saul, Jonathan's friendship with David becomes conspiracy rather than Jonathan's ideally envisioned *συνουσία*, being together, a perfect communion with his friend.³³ Wisdom of love is the wisdom of making choices, following one's heart: Do it wisely, do it all. Like in Charles Bukowski's "Roll the Dice":

if you're going to try, go all the
way.
otherwise, don't even start.

³² Here, we might differentiate between reflecting faith and dogmatic faith. It was Immanuel Kant's distinction between *reflektierendem (Vernunftglauben)* und *dogmatischem Glauben*. For Kant, the dogmatic faith is not really faith, but "die wahre Quelle alles der Moralität widerstrebenden Unglaubens" (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Jens Timmermann [Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1998], B XXVIII–XXIX). Cf. Rudolf Langthaler, *Kant über den Glauben und die "Selbsterhaltung der Vernunft": Sein Weg von der "Kritik" zur "eigentlichen Metaphysik"—und darüber hinaus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Alber, 2018).

³³ For Plato, *συνουσία* is a common act of free exchange of knowledge (The Seventh Letter). Worum es hingegen geht, ist eine umfängliche Form von Liebe. Sie wird ausgemacht von allem, was zur Liebe gehört und Liebe heißt. Deshalb arbeitet der Mythos mit drei verschiedenen Begriffen, die die ganze relevante Bandbreite bestimmen: mit "φιλία" eine Freundschaftlichkeit, die für Ehrlichkeit, Höflichkeit und Respekt steht; mit "οἰκειότης" eine Angehörigkeit, die Vertrauen, Zutrauen und Bekanntheit anzeigt; mit "ἔρως" eine sinnliche Freude, die In diesem Zusammenhang taucht mit "ἀφροδίσιος" sogar noch ein vierter Liebes-Begriff auf, von dem mit Sicherheit nicht klar ist, wie genauer sich in diesem ganzen Kontext bestimmen lassen sollte und vor allem von der Bedeutung von "ἔρως" unterscheidet. Die Vermutung ist, dass "ἡ τῶν ἀφροδισίων συνουσία" primär den körperlich-sexuellen Liebesakt im Sinne hat—von dem aber in einer rhetorischen Frage ausgeschlossen wird, dass er das hinreichende Motiv ist, weshalb zwei wahre Hälften eigentlich zusammensein wollen (Vgl. *Symp.* 192c). [192c] kindred, relationship, intimacy, friendliness, kindness, friendly relations happens on his own particular half, the two of them are wondrously thrilled with affection and intimacy and love, and are hardly to be induced to leave each other's side for a single moment. These are they who continue together throughout life, though they could not even say what they would have of one another. No one could imagine this to be the mere amorous connection, or that such alone could be the reason why each rejoices in the other's company with so eager a zest: obviously the soul of each is wishing for something else that it cannot express,

[192ε] οἰκειότητι καὶ ἔρωτι, οὐκ ἐθέλοντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν χωρίζεσθαι ἀλλήλων οὐδὲ μικρὸν χρόνον. καὶ οἱ διατελοῦντες μετ' ἀλλήλων διὰ βίου οὗτοι εἰσιν, οἳ οὐδ' ἂν ἔχοιεν εἰπεῖν ὅτι βούλονται σφίσι παρ' ἀλλήλων γίνεσθαι. οὐδενὶ γὰρ ἂν δόξειεν τοῦτ' εἶναι ἢ τῶν ἀφροδισίων συνουσία, ὡς ἄρα τούτου ἕνεκα ἕτερος ἐτέρῳ χαιρεῖ συνῶν οὕτως ἐπὶ μεγάλης σπουδῆς: ἀλλ' ἄλλο τι βουλομένη ἐκατέρου ἢ ψυχῆ.

if you're going to try, go all the
way. this could mean losing girlfriends,
wives, relatives, jobs and
maybe your mind.

go all the way.
it could mean not eating for 3 or
4 days.
it could mean freezing on a
park bench.
it could mean jail,
it could mean derision,
mockery,
isolation.
isolation is the gift,
all the others are a test of your
endurance, of
how much you really want to
do it.
and you'll do it
despite rejection and the
worst odds
and it will be better than
anything else
you can imagine.

if you're going to try,
go all the way.
there is no other feeling like
that.
you will be alone with the
gods
and the nights will flame with
fire.

do it, do it, do it.

do it.

all the way
 all the way.
 you will ride life straight to
 perfect laughter,
 it's the only good fight
 there is.³⁴

Cavafy's Friendship in His Poetics of Memory: The Discourse on Pleasure, Pain, and the Loss of the (Re)invented Love

When I was 18, Alfred, a friend of mine, in a pretty small but charmingly cozy garden overlooking from the south the valley, from the west the old streets of Lublin, and from the north, the brewery of the locally famous beer "The Perl" (Perla), introduced me to Constantine P. Cavafy (Κωνσταντίνος Πέτρου Καβάφης). The garden was a fabulous shelter place for the fugitives from the Dreamland of Heaven.³⁵ At that time, I read Cavafy in my native Polish, in a congenial translation by Zygmunt Kubiak,³⁶ Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, known as Andrei Belyi (Андрей Бѣлый) in Russian,³⁷ and privately studied Gadamer in German without ever dreaming of discussing in person his hermeneutics. Time has passed, my language constellations have changed, and I still read Cavafy with an ever-growing fascination for the powerful expression of the meaning of life and love.

Reading Cavafy throughout my life means reading his *corpus poeticus* in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. To get intimate with his poetry, I need to interpret it together with and through my life experiences. They belong to what needs to be understood as much as the poems themselves. Therefore, reading poetry is always a powerful lesson of

³⁴ Charles Bukowski, "Roll the Dice," in idem, *A New Year's Greeting from Black Sparrow* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Black Sparrow Press, 1999).

³⁵ See Stanislaw Barańczak, *A Fugitive from Utopia: The Poetry of Zbigniew Herbert* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987). See further a collection of passionate essays on culture, art, and history: Zbigniew Herbert, *Barbarian in the Garden*, trans. Michael March and Jarolaw (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986).

³⁶ We can safely say that in Poland, Cavafy lives *per* Kubiak, *con* Kubiak, and *in* Kubiak.

³⁷ Wladimir Solowjow, Nikolaj Fiodorow, Andriej Biely, Wiaczeslaw Iwanow, Wielemir Chlebnikow, Aleksandr Bogdanow, Nikolaj Roerich, Konstantin Ciolkowski, Wladimir Wernadski, Jewgienij Zamiatin, but also well-known representants of the Russian avant-garde, Konstantin Malewicz, Wasilij Kandinsky, Aleksandr Rodczenko, Pawel Filonow, Nikolaj Larionow, and especially Pavel Florenski were great visionaries and utopists. They dreamed of establishing a great synthesis of theology, philosophy, science, life, and culture.

understanding and a lesson in understanding. How poetry forms and transforms the understanding of the reader's life is the biggest mystery and witness that poetry gives us.³⁸

Being a diligent student in Cavafy's Academy requires courage to face everything we experience with the attention it deserves. This attention results from our authenticity, from the ability to respond to the call that addresses us. Facing life, we learn to progress in our art of discerning what we need to do on our way to maturity.

Myris: Alexandria, A.D. 340

When I heard the terrible news, that Myris was dead,
I went to his house, although I avoid
going to the houses of Christians,
especially during times of mourning or festivity.

I stood in the corridor. I didn't want
to go further inside because I noticed
that the relatives of the deceased looked at me
with obvious surprise and displeasure.
They had him in a large room,
and from the corner where I stood
I could catch a glimpse of it: all precious carpets,
and vessels in silver and gold.

I stood and wept in a corner of the corridor.
And I thought how our parties and excursions
would no longer be worthwhile without Myris;
and I thought how I'd no longer see him
at our wonderfully indecent night-long sessions
enjoying himself, laughing, and reciting verses

³⁸ See Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). "What is impressive in this witness of poetry is also the source of amazement in real life. The very meaning of the interpretive task is to imagine a world possibly unfolding by the text. Poetic imagination creates the world in front of us, inhabits the space in front of the text. This unfolding creates the possibility of new meanings and represents a new internal architecture unique to the individual mode of life" (Andrzej Wierciński, *Hermeneutics of Education: Exploring and Experiencing the Unpredictability of Education* [Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2019], 252).

with his perfect feel for Greek rhythm;
 and I thought how I'd lost forever
 his beauty, lost forever
 the young man I'd worshipped so passionately.

Some old women close to me were talking with lowered voices
 about the last day he lived:
 the name of Christ constantly on his lips,
 his hand holding a cross.
 Then four Christian priests
 came into the room, and said prayers
 fervently, and orisons to Jesus,
 or to Mary (I'm not very familiar with their religion).

We'd known of course that Myris was a Christian,
 known it from the very start,
 when he first joined our group the year before last.
 But he lived exactly as we did.
 More devoted to pleasure than all of us,
 he scattered his money lavishly on amusements.
 Not caring what anyone thought of him,
 he threw himself eagerly into night-time scuffles
 when our group happened to clash
 with some rival group in the street.
 He never spoke about his religion.
 And once we even told him
 that we'd take him with us to the Serapeion.
 But—I remember now—
 he didn't seem to like this joke of ours.
 And yes, now I recall two other incidents.
 When we made libations to Poseidon,
 he drew himself back from our circle and looked elsewhere.
 And when one of us in his fervor said:
 "May all of us be favored and protected
 by the great, the sublime Apollo"—
 Myris, unheard by the others, whispered: "Not counting me."

The Christian priests were praying loudly
 for the young man's soul.
 I noticed with how much diligence,
 how much intense concern
 for the forms of their religion, they were preparing
 everything for the Christian funeral.
 And suddenly an odd sensation
 took hold of me. Indefinably I felt
 as if Myris were going from me;
 I felt that he, a Christian, was united
 with his own people and that I was becoming
 a stranger, a total stranger. I even felt
 a doubt come over me: that I'd been deceived by my passion
 and had always been a stranger to him.
 I rushed out of their horrible house,
 rushed away before my memory of Myris
 could be captured, could be perverted by their Christianity.³⁹

As the poet of human relationships, Cavafy depicts the struggle of living together in the horizon of loss in his poetry. There is nothing that can save us from going through the bitterness of parting, temporal or permanent. However, not believing in a greater order than oneself, poetry brings us to rethinking and reliving the *how* of our relation to the Other. What do we know when we believe that we know our friend? Cavafy names only the deceased friend, not the narrator. Not giving a name to a mourning friend definitely has a reason. The lyrical hero can be either Cavafy himself, or anyone who loses a friend.

Cavafy's basic metrical pattern is a loose iambic. He divides his poem according to the logic of conversation, which can be happening within the narrator or with someone who might have known Myris to some degree. The first three parts consist of four lines each, and the next four are ten, eight, twenty-three, and seventeen lines.

By turning back to Alexandria in 340 AD, one of the great centers of Greek civilization not yet Christianized, Cavafy paints a powerful picture of the real life of real people. The narrator in the poem is not concerned with the remarkable political

³⁹ Constantine P. Cavafy, "Myris: Alexandria, A.D. 340," in *Collected Poems*, rev. ed., trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savvidis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 307–309.

and religious changes his world is undergoing, nor with the world of ideas, but with his love for Myris, his pleasures, and delights, however transient and exposed to inevitable loss. For Cavafy, loss of love, home, and culture is not just a simple deprivation (*privatio boni*). St. Augustine, in *De Civitate Dei*, defines the nature of evil: “For evil has no positive nature, but the loss of good has received the name ‘evil.’”⁴⁰ St. Augustine, whose formative years happened before 400 AD, just a little later than Myris’s, does not see evil as a polar opposite to good and is genuinely preoccupied with preaching the destructive power of evil: “For what flood of eloquence can suffice to detail the miseries of this life?”⁴¹ Evil cannot contribute to the development of the person but can only ignite the self-destructing forces in human heart: “*in concupiscentia carnis voluptas est, in concupiscentia oculorum curiositas est, in ambitione saeculi superbia est. qui tria ista uincit, non ei remanet omnino in cupiditate quod uincat. multi rami, sed triplex radix.*”⁴²

Cavafy problematizes in his poem a question of the opportune time for learning (*καιρός*). It seems, on the one hand, that the person, who has lost his beloved, is not in a position to learn anything that can revolutionize his life. However, there is something extremely vital that can be learned: living in a world of loss. We can preserve the meaning of love despite various destructive powers, even death. But one of the most important lessons Cavafy is offering is the precaution/warning that being preoccupied with oneself can make us really blind and unable to recognize what is there. What blindness!

Upon hearing of Myris’s death, the narrator went to his house, despite his deep reservation, especially with regard to “times of mourning or festivity.” It seems quite obvious that the reason for this reservation is either the lack of familiarity with Christian tradition or reluctance to participate in it. Standing in the hall, outside the room where the dead body lies, he “could catch a glimpse of it: all precious carpets, and vessels in silver and gold.” In this seemingly colloquial and casual description of what is happening, Cavafy proves that he is a master of the powerful expression of the profound human experience. “I stood and wept in a corner of the corridor.” What else is needed to convey the drama of parting?

Watching the Christian funeral rites, the narrator becomes aware of not knowing his lover. The dead friend is there. Absence is the mode of presence. Standing in the hall and weeping, the narrator realizes that the parties, the trips, and all the fun

⁴⁰ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xi: 9.

⁴¹ St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xix: 4. See Marleen Verschoren, “The Appearance of the Concept Concupiscentia in Augustine’s Early Antimanichaean Writings (388–391),” *Augustiniana* 52, no. 2/4 (2002): 199–240.

⁴² St. Augustine, *Sermones* a M. Denis editi, *Miscellanea Agostiniana* I (Roma 1930), 14, 2.

will be meaningless without Myris. Some old women were talking about Myris's pious end:

the name of Christ constantly on his lips,
 his hand holding a cross.
 Then four Christian priests
 came into the room, and said prayers
 fervently, and orisons to Jesus,
 or to Mary (I'm not very familiar with their religion).

Listening to the old women talk about the religiously virtuous Myris and the fervent prayers of the priests, the narrator realizes the growing estrangement: The dead lover is becoming a stranger or was a stranger unrecognized to the full extent by his friends.

I didn't want
 to go further inside because I noticed
 that the relatives of the deceased looked at me
 with obvious surprise and displeasure.

The problem of strangeness is tackled by the narrator from the double perspective of surprise and displeasure. That the old women are surprised indicates that they considered themselves familiar with Myris's friends. And the narrator definitely did not belong to one of them. But why displeasure? Was it because of some awkward behavior linked with his lack of familiarity with Christian funeral customs?

The alienation from Myris is emphasized by the narrator's admission that he knows very little about Christianity. The growing estrangement becomes unbearable for the narrator. This irrevocable loss of the possibility to become closer to each other, to understand what is genuinely important to the Other, to share his life and his faith evokes powerful emotions in the friend left behind. The art of narrating discloses the growing awareness of the meaning of love, religion, and death. A gradual disclosure of what religion meant to Myris comes through remembering apparently not very important occurrences. The power of remembering and understanding is emphasized through the reexamination of memory. Moving back to the past, remembering the past

events, helps to recreate the past and recover its meaning.⁴³ The narrator repeats “I thought how” three times, which means reflecting upon something.

Upon realizing what has happened and what the funeral can do to him, the lover has

rushed out of their horrible house,
rushed away before my memory of Myris
could be captured, could be perverted by their Christianity.

The narrator is fully aware of the permanent loss of Myris. But his pain is strangely aggravated by his vision that Myris returned to his own people by turning to his religion. One person’s loss is the other’s gain. But maybe Myris was never really away from his religion, and the narrator’s pain is actually the pain of not knowing his lover. Similarly, St. Augustine writes passionately about the parting and the loss of a friend in book four of his *Confessiones*.⁴⁴ From the perspective of death, the more comprehensive understanding of friendship and not really knowing his friend is much more evident. The revealing realization of the unfathomable complexity of the friend makes the pain even more unbearable.

Maybe, therefore, the pain of parting is so unbearable since there is always something still alive, “a bit of the past” that we do not wish to lose and will preserve. This might be the source of emotional tyranny. We are inclined to judge the past and what we take to be the past by the experience of our rootedness in the present.⁴⁵

For the narrator, the death of Myris, however painful, is a chance to call himself into question. This calling into question reminds us again of St. Augustine’s

⁴³ “What is at stake in the case of the structural identity of the narrative function as well as in that of the truth claim of every narrative work, is the temporal character of temporal experience. The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world. . . . Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience” (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984], 3).

⁴⁴ Augustinus Hipponensis, *Confessiones*, Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana 1, ed. Michel Pellegrino (Roma: Città Nuova editrice, 1975), 4.

⁴⁵ “[B]y ‘history,’ we have in view that which is past, but which nevertheless is still having effects. Howsoever the historical, as that which is past, is understood to be related to the ‘Present’ in the sense of what is actual ‘now’ and ‘today,’ and to be related to it, either positively or privatively, in such a way as to have effects upon it. Thus ‘the past’ has a remarkable double meaning; the past belongs irretrievably to an earlier time; it belonged to the events of that time; and in spite of that, it can still be present-at-hand ‘now’—for instance, the remains of a Greek temple. With the temple, a ‘bit of the past’ is still ‘in the present’” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 430).

“*factus eram ipse mihi magna quaestio*”⁴⁶ and concerns the possibility of not knowing the friend, the wish to preserve the memories untainted by religious beliefs (as confronted by the funeral), and the challenges of his own life after this final separation from his dead friend. Visiting the dead Myris was to his friend an unexpected retreat, an opportunity to face, in the dead Myris, not only their common past but also, and most predominantly, his own life. To look at himself from the perspective of the experience of death. The disclosure of self-understanding happens on the way to oneself through the process of narration.

In retrospective narratives, we recognize the internal logic of our thinking and acting. But only then. Life challenges us with ever new situations, and we are expected to face the given situation with radical responsibility since no one can give the answer for us. Hence, we need to practice always both *παρορσία* and respect, urgency and patience, strong conviction and humility. The genuine existential confusion of voices in us is not a matter to overcome. We need to face undecidability, unpredictability, and ambiguity with maximized attention and not suffocate the uncomfortable, unknown, or even hostile voices.⁴⁷

Recognizing the truth about himself, the narrator realizes that the truth of interpretation was overshadowed throughout the history of their friendship by the lack of assertiveness and attention to the very meaning of *Existenz*, in difference to mere existence.⁴⁸ In that respect, we can see the narrator’s sorrowful path as the possibility of rebirth. Using Jaspers’s notion of *Grenzsituation*,⁴⁹ Myris’s death can be the (re)discovery of the very self of the survivor and, as such, lead to a possible turn in his life toward living his life to the fullest. Cavafy’s understanding of religion allows for translating the untranslatable language of pain and loss of a friend into the formative and transformative space of empathy for what is not the world of the narrator. Still, it might have always been unrecognized by the other world of the beloved (Myris). Cavafy’s careful reading of human relationships inspires him to experience reconciliation with the afflicted, also with oneself as another, not only as the realization

⁴⁶ Augustinus Hipponensis, *Confessiones*, 4, 4. 9.

⁴⁷ See Andrzej Wierciński, “Confusion of Voices: The Crucial Dilemmas of Being a Human Being, Czesław Miłosz’s Poetry, and the Search for Personal Identity,” in *Cultural Politics and Identity: The Public Space of Recognition*, ed. Barbara Weber et al. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), 147–74.

⁴⁸ For Heidegger, Ek-sistence is a condition of being outside of oneself, of not fully coinciding with oneself or being reducible to one’s current properties. The ek-sistent is “set outside of itself,” “ex-posed” (*aus-setzen*, GA 9: 189/144). Human existence is ek-sistent in this sense. See Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, GA 9, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1996).

⁴⁹ See Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie I/III* (München: Piper, 1994), 220.

(*Verwirklichung*) and restoration (*Wiederbestellung*) of broken relations but the opening of spaces that discloses the very possibility of the event of truth (*Geschehen der Wahrheit*).

Understanding friendship requires maturity, and because of this, it might be necessary to go through the boundary-like situation (i.e., death) or an experience of parting (which resembles death). The friend needs to gain or regain confidence in recognizing his feelings. Still, it might be possible through the experience of loss, which needs to be fully embraced and evaluated in its formative and transformative potential. What is impressively striking in Cavafy's poetry is his permanent work on poems, including those previously published. With his existential maturity comes his development as a poet, someone who can appreciate more and more not just the gift of life and friendship, but the gift that death brings to us with itself, the gift of losing, and the gift of permanence in time beyond the time of the living. There is a permanent theme in Cavafy, which reminds us that the dead do not leave us behind empty-handed. Being severely affected by the death of so many dear people, Cavafy learns in time to appreciate the gift of the dead. The poet's genius is required to appreciate the absence fully as the mode of presence. Being entrusted with the gift of the dead, Cavafy knows how to treasure the beauty of the fleeting moment. On his way to existential and poetic maturity, Cavafy loses many adjectives. Yes, he eliminates those intolerably sweet and inexpressive adjectives that have the destructive power of trivializing even the most meaningful experiences by creating the unbearably obnoxious banality of stagnant idleness.⁵⁰

Cavafy, a master in the art of narrating, is fully aware of understanding the phenomena in question regarding the said and the unsaid.⁵¹ It is not only a successful and powerful technique (*ars poetica*) to intensify the emotion by the lack of words and the silence but a genuine understanding that the reality contains the undecipherable logic of the dynamics between the expressed and not expressed. This not expressed is everything that for whatever reason is not expressed and all this what cannot be expressed yet or cannot be expressed at all. It is precisely this inexpressibility which in the *ars poetica* enlivens the complexity and essential impenetrability of what needs to be understood. Our refuge is in turning toward the Logoi, toward facing each other. As

⁵⁰ Compare two published versions of the revised poems: "Sweet Voices" and "Voices." The brevity and simplicity of the revised version add an enormous weight to the matter in question.

⁵¹ "Das Gesagte ist das Dürftige, das Ungesagte erfüllt mit Reichtum" (Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, GA 3, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991], 249). That which will never be written, which is unsaid and inexpressible, which is detached from any form of representation, encompasses the enormous richness of the thinking of being, and is, along with what is said, the mode of disclosing being.

Gadamer poignantly says, our task is to take “part in a conversation that exceeds us and is alone able to give us the language and that vision that could guide us.”⁵²

Louis A. Ruprecht Jr. calls Cavafy’s poetry “waterways, not walls.”⁵³ It is the power of poetry to find other routes for traveling toward our self-understanding and exploring, indicating, and revealing channels for facing life with all its blessings and demands. By emphasizing the dynamic nature of poetry and the opening of our horizons of understanding that move with us, Ruprecht’s dictum recalls Heidegger’s approach to his own philosophical accomplishment: “Ways, not Works” (*Wege nicht Werke*).⁵⁴

The *genius loci* of Alexandria allowed Cavafy and now allows us, as his readers, to translate the dwelling space into a dialogical space. Cavafy’s poetry depicts the moment in its reference to the past and the future, which in its reaching toward what is not yet becoming the landscape of hope, even though this hope is brutally stained with the atrocities of the present.

Cavafy discloses in the story of Myris a painful experience of our being in the world with others: neither this family knew him nor his friend with whom he enjoyed the uninhibited intimate pleasures of love. The scene when the women talk about Myris’s religion painfully exhibits the lack of knowledge of the Other and his potential permanent feeling of being lonely and strange in both incompatible worlds. It reminds us of the final incommunicability of the person when failure to know the self and the Other means to experience human failure in the eyes of the Other and the eyes of the self. There is no need to compete between which failure and which pain and suffering are more significant.⁵⁵

⁵² Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Philosophie und Philologie,” in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6: *Griechische Philosophie II* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985), 277. In the Gadamerian context, I would like to emphasize the proximity between philosophy, philology, and literary studies. For a very compelling example, see John T. Hamilton, *Music, Madness, and the Unworking of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁵³ Louis A. Ruprecht Jr., “Waterways, not Walls: Cavafy, the Cosmopolitan Poet of Blurred Boundaries,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 48, no. 2 (2015): 47–71.

⁵⁴ A few days before his death, Heidegger composed a motto for his collected edition: “Ways, not works.” He chose “collected edition” over “collected works” (*Gesamtausgabe* versus *Gesammelte Werke*) explaining: “The collected edition should indicate various ways: it is underway in the field of paths of the selftransforming asking of the many-sided question of Being. . . . The point is to awaken the confrontation about the question concerning the topic of thinking. . . and not to communicate the opinion of the author, and not to characterize the standpoint of the writer, and not to fit it into the series of other historically determinable philosophical standpoints. Of course, such a thing is always possible, especially in the information age, but for preparing the questioning access to the topic of thinking, it is completely useless” (Martin Heidegger, *Frühe Schriften: 1912–16*, GA1, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann), 437–38).

⁵⁵ “The person is a being that understands, and always understands differently, not only *rationalis naturae individua substantia*, *intellectualis naturae incommunicabilis existentia* but primarily *existentia hermeneutica*.

Cavafy's "Myris" is a treatise on memory in verses he composes while coming to understand the meaning of lived experience. He brilliantly shows that the phenomenological and hermeneutic understanding of memory goes beyond remembering individual lived experiences in our personal history. In fact, memory is what makes the shared experience possible.⁵⁶ In a congenial way, Cavafy asks what makes the difference between the recollection of specific instances and memory. Following Plato, we can say those recollections, by becoming memories, can pave the way for the intersubjective space of shared experience. Myris is a mediator between the past filled with the friend/narrator's adventurous and joyous recollections of the past and the family circle's reminiscences of which we do not know. Myris is also the mediator in the sense of allowing the narrator to understand the occurrences of the past from the perspective of Myris's death, an encounter with his family and funeral rituals, and the possibility to look at the narrator's personal experience of Myris and the past through the lens of the painful presence. This opportunity to understand the events of the past from the perspective of the present situation and what has happened in-between is, hermeneutically speaking, the *way* of understanding, and it means an event of understanding the phenomenon in question in its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Cavafy is acutely aware that what needs to be interpreted in order to understand Myris embraces everything he understood of himself, everybody involved understood of him, and how this understanding is transformed now through his death and subsequent changes in perceiving him by his family and friends.⁵⁷

Conclusion: The End of Friendship (τὸ τέλος της φιλίας)?

Gathering together to listen and speak, representing a wide range of professional interests and fields of expertise, we want to break through traditional barriers, thereby creating an interdisciplinary forum for hermeneutic dialogue, a conversation which revolves around our relationship to history and its texts" (Wierciński, *Existential Hermeneutics*, 11).

⁵⁶ See Paul Ricœur, *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2000). Ricoeur addresses here the fundamental question of the representation of the past by examining the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting. The prevailing issue of the treatise is the possibility of the past's being made present again. Ricoeur situates his philosophy of history in between the mastery of memory and the force of forgetting.

⁵⁷ Reading Cavafy is always a struggle with love for language and the language for love. To read poetry, we need to be not only philologists of the body but philologists of the flesh. See John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018). The distinction between σαρκ-*flesh* and σῶμα-*body*, especially for interpretation of the incarnational metaphor is of the utmost importance. The theological distinction requires very careful consideration since it can be easily misinterpreted, particularly in *Corpus Paulinum* (Rom 8: 13–24, Gal 5: 13–24).

Art and religion have an exceptional potentiality to form, inform, and transform our ability to face the reality of life: To help us on the way to being an experienced person and to deal with future events enriched by the experiences of the past.⁵⁸

Jonathan and David remind us that friendship is a source of happiness and its great challenge. It asks for complete devotion to a friend and offers unsurpassable joy and delight. The advancement of friendship happens through the challenging and unstable equilibrium of growing together, (dis)covering the unsettled, and accepting the loss. Encountering the inescapable dilemma of choosing between fidelity to a friend and betrayal of the father, Jonathan critically examines the real meaning of friendship. He translates the virtually untranslatable into the language of action. The core of this action is hospitality, where the delight in the Other and the pleasure of welcoming him in your own world, despite the severe threat of losing it because of your commitment to the friend, are very life-giving. By offering his kingdom to David, thus putting him above himself, Jonathan transforms his own welcoming house into the realm of friendship. What is truly amazing is that Jonathan quickly learns the language of friendship by incorporating signs, metaphors, and cultural expressions to find his way into this genuinely new form of life, which needs to be learned. Here, we experience the powerful mystery of the impenetrable potential of the human being to learn and mature quickly in times of misfortune, war, or death. Jonathan's falling into friendship with David requires his serious and honest engagement with translating his sentiments into Saul's and David's languages. Jonathan becomes a mediator who is painfully aware of the untranslatability of his sentiments both in linguistic and cultural terms.

A broken heart could be a figure of terror, threatening the vision of a happy life and love. Jonathan and David gave us a powerful lesson of the courage to love and live despite the obstacles and spite coming from Saul. Believing in friendship and love brought them out of the spatial realm of fear and anxiety and into the immense joy of friendship that was not to be taken away from them.

⁵⁸ "Heidegger. . . enabled us to perceive the ontological plenitude or the truth that addresses us in art through the twofold movement of revealing, unconcealing, and manifesting, on the one hand, and concealing and sheltering, on the other. He showed that the Greek concept of concealment (aletheia), only represented one side of man's fundamental experience of the world. Alongside and inseparable from this unconcealing, there also stands the shrouding and concealing that belongs to our human finitude. This philosophical insight, which sets limits to any idealism claiming a total recovery of meaning, implies that there is more to the work of art than a meaning that is experienced only in an indeterminate way" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Bernasconi, trans. Nicholas Walker [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], 34).

Cavafy, in his great poetic vision and wisdom, teaches us that those who have existential courage know how to deal with possibly harder and darker days ahead (Περιμένοντας τὸς Βαρβάρους, *Waiting for the Barbarians*). Without sentimentalizing and banalizing the broken-heart experience, we can say that however dramatic the present is, we might need to get ready for more difficult days ahead. And this is not a strategized recipe for avoiding or minimizing unwanted future pain and suffering. Being prepared for darker days means we are well-prepared for what might come. This is the meaning of the experienced person: To be ready to face future challenges. An experienced person does not need to wait for any enemy, real or imaginary, to excuse oneself for the lack of responsivity to the call of life. Cavafy's "What are we going to do now without the barbarians?" sounds like the admonition for not wanting and/or not being able to deal with what needs to be done *hic et nunc* and exposing oneself for waiting for the solution to come from the other, i.e., unknown side—hence βάρβαρος, an unidentified enemy, who does not speak our language and/or share our cultural identity (βάρβαρος as the opposite to πολίτης). Cavafy is unapologetic in reminding us of the necessity of facing life as it is now, instead of indulging ourselves in an impossible-to-bear unreality fed with underlying fears and anxieties. They distort our personal identity. Waiting for a possible future input, however strange or damaging, seems to be the only solution for our unwillingness to deal with life in the first instance. Barbarians' absence is the mode of their presence. It is us who envision the barbarians to be the welcomed solution to our problems. They should bring about the change. It is our call to decide if we are going to wait for them.

Thinking about and living friendship is a matter of our self-education. This experience is inevitably connected to pain and suffering, πάθει μάθος,⁵⁹ and leads toward a noble life in a manner of καλὸς κάγαθός. Thus, learning and living cannot be separated: Learning about friendship and learning from friendship is learning into friendship.⁶⁰ The understanding of πάθει μάθος, as learning from an adversary, highlights the importance of personal experience for authentic learning. The emphasis on the indispensability of pain, hardship, grief, and suffering on the way to personal wisdom comes from valuing πάθει μάθος as the unquestionably superior form of acquiring a formative experience of friendship.

⁵⁹ Chorus praises Zeus for setting mortals on the path to understanding with a fixed law that "wisdom comes by suffering." "Χορός τὸν φρονεῖν βροτοὺς ὀδώσαντα, τὸν πάθει μάθος θέντα κυρίως ἔχειν" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 179, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0004>).

⁶⁰ For Thomas H. Groome, Christian religious education is a shared Christian praxis, where people learn about, from, and into faith. See Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: The Way of Shared Praxis* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990).

Is there the end of a friendship?⁶¹ Thinking about and living friendship brings us always to the beginning, ἀρχή: τὸ τέλος της φιλίας is, at the same time, η ἀρχή της φιλίας. In Greek, τέλος means both an aim, purpose, and a termination, final limit. It calls for faith and brings with it the struggle of beginning. It creates tension between the recognition of friendship and the reconciliation of friends. The promise of friendship is the vision of the different way (ἄλλος ὁδός) to live our lives.

⁶¹ Cf. Eftichis Pirovolakis, “Το τέλος της φιλίας και της δημοκρατίας: από τον Ντεριντά στον Αριστοτέλη,” *Philosophiein* 13 (2016): 359–80.