



## GANZ - #14 - REWILDING THE WORD (MAY 2025)

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**Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*** - EDUCATION, n. That which discloses to the wise and disguises from the foolish their lack of understanding.

**Rowan Williams, *Passions of the Soul* (2024), page 13:** It's worth noticing how the ideal of freedom from 'passion' is connected here with a new level of awareness, a new clarity of vision. What these earlier writers of the Eastern spiritual tradition are talking about is regularly grounded in *the idea that our habitual mental and spiritual condition is one in which we quite simply don't see clearly;* and even in the Western tradition St Augustine will tell us that one of the effects of evil within us is that our minds are skewed. *We don't know things as we ought to know them; we don't see things as we ought to see them.* [My emphasis.]



“Theseus<sup>1</sup> and Ariadne” (1811) by Rudolph Suhrlandt (1781-1862) housed in the Berlinische Galerie.<sup>2</sup> Notice the “clue” of thread that Ariadne has just placed in Theseus’ left hand.

## A Story

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<sup>1</sup> The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* at “**Theseus**” - But the major exploit of this part of his life was the journey to Crete and killing of the Minotaur (see Cretan cults and myths). In revenge for the death of his son Androgeus, \*Minos had laid upon Athens an annual tribute of seven youths and seven maidens to be given to the Minotaur. **Theseus now travelled to Crete as one of the youths and killed the beast, then escaping from the \*Labyrinth in which it was kept, with the help of a thread given him by Minos' daughter \*Ariadne.** He then fled Crete with Ariadne, but for reasons variously given abandoned her on \*Naxos. On his return to Athens with his companions, he was unwittingly responsible for his father's death, by forgetting to hoist the white sails indicating his survival; Aegeus, thinking his son was dead, hurled himself off the Acropolis or into the sea. Theseus thus became king.

<sup>2</sup> To look closer at this image:  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudolph\\_Friedrich\\_Karl\\_Suhrlandt\\_-\\_Theseus\\_und\\_Ariadne\\_-\\_BG-M-SG\\_5659%5E92\\_-\\_Berlinische\\_Galerie.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rudolph_Friedrich_Karl_Suhrlandt_-_Theseus_und_Ariadne_-_BG-M-SG_5659%5E92_-_Berlinische_Galerie.jpg).

One of the earliest “habits” of the Faber Institute (founded in October 2014) was *The Night School of Deeper Learning* (aka, “the Night School”)<sup>3</sup>. I was asked this past week how I teach these classes, wondering whether I had a particular approach to communicating so much, at depth, in so short a period of time – only one hour. I replied to him then, but I have continued to think about his question.

To the Night School we invite “Guests”. I ask a profound person from the past, especially (but not solely) from our Christian past, to join us – one Guest per night. And when, once a month (eight months of the year), we gather to meet one of them, I labor to convey a few of the deepest and most beautiful thoughts from the writings of our Guest. I will come back to this.

But there is another matter of importance. We have arranged the Night School into an expanding set of *Series*, a gathering of four Guests per Series. (We are about to complete the 16<sup>th</sup> Series, later this month.) I invite the four Guests, because I sense that *their combination* in a Series could shed light on a central “problem” that I recognize, in our present context, is vexing many of us. In the back of my mind in this gathering of four Guests is Plato’s *Symposium* dialogue,<sup>4</sup> an account of an evening of eating and drinking when each guest was invited to give a speech worth listening to on the subject of love/friendship. I also think of a “luminous Mystery”, the Transfiguration, when to a mountainside one night Jesus invited his three closest friends and then two Guests: Moses and Elijah – **Matthew 17**:<sup>2</sup> There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as dazzling as light.<sup>3</sup> And suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to *them*; they were talking with *him*.<sup>5</sup>

In our time with our Guest, we look for insight, for a deeper grasp of what really matters; in short, we seek the face of God – “the love of learning and the desire for

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<sup>3</sup> I had actually founded this while living and working at Jesuit High Portland (1997-2003), offered to the parents of our students there. This form of The Night School of Deeper Learning (the title related to what C.S. Lewis writes in his *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, when he introduces the idea of “the deeper magic”) became at The Faber Institute the *Faber Sessions*, developed to help families during the COVID Pandemic lockdown of 2020 but then continuing beyond that time.

<sup>4</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, “**Symposium Literature**” by Oswyn Murray: “Plato (1) established the prose genre of the *Symposium*, an imagined dialogue of set speeches or discussions usually on themes appropriate to the occasion. Plato wrote on ideal love; Xenophon (1)’s *Symposium* is more realistic and less serious; Aristotle wrote on drunkenness, Epicurus on the physical effects of wine and sex, Heraclides (4) of Tarentum on the medical effects of food and drink (Ath. 64a). Maecenas wrote a literary *Symposium* which contained a discussion of wine and in which Virgil and Horace appeared (Serv. on Aen. 8. 310). The *Symposia* of Menippus (1) and Lucian parodied the serious philosophic symposium.”

<sup>5</sup> [\*The New Jerusalem Bible\*](#) (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Mt 17:2-3.

God".<sup>6</sup> But also, through the course of the Series, we want those attending the Night School to catch on as to why these four Guests, who are *grouped together* in a particular Series, belong together.

Let me return to the second paragraph above. The principle of teaching that I am practicing is one that I learned from the Jesuit way of educating a person. The *principle* is **courtesy** toward the mind of another person; the *habit* is **prelection** – literally, “to pre-read.” This English word comes from the Latin verb *praelego*, which means “to read aloud to others” a text, or more specifically, a teacher sets an example of *how* to read it, of how to begin to understand it. He or she “*pre-reads*” the text, preparing students to study it on their own.<sup>7</sup>

Consider two ideas here.

First, anyone can pick up a poem and read it when asked or when he or she may desire to read it aloud to others. What quickly becomes apparent is that it is possible to read a poem badly! What a striking difference when we hear a poem read well, by which we mean the reader’s voice and emotion and pace and understanding of the words is just right. We hear and understand (even if we don’t yet understand all the lines), but also, we are infected by *how much this text matters* to our teacher – his or her love of it. *A teacher’s love of a text is contagious* and educative. When we hear a person read a poem beautifully, we might never be able to *un-hear* his or her voice reading it.

Second, the principle of *prelection* means not only this “pre-reading” (in the way described above), but it also includes a teacher’s commitment to give the students *clues* about how to read the text, so that he or she can discover what the writer means. When a teacher gives clues, he (in this case) seeks fully *to activate the desire of his students to read the text (or an author) for themselves*, to wrestle with it, to fall under its spell.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**clue**” – **2.a. – 1605** – A ball of thread, employed to guide a person in ‘threading’ his or her way into or out of a labyrinth or maze;<sup>8</sup> hence, in many more or less figurative applications, a fact, circumstance,

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<sup>6</sup> This is the title of a favorite book: *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (French original, 1957) by Dom Jean Leclercq, OSB (1911-1993).

<sup>7</sup> Notice how such a teacher does not tell the students what a text means, because that is for a student to discover on his or her own. The true education of a person does not happen when a teacher pours his or her knowledge into the student’s mind. Rather the real teacher is one who cares above all about the activation of the mind and heart of each student, who “grades” (I don’t like this word) a student not on how much he or she knows but on how far his or her mind (intellect) and heart (affect) has developed with respect to the particular subject being taught since coming into his or her class.

<sup>8</sup> The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* at “**Ariadne**” – Ariadne, daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë. In Cnossus Daedalus built her a dancing-floor (Il. 18. 592), perhaps the Daidaleion on Linear B tablet KN

or principle which, being taken hold of and followed up, leads through a maze, perplexity, difficulty, intricate investigation, etc.

The teaching at The Night School is a *practice of prelection*.<sup>9</sup> In an age when Americans (not just students) expect their teachers or preachers to “give me the right answers” or “tell me what I need to know”, or “just summarize the main points”, well, the habit of prelection stands in defiance of this demand. The greatest skill of a teacher, in the Jesuit way of educating persons, is *giving the right clues* to people, the ones that are most likely to make them want to think towards an understanding of their own and to feel the joy of finding it – *Eureka!* (literally in Greek, “I have found it!”) as Archimedes<sup>10</sup> famously shouted in a bathhouse of Syracuse in Sicily.

### A Text - “On Education” (December 1789) by Elizabeth Bentley (1767-1839)<sup>11</sup>

When infant Reason first exerts her sway,  
And new-formed thoughts their earliest charms display;  
Then let the growing race employ your care  
Then guard their opening minds from Folly’s snare;

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Fpl. **She fell in love with Theseus and gave him a thread [i.e., a “clue”] of wool to escape from the Labyrinth after killing the Minotaur.** Theseus fled with Ariadne but abandoned her on Naxos (1) either by choice or because the gods commanded him. Dionysus found and married her there.

<sup>9</sup> Fr. Clement J. Fuerst, SJ, “A Few Principles and Characteristic of the *Ratio Studiorum* [of the Jesuits]”, *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (1925): “The most important characteristic and typical feature of the *Ratio* [i.e., the rationale] is the so-called *prelection* or *explanation beforehand* of every assignment that is given to a student. **The *prelection* aims to open up the subject [or a particular text] to the student, to adapt the matter to his or her understanding, and to point [i.e., to give clues] to the solution of difficulties, so that the pupil in his home study will find the lesson attractive and interesting in the conscious knowledge that the assignment has been made digestible.** Its purpose is not to save the student painstaking labor, nor to furnish him or her with information that with application he or she can readily secure for himself or herself.”

<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* at “**Archimedes**” – Archimedes [287-212 BCE] seeks surprise and unlikely combinations, and in some of his works pushes at the edges of valid argument (most spectacularly, by considering arguments involving actual infinity, in the *Method*). **He often ignores detail, leaving much for the reader to complete.** And yet his statements are remarkable in their precision and rigour, leaving no room for doubt about the correctness of his results. This combination of maximal surprise and maximal certainty marks him as the greatest mathematical mind of antiquity and may have contributed to the popular legend of the super-human inventor of unlikely contrivances.

<sup>11</sup> *The Poetry Foundation*: “Poet **Elizabeth Bentley (1767-1839)** was born in Norwich, England, and taught to read and write by her father, a journeyman shoemaker. Bentley worked as a teacher to support her mother. She began writing poetry two years later and was one of a handful of working-class women to publish poetry in the Romantic era. ... Bentley’s poetry frequently conveys her views on the abolition of slavery and on animal welfare and is often set in a rural landscape; she is also the author of several collections of children’s verse.”

Correct the rising passions of their youth,  
Teach them each serious, each important truth;  
Plant heavenly virtue in the tender breast,  
Destroy each vice that might its growth molest;  
Point out betimes the course they should pursue;  
Then with redoubled pleasure shall you view  
Their reason strengthen as their years increase,  
Their virtue ripen and their follies cease;  
Like corn sown early in the fertile soil,  
The richest harvest shall repay your toil.

### A Close Reading

**“When infant Reason ... their earliest charms display”** – When Reason is in its infancy in a person, it presents itself as richly articulate *affect* not as intellect. This affect is expressed by the infant in a fully *embodied* way. When I have watched infants, I see them “thinking” with their bodies, expressing their thoughts physically (their brains are not yet ready for language and concepts). I notice the twitches and gesturing, their facial contortions, their turnings toward and away, their grabbing on and letting go, their inner alertness shown in their open and clear-seeing eyes. And of course we cannot miss their robustly felt feelings. “Wow, that kid has big feelings!” Their “new-formed thoughts” *are* these affects with their bodily accompaniments. Infants are far more advanced in these capacities than we “grownups” who long ago became distant from them, our intellects only vaguely embodied. This is why I have not been a fan of adults speaking “baby talk”. It seems to me that the sufficient way to meet an infant in his or her “new-formed thoughts” is for adults to be more richly expressive of their own well-ordered and refined emotions expressed with articulate bodily movements.<sup>12</sup> Infants are not just cute, but they remind us adults of capacities, and a mind-body connectivity, that we have lost over the years.

**“Correct the rising passions of their youth”** – I mentioned earlier how one way of understanding what Jesuits mean by the *ratio studiorum* is “the way by which a teacher educates a student’s *zeal* (i.e., passion)”.<sup>13</sup> The untamed and unrefined affect (emotions) of students is one of their best qualities. St. Ignatius of Loyola once, when asked about the type of man he preferred to enter the Jesuit Order, replied (I am not able to quote

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<sup>12</sup> When I was teaching high school students, a key indicator that a student was really thinking on his or her own, catching on, was watching how for him or her to express a new understanding “required” bodily expressiveness. Their excitement and in the joy of insight made them move, gesture, smile, breathe differently. His or her thinking was embodied; it could not help being so.

<sup>13</sup> Fr. Bernard Lonergan, SJ speaks of “the unrestricted desire to know” to which later in his life he would add to that “an unrestricted desire to love, to be *in* love.”



exactly): “Give me a man of great desires. One cannot *do* anything with a man who doesn’t *really want* anything worth wanting.” A person with a rich affective life (zeal; Latin adjective *studiosus* -a -um meaning “eager, assiduous, fond of”) is one who is able to be taught discernment, because discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit working primarily in the realm of affect (i.e., a perfection developed in the power of soul that we call “Will”).

**“Point out betimes the course they should pursue”** – This “pointing out” is what *prelection* does: it deploys the right clues to a person wanting to understand something, something that the teacher has persuaded him or her to seek – “they should pursue.” Notice that the right clues, given at the right moment, create in a person a desire, even an *enthusiasm*, to discover something important on his or her own.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* at “**enthusiasm**” – **4.a. – 1717** – Originally: rapturous intensity of feeling in favour of a particular cause, principle, etc.; passionate eagerness or zeal in the pursuit of an activity or objective. Now more mildly: keen interest in, passion for, or enjoyment of a particular activity or subject; approval of or optimism about someone or something; (as a general quality) eagerness, energy.

**“Destroy each vice that might its growth [i.e., virtue] molest”** – When education is understood as an exercise of imparting *content* from the teacher’s mind (or from a book) into a student’s head, then having the “right” answer and not the “wrong” answer dominates the educational enterprise. But the language here reveals a problem: It is *persons*, in this case students, who are properly identified as “right” or “wrong” (we speak of a person “being right” with the world, or “there is something wrong with that guy”); while it is *answers* that are correct or incorrect. A master teacher can discern the connection between, on the one hand, what a student understands (correctly or incorrectly) and, on the other hand, *the kind of person* that student is – his or her character or moral maturity. Such a teacher can recognize *vice* in a student and help him or her recognize this vice for what it is, giving it its proper name (sloth, envy, pride, vainglory, prejudice, cliquishness, etc.), and showing him or her how to defeat it.

**Origen (185-283 CE)**<sup>14</sup>, *First Homily on Ezekiel*, 3: “God did not create death; he did not create evil; but he left to human beings, as to angels, freedom in everything. Thus, through their freedom some rise to the highest good, others rush headlong into the depths of evil. But you, Man, why do you reject your freedom? Why this reluctance to have to make an effort, to toil, to fight, to become the artificer of your own salvation? ‘My father is working still’, it is

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<sup>14</sup> ORIGEN (PERSON). An Alexandrian-born early Church Father (ca. 185–253); most of what we know about him comes from Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* (ca. 340).

written, 'and I am working' (John 5:17). Are you then reluctant to work, you who were created in order to create positively?"

### **An Action**

From early on in my education – grade school and high school – memorization was disesteemed, considered a waste of time. This happened because memorization was misunderstood as being about *what was being memorized* rather than about Memory as one of the three *powers of soul*, a power that must be trained to be more powerful by memorizing! I suggest memorizing this prayer, written by **St. Thomas Aquinas, OP (1225-1274)**, who was and remains one of the most astonishing students who ever lived:

Come, Holy Spirit, Divine Creator, true source of light and fountain of wisdom! Pour forth your brilliance upon my dense intellect, dissipate the darkness which covers me, that of sin and of ignorance. Grant me a penetrating mind to understand, a retentive memory, method and ease in learning, the lucidity to comprehend, and abundant grace in expressing myself. Guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress, and bring it to successful completion. This I ask through Jesus Christ, true God and true man, living and reigning with You and the Father, forever and ever. Amen.