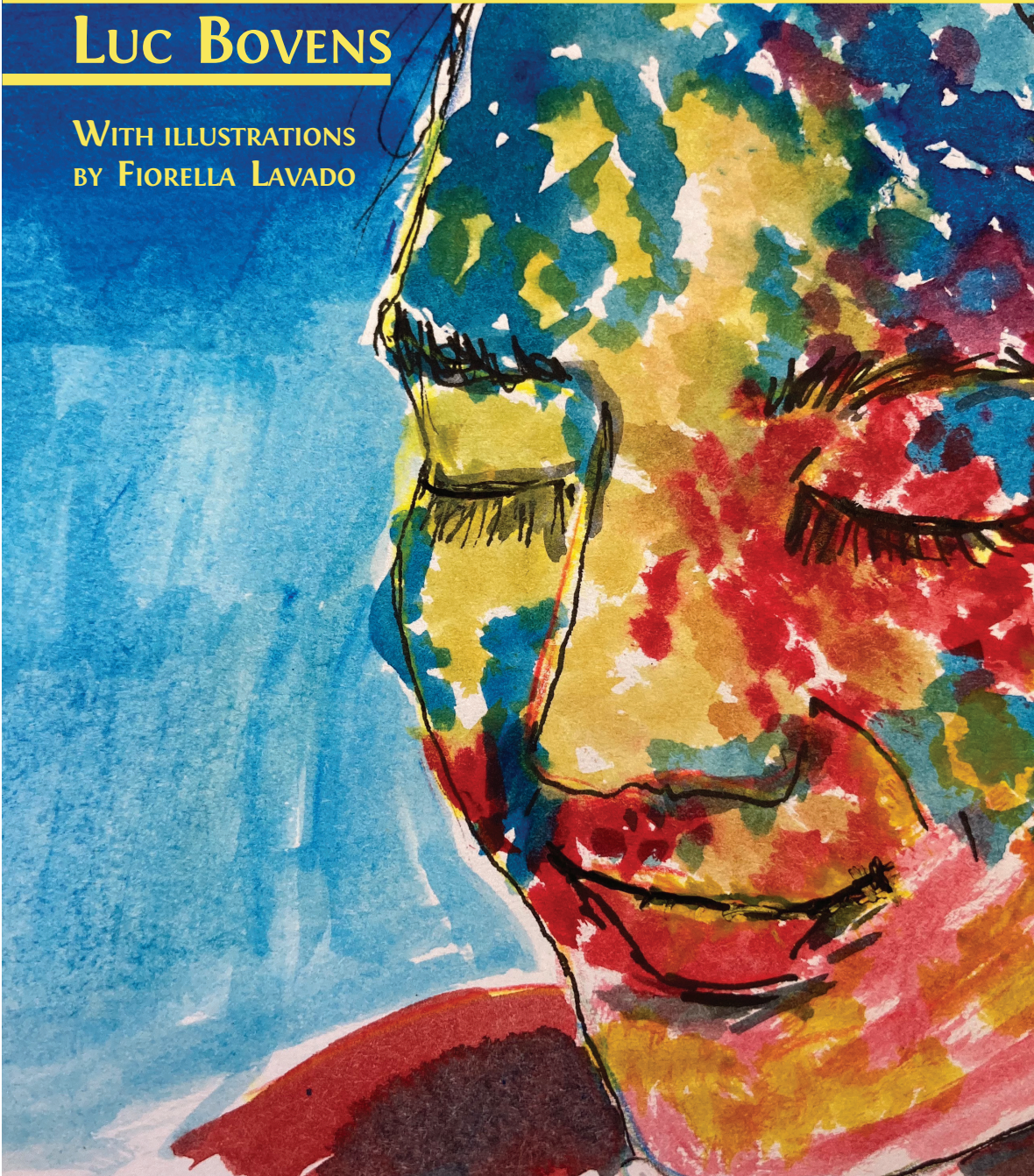


COPING

A PHILOSOPHICAL GUIDE

LUC BOVENS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY FIORELLA LAVADO





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Final Words

In an earlier draft, I wanted to title this book ‘On What Abides.’ Friends and colleagues did not think much of this title. And, of course, they were right. Would you have bothered reaching for it or clicking on a link with a title like that? Books with archaic titles attract dust rather than elicit curiosity. And yet, there are many ways in which this book is on what abides.

The very word ‘abides’ has not been doing much abiding over the last century and a half. When you enter it into Google n-grams, you will notice a steady decline in its occurrence in the written word from around 1865. However, in the late 1990s there is a curious upswing with a return to 1907 levels by 2019 (the last year for which n-grams has data).

Why this upswing in late 90s? I do not know whether it is just a coincidence, but 1998 is the year that the Coen Brothers brought out the movie *The Big Lebowski*, with the famous line ‘The Dude abides.’ The internet has lots of discussion of what could be meant by the phrase ‘The Dude abides.’ Indeed, what does ‘abide’ even mean?

There is the meaning that follows Ecclesiastes 1:4: ‘One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.’ Here abiding is simply not vanishing, simply retaining a presence.

But there is more to abiding than merely being present. The Dude abides not just in the sense that he will always be a fixture in the bowling alley—instead, he will remain a presence in the way that, say, a memory abides—authentic and unaffected by what besieges it. The most-cited phrase containing ‘abides’ is St. Paul’s line in 1 Corinthians 13:13: ‘And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.’ Faith, hope, and love endure because they are the stronger forces in human life.

This book is about questioning those things that abide, and those questions are taken up across the ages in philosophical traditions, in

literature, as well as in today's popular culture. Hope, love, and faith are among the things that abide.

And there is even more to 'abide'—meanings abound. Abiding can mean *trusting* in a nurturing source as in 'the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine' (John 15:4) It can mean *tolerating* as in 'I cannot abide rudeness,' or, more positively, *respecting* or *holding dear*, as in 'law-abiding citizens.'

This book is also about trusting in various ways of coping, tolerating adversity, and holding life dear. It would be nice to conclude: May you abide as you abide in its counsel. But my aspirations have been much less grand. If some snippets here and there made you wonder, offered a moment of recognition, or simply brought a smile to your face, then I will not have written for naught.