

## Transience

In discussing the important link-word *trans*, in an earlier entry (TRANSFORMATION), we considered the potential impact of language minutiae on larger linguistic implications, in that case on the doctrine of the eucharist in Catholic theology. The richness of the notion of transformation was at stake, here, and we were on the track of one of the formative doctrines of Christian religious thought—thus of many aspects of the development of Western European thought as a whole. The same link word, *trans*, faces us in the term *transience*, whose Latin root forces us back to *trans* (*across, through*) and reads it into the verbals *eo, ire*, which are derivatives of the verb *to go*. Transience emerges from this verbal chemistry meaning ‘a condition of passing through,’ an ontological condition, shall we say, of transitoriness. It is not to be wondered, accordingly, that the term *transience* figures regularly in the efforts of Christian thinkers to characterize the human condition. The fragility and temporariness of our condition are summed up in our transience. ‘Man,’ said Pascal, ‘is only a reed, but he is a thinking reed,’ ‘un roseau pensant.’