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The Human

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"In Search of Eldorado": Elements of Travel Fiction in Tahir Shah’s Books on Morocco

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė

Abstract
Travel narratives and travel fiction constitute a considerable part of contemporary popular fiction; however, critical attention to travel fiction has been expanding only recently. Due to the processes of globalization travel writing has strengthened its position in recent years and has become an internationally acclaimed literary field, drawing the attention of exceeding number of readers. The aim of this article is to present a short overview of the development of travel writing, to analyze types and forms of travel literature, to define the narrative structure and main elements of travel narrative and to analyze the features of travel fiction in Tahir Shah’s books on adventures in Morocco – The Caliph’s House: A Year in Casablanca (2006) and In Arabian Nights: In search of Morocco, through its stories and storytellers (2008). Tahir Shah (b. 1966), a contemporary British author of Afghan decent, who has travelled much and settled in Casablanca, Morocco, is widely known for a very strongly expressed travel dimension in his works. Thus, many of his novels include a cross-cultural paradigm.

Key words: British literature, travel fiction, travel narrative, travel literature, ethnographic dimension, popular narrative, cross-cultural paradigm.
“In Search of Eldorado”: Elements of Travel Fiction in Tahir Shah’s Books on Morocco

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė

Introduction

Travel narratives or travel fiction constitute a considerable part of contemporary popular fiction. As a field of scholarly research, the critical attention to travel writing is relatively young; however, due to the processes of globalization, travel writing has strengthened its position in recent years and has become an international literary field, drawing the attention of many readers. Globalization of the world has inspired certain new developments in British literature. Nick Bentley notices the importance of “blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality” in contemporary literature. This may explain the increased amount of popular literature, which is often grounded in reality. Among all the writing tendencies since the 1990s in European fiction, travel literature has appeared a significant phenomenon. Much contemporary British fiction has been concerned with the imaginative or realistic “construction of contemporary spaces and with the relationship between, history, geography and identity.” Migration of people has resulted in different representations of cultural environment. Physical environment has appeared in many postmodern novels and added a considerable touch of reality. According to Bentley, “countercultural narratives” have become a popular branch of fiction, the subpart of which is travel literature, a genre that has always interested readers. As Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs state, travel has become “a key theme for

5Ibid., 14.
the humanities and social sciences, and the amount of scholarly work on travel writing has reached unprecedented levels.”6 Different social factors directly influence the spread of travel literature and, especially, travel fiction – a situation which, according to Mary Baine Campbell, accounts for the strengthened positions of this sub-genre, earlier indiscreetly labelled “subliterary.”7 Although this new literary trend has been widely discussed and analysed only since the end of the twentieth century, travel narratives had existed even before the Odyssey that “describes an epic journey which offers a blueprint for the romance, indirection and danger of travel as well as the joy (and danger) of homecoming.”8 Travel always brings new experiences, knowledge and the understanding of other cultures; thus, due to contemporary processes this type of literature has definitely strengthened its position.

During many years of existence, travel literature has changed in its quality as travels have become more common and popular. Also, the traveller has always been concerned with more than the places s/he has visited, and in the past, tended to be an adventurer, a starting writer or a well-known writer, a scientist or a biologist.9 However, nowadays travel literature is more often associated to the feelings of the traveller and his/her gained experience and knowledge than to the descriptions of sightseeing that had impressed the writer. As philosopher Alain de Botton observes, starting from different impressions the writer’s experience gradually turns into “a compact and well-defined narrative.”10 Contrary to earlier travel narratives, the contemporary ones contain a surprisingly large amount of personal experience. Thus, personalization of contemporary travel narratives is one of the most distinct features of travel fiction nowadays. Moreover, the purpose of travelling itself has become different: for example, earlier travel narratives included much geographical and scientific information, while the present-day travel writing includes the attitude of the author/traveller to places, customs and people. “Cultural significance of place” and the contrastive aspect of different settings have become important features of travel fiction nowadays.11 According to William W. Stowe, “most nineteenth century American travellers used Europe for both social and personal purposes, a large minority also exploited it for professional ends, using their tours as occasions and

8Hulme and Youngs, “Introduction,” 2.
11Steve Hardy, Relations of Place. Aspects of Late 20th Century Fiction and Theory. (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2008), 7.
subjects of writing.”\textsuperscript{12} It was a good way of getting new knowledge and inspiration: more and more travellers and readers interested in this travel literature appeared. In addition to this, the cause of such popularity was “its attractiveness as an established, respectable, and relatively undemanding literary genre.”\textsuperscript{13} The readers liked it because of the lack of possibilities to travel themselves or because it was not too difficult to read and it did not require specific knowledge.

\textbf{Development of Travel Fiction: Genre and Authorship}

Travel narratives have always been ascribed to popular literature. As William H. Sherman states, in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries “literacy rates were still relatively low and many of the texts spoke to very limited audiences with very specific purposes.”\textsuperscript{14} Later, when the reading audience grew bigger in number, more publishers appeared who favoured travel writing. Travel narratives got popular and influenced other genres of literature. Michael Carhart claims that “travel literature was the second-bestselling genre in the early modern era, behind only history.”\textsuperscript{15} Numerous exotic descriptions of different places and countries that characterized the target country in detail appeared. This made the readers imagine all the adventures and surroundings of events taking place in the novels or stories. As William H. Sherman explains, “travelers made contact with new regions and peoples […]; there was a significant audience for travel writing, eager to hear the news of the wider world.”\textsuperscript{16} Thus, travel literature is one of the genres that have always raised great interest all over the world. Readers wanted to receive more information about different countries, their cultures, society and customs. Certain issues were exceptionally tempting to the readers: varieties of people, strange surroundings and customs, exotic places and different habits. Readers were excited by described experiences and adventures of the people who dared to leave their country and go where their mind would take them. During the ages, the concept of travel literature has changed; although it still tells about all the particularities of other countries and societies, now it has less geographical or factual information and is rather focused on the experience of the travellers and their point of view.

\textsuperscript{13}Stowe, \textit{Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-century American Culture}, 11.
\textsuperscript{16}Sherman, “Stirrings and Searchings (1500-1720),” 19.
Travel literature, a wide genre, includes travel writing by famous authors, geographical explorations by travellers who recorded their travels, accidental writers who, under the spell of different surroundings, would record their feelings. The origins of travel writing lie in pilgrimage: William H. Sherman claims that “pilgrimage was the dominant medieval framework for long-distance, non-utilitarian travel,” while Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs explain that pilgrims “were ancestors of modern tourists.” Later travellers were able to use their routes being aware of the experience and the curiosity of pilgrims. Another type of travel writers were errant knights. Chivalric literature “was the other major paradigm inherited from medieval travel writers, and it sometimes overlapped the spiritual quest of the pilgrims.” Merchants also used to participate in the process of writing travel narratives. As William M. Sherman claims, merchants used to do that “whether in the author’s and printer’s desire to make money or in the sponsorship of specific ventures.” Historically, these works of travel literature were quite serious and important ones because of the documentation as they were responsible for keeping careful records of their movements. These records aided the forthcoming travellers and provided them with additional geographical knowledge. Moreover, there were explorers who “were not always interested in writing, and alongside the famous names we associate with early travels are the often obscure names of those who described them.” Thus, all the explorers used to travel for their personal reasons or in order to explore different parts of the world. Others, for example, colonizers, mostly wrote texts that described and debated England’s colonial ambitions in the early modern period. Such travel narratives provided more information related to colonizers and historical facts than the narratives by usual travellers, as people used to record their experiences and descriptions of their life, different places and culture.

Political relationship among countries have made a considerable influence on travel narratives: politicians and, especially, ambassadors also form a part of the list of the authors of travel literature. As William Sherman states, “no community was in a better position to report on foreign lands than ambassadors.” They were always closer to the new things happening in the other parts of the world, so they could inform people in their native countries of the peculiarities of the host ones. Furthermore, there were scientists and explorers who, participating in expeditions,

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17Ibid., 24.
18Hulme and Youngs, “Introduction,” 2.
19Ibid., 24.
20Ibid., 25.
21Ibid., 17.
22Ibid., 25.
23Ibid., 26.
24Ibid., 27.
contributed to travel literature; however, they did not concentrate on travels as the main subject of their writing and used to include additional information (often historical or cultural) that would suit the expectations of the reading audience.

The authorship of travel literature is of diverse character. Many famous authors were also travel writers: for example, Thomas Jefferson (*Travel Journals* (1784-1789), James Fenimore Cooper (*Gleanings in Europe* (1836-1837), Charles Dickens (*Pictures from Italy* (1844-1845), Mark Twain (*The Innocents Abroad* (1869), Henry James (*A Little Tour in France* (1884), D. H. Lawrence (*Sea and Sardinia* (1921), William Somerset Maugham (*On a Chinese Screen* (1922), John Steinbeck (*Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1962), Paul Theroux (*The Great Railway Bazaar* (1975), Bill Bryson (*Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe* (1992) and many others. Probably, each country can boast of outstanding travel writers. All of them played a significant role in the history of travel literature in terms of new geographical, historical or personal information included in their narratives. Thus, travel writers can be classified into several groups: (1) writers whose aim is to describe people, their customs and traditions (long-term travels); (2) writers who have settled in a particular place for a longer period of time; (3) famous writers, inspired by the exotic of adventures; (4) writers of Diaspora, who, although first challenged by different surroundings, later may opt for adaptation of different customs. The attitude of travel writers towards the target location can also be of great importance: for example, an outsider or stranger may encounter antagonistic local people or, on the contrary, the outsider meets friendly people, so that a curious person builds close relationship with the locals; a writer/traveller may be an adventurous optimistic person or a person emerged into sophisticated contemplations about the influence of the place on the individual. If the writer gets closer to a particular society or people, his/her travel account may appear more reliable. Travel writers produce narratives that differ in purposes and functions, writing style and formality. The only thing that is common to various types of travel narratives is the travelling information given in all of the accounts. Thus, contemporary travel narratives try to answer questions about identities, stereotypes, different values and cultural aspects.

**Types of Travel Narratives: Different Purposes and Expectations**

As Hulme and Youngs state, “travel writing is best considered as a broad and ever-shifting genre” because it presents various other issues apart from travelling.25 The genre consists of purely fictional travel narratives, imaginary travel narratives, fantastic travel stories, realistic travel narratives that contain some fictional elements, essays or journalistic accounts. To the latter type of travel narratives, guidebooks,
travel chronicles and other travel accounts can be ascribed. According to William W. Stowe, they “set the planner dreaming of foreign scenes, great works of art, moving, scenery, and unaccustomed luxury.”

Guidebooks give the main information for a traveller, such as the basic information about the country, the best places to stay and see. They also “tell tourist what kind of behavior is appropriate to each site and indicate what kind of fulfilment to expect from him.”

Different cultures and customs exist and it is always useful to know them in order to respect them during the visit. As Stowe asserts, “guidebooks promulgate more specific, historically determined relations between travel, knowledge, and satisfaction.” In other words, guidebooks help to plan travels, get people aware of a lot of useful and interesting information, and give the pleasure of reading. However, often travel guides are impersonal and merely contain tourist information.

Another type of travel narratives is travel chronicles. According to Stowe, the writers of this type of travel narratives have “the opportunity to testify to what were often transformative, always extraordinary, passages in their lives and to court the prestige of authorship by contributing to an established literary genre.” There are two subtypes of travel chronicles: newspaper travel accounts and book-length travel chronicle. Stowe explains that newspaper travel accounts instruct and amuse their readers and “entice the potential travel writer with the prospect of authorship.” The book-length travel chronicle is “often compiled from newspaper dispatches and private letters, with a clear reportorial purpose and an overall shape dictated by the outline of the author’s actual travels.” These narratives are based on his/her real experiences and adventures of travelling. Travel journalism or travel writing for newspapers and magazines, is another popular type of a narrative, which can be analytical and descriptive and has recently spread widely in the form of web sites and blogs.

Travel narratives can be distinguished by certain purposes and features. Travel narratives are usually detailed or more explicit so that the readers could get specific information and imagine all the adventures and visualize the particular location. In addition to this, writers have different purposes of travelling. Some of them travel and take down their adventures out of their own interest, others write in order to inform and/or educate the readers or simply share their fascination with the country with the readers. The type of the traveller-writer, relationship between reality and fiction, the paradigm of time, the purpose of writing and the type of the narrative determine the structure of travel narratives.

26 Stowe, Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-century American Culture, 29.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 44.
29 Ibid., 55.
30 Ibid., 57.
31 Ibid.
Another system of classifying travel literature is according to its nature. Peter Hulme states that “travel writing of the last twenty-five years can be detected as the comic, the analytical, the wilderness, the spiritual, and the experimental.”32 The first sub-category contains comic elements and parody. Analytical type travel narratives usually analyze different cultures, political systems or other differences between distinct societies. The wilderness usually refers to the wild nature described in travel narratives. The spiritual type of travel literature concentrates not only on a certain journey but also on the feelings of a person who is in the process of gaining new experience and knowledge. Experimental narratives usually present innovative method of travelling, new routes or directions, and the changed role of the traveller.

Moreover, travel literature has many features based on ethnographical issues. From the ethnographic point of view, travel narratives include the description of people, their nature, customs, religion, forms of government and language.33 Travellers and the readers of travel literature always concentrate on cultural, social, and political aspects of different places and countries. The ethnographic features found in travel literature are related to languages and oral rhetoric, political order, national or racial temperaments, economic activities, religion (rituals, festivals, idols and temples, religion), different points of view (to marriage, sexuality, nudity, etc.), habits, different ideologies or arts.34 These categories vary a lot depending on the attitude of the traveller to different cultures.

Representation of social stereotypes and cultural issues is a significant feature of travel narratives. Joan Pau Rubiés asserts that its reason is “intense curiosity towards the variety of human customs, religions and systems of government.”35 Travel writers share their knowledge and experience with their readers: they may include realistic account of their travels, present some ironic or critical comments or simply exaggerate different issues with a great degree of fantasy. The descriptions of people, who belong to a different location, include comments on their behaviour, philosophical issues and explanation of universal human traits.36 These descriptions are related to cultural aspects and analysis of different customs. Reading about curious differences between countries readers get information and learn to tolerate and respect other cultures and different customs.

Another significant and easily distinguishable feature of travel literature is geography. As Joan Pau Rubiés explains, “learning geography, or cosmography,
acted as encyclopaedic synthesis for the description of the world.” Maps only give the basic geographical information, while travel narratives add more details and additional information related to a certain place and making it easier to imagine. The writer’s relationship to the location and his/her functions in it become important features in “writings about ‘foreign’ and especially ‘exotic’ places in which they have travelled and lived.” Readers would always like the idea of knowing more about some exotic and interesting places. In addition to this, the real experience and adventures of others contain an important aspect of truth. Travel narratives make readers aware of the people of certain region, country, or culture. The writer observes them and gives his/her point of view. The particularities of this characterization depend on the possible intimacy of conversation the writer can have with the local people. If contacts with a particular society or people become close, then the description and analysis of the place and the local people become more reliable.

At present additional features of travel narratives have appeared. Hulme and Youngs explain that ‘since the late 1970s travel texts have often reflected on contemporary issues.’ Most of travel narratives get the readers acknowledged with the most important things of a certain century. Nowadays travel narratives include discussion of contemporary problems of globalization, Diaspora and “nomadism.” Such narratives describe the problems of residents of certain countries living in other countries and adapting to different cultures due to the reasons of immigration. In other words, travel narratives not only introduce other cultures or societies but also present current problems and certain cultural or historical changes. Mary Baine Campbell observes that nowadays travel writing “provokes certain kinds of essentially literary questions of formulations.” Finally, they demonstrate the authorial perspective of the writer. The author may choose to include some biographical information or include the reader in structuring the narrative. The autobiographical dimension, according to Jerome Bruner, contains accounts of the authors’ themselves and may transform the travel narrative into “cultural geography” or, sometimes, even into geographical autobiography. For this reason, books by travel writers are often classified as “Travel/Autobiography” by publishers and librarians – a situation which explains a strong emphasis on facts in travel narratives.

37Ibid., 242.
38Campbell, “Travel Writing and Its Theory,” 261.
41Campbell, “Travel Writing and Its Theory,” 262.
42Ibid., 263.
43Ibid.
narratives. However, the questions of the fictionalized amount of the text in the travel narrative still exist: (1) To what extent does the author use (or is allowed to use) his/her imaginative powers? (2) Who remains responsible for the TRUTH? and (3) How can the reader distinguish true facts from the fictionalized ones?

Concerning the style of the language, Mary Baine Campbell asserts that the writers of travel narratives may “go primitive.”  

Thus, the phrases and information given in the narratives are not too complicated, which, probably, explains the reason why readers choose this genre of literature. Despite possible fictional elements that may be present in a travel narrative, Alain De Botton labels it “a kind of essayistic writing” and discloses different stages of a journey as represented in the travel narrative: motives, timing, departure and return, the role of landscape and other issues. Travel narratives depend on the authors’ choices about the location and time and degree of personal experience, which is “allowed” to enter the narrative. The motives or purpose of travelling is a significant feature of the narrative, which may influence its structure. Campbell states that travel writing “has had to do with imperial periods of the later eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, in which the geographical surveying of the globe […] produced so much knowledge in the service of so much desire for power and wealth.”

There were authors who were simultaneously travelling and producing narratives in order to gain something: conquer some lands, gain wealth. The situation and the motivation of producing narratives of this genre changed a lot in the twentieth century. As Peter Hulme explains, “travel writing was not usually seen as the basis of literary career before.”

Travel writers wrote for pleasure or other reasons not directly related to it as an occupation. During the second half of the twentieth century, more travel writers appeared who started writing travel narratives under the contracts with famous publishing houses for commercial reasons meeting the needs of the market. Thus, as Fiona J. Doloughan rightly notices, the motives and the journey itself provide a “temporal framework for a text.”

The authors of travel literature often directly address the reader and develop their narrative in the first person, creating very close relationship with the reader. As William H. Sherman asserts, “the narrative voice could be either strongly first-person or strongly third-person, depending on whether the author wanted to emphasize the

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45Campbell, “Travel Writing and Its Theory,” 268.
46De Botton, The Art of Travel, 137.
47Campbell, “Travel Writing and Its Theory,” 269.
48Hulme, “Travelling to Write”, 89.
49Fiona J. Doloughan, “Narratives of Travel and the Travelling Concept of Narrative: Genre Blending and the Art of Transformation,” in COLLeGIUM Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences 1. (Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, 2006), 137.
travels or what they encountered.”50 The first-person narrator usually appears when the author is telling about his/her own experience, concentrating on his/her own point of view. The third-person narrator is often present in descriptive narratives.

Some travel narratives make a considerable use of maps or pictures – a contribution to the realistic paradigm of travel narratives. William H. Sherman asserts that this aspect has been inherited from earlier travel narratives: “readers would have expected to see illustrations (of increasingly high quality), not just of harbors and important cities but of native costumes and exotic flora and fauna.”51 Readers were interested in pictures as it was an opportunity to understand cultural and geographical aspects of other countries such as local people, their native costumes, or the exotic nature surrounding them.

“In Search of Eldorado” or in Search for the Answers to Cross-cultural Puzzles

As it has been mentioned above, travel literature records the experiences of the author and may be cross-cultural or transnational in focus. The theme of travel can be found in numerous works of fiction and poetry. The stanza from Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “Eldorado”52, chosen as an epigraph of this article, proves the tempting nature of travel or search – a search for new horizons, adventures, exotic places, and even a search for oneself. However, nowadays most travel authors choose the mode of explaining cultural differences and similarities. Mainly, these cross-cultural issues become important aspects of contemporary literature, which often discusses the problems of people migration. An example of such type of cross-cultural travel narrative may be Tahir Shah’s texts. Tahir Shah (b. 1966) is a contemporary British author, who is widely-known for his travel books, especially the ones set in Morocco: The Caliph’s House: A Year in Casablanca (2006) and In Arabian Nights: In search of Morocco, through its stories and storytellers (2008). These books contain many features of travel fiction; thus, they seem to open more space for countercultural or cross-cultural narratives in contemporary British fiction.

Tahir Shah’s family background (Anglo-Afghan Indian) stands for cultural diversity, which may be found in his books. Born and brought up in Great Britain, he has travelled extensively, and in 2003, he moved to Morocco with his family. The author of fourteen books, Tahir Shah is often associated with travel writers. The most significant themes in his works are stepping across cultural boundaries, searching for positive dialogue, description of cultural heritage of East and West, and discussion of

50Sherman, “Stirrings and Searchings (1500-1720),” 30.
51Ibid., 31.
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political and cultural situation in Muslim countries. With the help of humour and self-irony he tries to educate his readers and encourage them to search for new horizons and boldly take up challenges.

*The Caliph’s House: A Year in Casablanca* is written in the form of the first-person narrative: the author describes his first experiences and adventures in Morocco. The humoristic and mildly ironic first-person narrative brings two cultures, British and Moroccan, together. As French influence is rather expressed in Morocco, often the third culture, French, is being referred to in Shah’s books on Morocco. In *The Caliph’s House*, each chapter (of the twenty-one) starts with a Moroccan proverb, which serves as a leitmotif for a particular event. The author uses many Arab and French words throughout the novel to describe local people and places. At the end of the book, to aid the reader, a glossary of most often used Arab words and phrases is included. Alongside useful suggestions for a traveller, the text provides information on social and ethnic identity and cultures, balancing on the thin boundary between reality and fiction. In addition, the text is loaded with tourist information; however, this information is personalized, so that the attitude of the author remains distinct:

Our starting point was Fès, undoubtedly Morocco’s greatest jewel. It is the only medieval Arab city that remains entirely intact. Walking through the labyrinth of streets that make up the vast medina is like stepping into *A Thousand and One Nights*. The smells, sights and sounds bombard the senses. A stroll of a few feet can be an overwhelming experience. For centuries, Fès was a place of impressive wealth, a centre of scholarship and trade. Its houses reflect a confidence in Arab architecture almost never seen elsewhere, their decor profiting from a line of apprentices unbroken for a thousand years.53

Detailed descriptions of the surroundings and people help the reader visualize the place and may encourage them to find the place. Mainly, this feature is one of the most popular ones in travel narratives: the author’s admiration or, sometimes, critical opinion may set the readers on searching out that place.

Tahir Shah belongs to a group of travel writers, who, after a long search for a particular place and having settled in it, describe their feelings, emotions, attitude to local people and customs, give a detailed account of the location and events and reveal their personal attitude to the surroundings. Shah involves his readers in understanding and accepting the place. Unlike his other book on Morocco, *In Arabian

Nights: In search of Morocco, through its stories and storytellers, where the map of the country is included, in The Caliph’s House detailed descriptions of the places help the readers form their own perception of the locations. The idea of buying a house in a foreign country and settling there has been a tempting topic for many writers. A slightly earlier representation of this theme could be another British author’s, Peter Mayle’s, travel narratives on Provence, especially his first one on the topic – A Year in Provence (1989), which starts the trilogy on Provence (Toujours Provence (1992), Encore Provence (2000)). In the first book on Provence, Peter Mayle describes his adventures of buying a house, settling in it and doing renovations. This one and similar examples only prove the point that some writers choose sharing of newly acquired information with their readers and involving them in their personal experiences and adventures in a foreign country.

However, the house in Tahir Shah’s book – ‘Dar Khalifa, the Caliph’s house – turns into a major character, full of mysteries, “jinns” and secrets. Thus, the starting Moroccan proverb at the beginning of the book (“Look into the eyes of a jinn and stare into the depths of your own soul”) sets a special mood of the book. A search for jinns or rather their expulsion from the house might symbolize getting rid of any prejudices against “The Other.” Moreover, Tahir Shah is set on describing and explaining differences between the Eastern and Western way of life.

The ethnographic dimension becomes another distinct aspect of this book: the text is full of useful for the tourists descriptions on the Moroccan way of life, customs, traditions, architecture of the cities, folklore and other issues. Tahir Shah describes his first experiences, settling in Morocco; thus, it is not surprising that exploration of the country starts from Casablanca, a city in which he has settled:

Built by the French after they annexed Morocco in the first decade of the last century, the buildings have the sweeping lines of classic art deco and art nouveau. I spent hours strolling there, staring up, picking out the details – the floral façades and gilded domes, the orderly wrought-iron balconies, the mullion windows and stone balustrades, and the sleek rounded walls of a robust age. Casablanca was the first city in the world to be planned from the air. Looking at it, one thing was astonishingly clear – that the French regarded it as a jewel in their Imperial crown.

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55Shah, The Caliph’s House, 40.
Vivid description of the place tempts the reader to travel there and search out the same sights. Often similar descriptions of the places are combined with historical facts, thus, turning the narrative into a reliable source of information.

As it is often the mode of travel narratives or travel fiction, Tahir Shah’s books include elements of gourmet fiction, incorporated with those of travel fiction. Elements of gourmet fiction consist of detailed description of food, processes of meals, various dishes, habits of eating, special table traditions, etc. Travel authors often take up the representation of the five human senses in describing peculiarities of the country’s traditional meals; the use of special names of meals that are both informative and exotic adds to the credibility level of the narrative:

The meal reintroduced me to the sensory marvels of real Moroccan cuisine. We ordered a selection of dishes. There was chicken tagine, flavoured with turmeric, honey and apricots; a pair of sea bream marinated in a saffron sauce and served on a bed of couscous. After that came bistiya, a vast platter of sweet pastry, beneath which lay wafer-thin layers of pigeon, almonds and egg.⁵⁶

Moroccan food and eating habits are seen as self-expression of the local people or part of their identity; however, in Shah’s texts, there is more emphasis on places and people than on gourmet details:

Moroccan food tends to be as inferior in restaurants as it is superior in the home. To achieve the subtle flavours takes an astonishing amount of care and time. The ambience is as important as the food itself, as is the attention lavished on the guest. As you gorge yourself with the delicacies, with your hosts whispering flattery, it’s very hard not to give in to delusion.⁵⁷

In Shah’s text, food creates positive associations, describes feelings and emotions or represents close relationship among people, who enjoy this moment of sharing food.

Learning and trying to educate his readers or wishing to share his first impressions of the country with them, Tahir Shah sets on describing all the aspects of

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⁵⁶Ibid., 60, italic in the original.
“In Search of Eldorado”: Elements of Travel Fiction in Tahir Shah’s Books on Morocco

cross-cultural relationship. To an ignorant reader, he presents detailed analysis of Muslim holidays and discusses their meaning (“For Muslims, observing Ramadan is one of the central pillars of faith.”58; “Across the Arab world, Friday prayers are followed by the heaviest lunch of the week.”59), and even provides comparative analysis of the religious holidays, aiming to find elements of affinity between East and West:

In the West, we try to work out a logical cause when an accident occurs. The vase breaks because it’s knocked by a careless hand. The car crashes because the road is wet. The dog bites a child because it’s savage and a danger to honest society. But I found in Morocco that these everyday mishaps were treated in a very different way. They were frequently put down to the work of supernatural forces, with the jinns at the centre of the belief system.60

The author’s personal experience is prominent throughout the book; however, the subjective point of view does not hinder the reader’s understanding of factual information. Thus, Shah’s description of the places make the readers wish to search out these places; his adventures in Morocco set an example and invite the readers to experience the same events; vivid descriptions of local people tempt the readers to meet these people; descriptions of Moroccan food provide much factual information about the country’s cuisine.

Tahir Shah’s second book on Morocco, In Arabian Nights: In search of Morocco, through its stories and storytellers (2008), although slightly different in character in comparison to the first one, presents a more detailed analysis of Moroccan folklore. As Shah states at the beginning of the book, “For my father there was no sharper way to understand a country than by listening to its stories.”61 Thus, the aim of the book becomes clear – to share the understanding of Moroccan tales and stories:

‘The Berbers believe that when people are born, they are born with a story inside them, locked in their heart. It looks after them, protects them.’ Dr Mehdi flicked the hood of his jelaba down on to his neck and sipped his

58Ibid., 118.
59Ibid., 181.
60Ibid., 60.
coffee. ‘Their task is to search for their story,’ he said, ‘to look for it in everything they do,’

It seems that under the guidance of the author the reader is invited to this eternal search for his/her own stories. As it is mentioned in the book, “Some people find their story right away”; others “search their entire lives and never find it” – “it depends on ‘perception’.” In this way, Tahir Shah sends a message to his readers or wants to pose a question for them: Have they already found their stories? This aspect starts a special dialogue between the author and the reader and points to the two directions of this perception: in order to understand the stories of other countries, people have to search for the stories of their own. Thus, it is not surprising that the structure of this second book on Morocco includes the central journey symbol – the author’s quest for finding a ten-volume edition of “Alf Layla wa Layla, ‘A Thousand Nights and A Night’”, a notorious collection of the Arabian Nights.

Explaining the origin of tales and stories, Tahir Shah discusses their cosmopolitan nature: “stories are a communal currency of humanity. They follow the same patterns irrespective of where they are found.” Although similar in the narrative form, the two books (The Caliph’s House and In Arabian Nights) contain a different central focus: in the first one, the house (Dar Khalifa) is the central character, around which most of the action rotates; while, in the second one, the journey in search for a story or stories is the central issue:

‘In the south of Morocco people believe that there are streams running under the ground.’ [...] ‘The streams don’t run with water.’ [They run] ‘With words’. [...] ‘The streams irrigate Morocco,’ he said, ‘like water on farmland, they have allowed the civilization to grow, to thrive. Why is Morocco what it is? Why does it mesmerize everyone who comes here, with its colours, with its atmosphere?’ [...] ‘It’s because of the streams,’ he said.

The readers are encouraged to turn to their roots and to look for these streams in their own culture. The author makes everyone question the importance of stories, which are “a kind of key, a catalyst, a device to help humanity think in a certain

62Ibid., 47, italic in the original.
63Ibid., 48.
64Ibid., 162-163, italic in the original.
65Ibid., 152.
66Shah, In Arabian Nights, 382.
way." The author’s role is clear – he tries to awaken the reader from a sleep, stating that “until their minds are stirred with stories, people are asleep.”

*In Arabian Nights* is full of the cases of intertextuality: there are references to Shah’s first book on Morocco, *The Caliph’s House*, and to the stories from the collection *A Thousand and One Nights*. Gérard Genette (1992 and 1997) listed the following five subtypes of inter/transtextuality: 1) *intertextuality* (quotation, plagiarism, allusion when citing another text is an explicit intertextual relation); 2) *paratextuality* (the relation between a text and its ‘paratext’ – that which surrounds the main body of the text, such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations, etc.); 3) *architextuality* (designation of a text as part of a genre or genres or framing by readers, which spans from critical texts (comments, reviews)); 4) *metatextuality* (explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text); 5) *hypotextuality* or *hypertextuality* (the relation between a text and a preceding “hypotext” – a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, spoof, sequel, translation). Following this theoretical framework, it is possible to state that Tahir Shah’s books on Morocco contain a great amount of intertextual relationship of different types; however, the book *In Arabian Nights* is a text where these cases are most obvious.

**Conclusion**

To sum up, travel literature is a wide genre sub-divided according to its purpose, type and nature. Firstly, travel narratives include geographical information, sometimes illustrated with pictures and maps, describe the exotic of travels, analyze cultural aspects, and comment on different psychological and cross-cultural problems which may arise in a foreign country. Travel narratives usually describe ethnographical issues such as different customs, traditions, and society and may provide information related to religion and political system of the target country. Furthermore, travel narratives introduce certain racial and cultural stereotypes, nuances of languages, contrasting values or the writer’s point of view on many issues. Often travel narratives provide information about the culture of the target country. Being either a record of an escape from reality or an informative source for readers, contrasting the values and self-concept and presenting ethnographic

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67 Ibid., 383.
68 Ibid.
dimension, first of all, contemporary travel narratives demonstrate the author's point of view, which is in accordance with the purpose of travelling, the author's experience and style.

During many centuries travel literature has become a broad and important genre, attracting many readers. Alongside the cross-cultural aspect of this type of writing, it can appear in many forms, which represent the literary tendencies of the period. The analysis of the features of travel literature has demonstrated the main trends and types of travel literature. Many new forms and types have appeared, such as travel newspapers and magazines, or travel web sites. In addition, travel narratives have gained new features and discuss different contemporary issues. However, the tendency to personalize travel narratives becomes the most significant feature nowadays.

The analysis of the features of travel narratives in Tahir Shah's books The Caliph's House: A Year in Casablanca (2006) and In Arabian Nights: In search of Morocco, through its stories and storytellers (2008) has proved the importance of geographical information, exotic of travels, ethnographic, linguistic aspects and the author's role. In the contemporary travel narrative, the author's voice becomes distinct: biographical elements, "self-making and world-making," the author's point of view on different issues, the purpose of travelling, and the intimacy of conversation with the local people (and with himself) are the features in Tahir Shah's texts that present the cross-cultural perspective on the social systems in Morocco and Great Britain or France. Tahir Shah's insight into Moroccan customs can be an outstanding source for cross-cultural investigations. Moreover, national temperaments and habits of the British, French and Moroccan, different psychological features, a different point of view, and the description of the social system of the country help to solve cross-cultural puzzles that a contemporary reader or traveller may face when tempted to explore the exotic route offered by the author.

References


Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė


The Inheritance of Loss – Memory, Absence and Acceptance in Recent Booker Prize Winning Novels

Kinga Földváry

Abstract
The essay examines six recent winners of the Man Booker Prize, published between 2005 and 2011, with an intention to show how the most mainstream genre of literature, the novel, is characterised by a powerful desire to preserve the past through memory, a reflection on what we have inherited from our pasts, both in a personal sense, and in the wider context of humanity as a whole. When examining what exactly it is that narratives attempt to remember, we may find only a theme definable by negation: it is a general sense of loss, accompanied by an absence of meaning, together with the inability to communicate that appears to characterise contemporary English prose fiction. The essay also justifies the selection of the Booker winners as signifiers of contemporary tendencies in literary representation by arguing that it is precisely the lack of spectacular literary or stylistic innovations that make the Man Booker Prize representative of average, mainstream, middlebrow fiction today.
The Inheritance of Loss – Memory, Absence and Acceptance in Recent Booker Prize Winning Novels

Kinga Földváry

Living in a world which is commonly described with the help of clichés such as globalisation and alienation, our fellow humans as rootless (or uprooted) and traumatised, to name just a few commonplaces of contemporary cultural discourse, it is instructive to see how literature – the most verbal and thus most openly reflexive form of cultural artefacts – chooses to represent the plight of the individual and society, to see if the apparently endemic threat of globalisation (whether real or artificial, truly reported or falsely presented) indeed makes such a marked appearance in literary works of art. In what follows, I intend to show how the primary concern of the most mainstream genre of literature, the novel, is still – if not increasingly – haunted by memory, which Jan Assmann shows to be operating against the forces of globalisation:

memory and globalization work in opposite directions. Memory functions in the direction of identity which [...] always implies the notion of difference. Globalization, on the other hand, works in the direction of diffusion, blurring all boundaries and bridging all differences.²

In this way, the centrality of memory in contemporary fiction – whether represented as personal or collective, communicative, cultural or political – makes a powerful claim concerning how the individual responds to the context of globalisation surrounding us. The target of memory, though, may vary and the effort to remember with a view to confirming or establishing some version of identity may take diverse forms and produce equally divergent results; still, the prevailing confessional mode in fiction is a telltale sign of a powerful desire to preserve the past through memory. When examining what exactly it is that narratives attempt to remember, we may nonetheless be surprised to find only a theme definable by negation: borrowing the title of Kiran Desai’s novel, the winner of the 2006 Man

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Booker Prize, in this essay I wish to argue that the common ground, the shared goal of memory in twenty-first-century writing, exemplified in this essay by six recent winners of the Man Booker Prize, appears to be no more than acceptance, and mainly the acceptance of inevitable loss. Since my interest here lies with general tendencies, I have therefore selected a group of texts on a pragmatic, rather than thematic basis, and thus it would be a rather futile effort to apply any overarching theoretical framework in the investigation, but reference will be made to some basic terms of trauma theory, besides the above mentioned keywords of memory studies.

But before going into details of textual investigations, I feel it is necessary to offer some justification for the daring enterprise to make generalised inferences concerning contemporary reality based on a relatively small number of artefacts. I am more than aware that when selecting appropriate representatives of contemporary cultural phenomena, the reader may be at a loss as to choosing from an immense variety and range of new products, since we cannot yet rely on the assistance of the proverbial truth of veritas filia temporis, that time will tell us what has proved to be valuable, and with hindsight we may find it easier to notice key themes, trends and issues in contemporary writing. Moreover, when choosing a genre to examine how art reflects on the world around us, on the socio-historical and cultural context that has produced these artistic creations, it seems that the novel is particularly suitable for such investigations. Quoting what Brian W. Shaffer says in the Preface of his Reading the Novel in English 1950–2000, we can easily describe the novel as a “genre that is open-ended, socially engaged, and exploratory, one that challenges and stretches the prevailing canons of knowledge, perception, and literary representation in its bid to picture and probe an evolving contemporary reality”3. Therefore it may not be too far-fetched to use contemporary novels in our search for locally or globally perceivable visions of the future.

However, the novel is not only useful as a good gauge into the depths of our own time, but it is also the most broadly defined, possibly least coherent genre, with the widest range of varieties of form and content, as J. A. Cuddon opens his forty-two page (an absolute record-breaker within the volume) entry on the “novel” in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory: he shows how the term is “now applied to a wide variety of writings whose only common attribute is that they are extended pieces of prose fiction.”4 Such a broad definition, while it confirms our perception of the flexibility of the genre, necessitates some further criteria of selection to enable us to choose from this immense amount of texts published each year. The wider reading public is offered certain markers of quality and quantity in their choice of what is worthy of their attention, what should be meant and perceived as typical

or representative, through the ever broadening system of literary prizes, since both producers and consumers of cultural products turn to these for guidance when selecting representative items. One of the most prestigious and best known literary awards in the English language publishing world is undeniably the Man Booker Prize, although it is also seen as somewhat controversial by virtue of its selection process of both judges and nominations. Nonetheless, such prizes are by nature representative of the general middle-brow readership (if for no other reason than by their power of shaping readers’ choices by publicising their selections), and therefore I have chosen to limit the scope of my investigation to novels that have won the Booker prize in the past couple of years, since – at least as far as the marketing is concerned – they are supposed to be the “very best novel[s] of the year”, as the self-important introduction on the Booker website hints at “the consistent excellence” and power of the prize.

At the same time, I am more than aware that in reality already the long and shortlists, and especially the winners spark debates in the reading public and the academic community from year to year. The disappointment of readers is often centred on the lack of innovation or originality in the selected works, as stylistically, these novels are typically characterised by forms that are not peculiar to the twenty-first century; in narrative techniques they do not show any trace of an experimental spirit either. The reason for such decisions might be what Merritt Moseley sums up in his account of the 2006-2007 Booker Prizes as “a long tradition of English scepticism about modernism, experimentation, “buggering about the reader” (Kingsley Amis’s phrase), and being too clever by half”. About the 2008 Booker, Moseley mentions the rather dubious merit the judges pointed out by emphasising the “readability” of the contenders, which Moseley interprets as a sign that portends no good. He claims that “Readable is code for not too modernist or postmodernist or confusing or experimental or intellectual”. Still, even if the Booker winners are nothing extraordinary, or even “utterly ordinary”, as he says, their clichés and commonplaces perfectly serve our purposes when we wish to explore the current state of affairs in literary culture, as they prove the point that inheritance, traditions and past trends still characterise contemporary fiction.

5 Regarding the history, the complex psychology and manipulative power of the prize industry, probably the best summary to date is James F. English, The Economy of Prestige. Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005).
9 Ibid., 160.
Having defined our scope thus as the winners of the Booker Prize in the past few years, between 2005 and 2011, to be precise, the list includes John Banville’s *The Sea*, Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*, Anne Enright’s *The Gathering*, Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, and Julian Barnes’ *The Sense of an Ending* (the 2010 winner, Howard Jacobson’s *The Finkler Question*, as a comic novel, a trait noted by many critics as unique and indeed exceptional for prize winners, will not be included in the investigation). When trying to identify common artistic features in the six novels, it is easy to notice that these supposedly “best” representatives of contemporary fiction do not offer much in terms of experimental narrative or stylistic techniques, but, for all their differences of subject matter, setting and genre, all of them are characterised by a resigned attitude to loss, lost hope and a lack of belief in any sort of redemption. This, however, does not lead to achieving a sense of similarity of the reading experience, since the particular instances of what exactly is lost, absent, or simply missing are far from identical; besides, and the localised socio-historical, cultural and literary contexts of the various pieces are always more dominant than the underlying motif of something that is not there.

The above, clearly over-generalised summary may disregard many individual values of the works; nevertheless, it still seems to be helpful when trying to find trends or patterns, especially as we can see how the presence of loss is always accompanied by the lack of several other themes that we used to expect from our readings, such as a sense of triumph, victory or gain, or the notion that struggle, pain or suffering actually lead us somewhere, and in general, that history follows an intelligible pattern, linear or circular, that we could try to make sense of. At the same time, I would also like to argue that contemporary writing borrows heavily from the work of earlier periods, both in form and in content, therefore it is also worth looking at the way the presentation of loss has become our inheritance from our predecessors.

The above mentioned inheritance of past traditions may take a number of forms, from thematic to generic continuities, and if we look at some reviews of the novels, to see how these traditional features are spotted by critics straight away, we can find Banville’s novel described as “a work of art, in the tradition of high modernism”; Desai’s novel invoking V. S. Naipaul as one of “the literary influences on [her] exploration of postcolonial chaos and despair”; and Enright’s plot accused

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11 Rick Gekoski, “At last, the best Booker book won,” *The Times*, October 12, 2005 http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article577423.ece

of containing “that staple of the conventional contemporary plot – sexual abuse”\(^{13}\), with one unimpressed critic claiming that there is nothing new it offers in “its concentrated Irishness, a state of being that surely doesn't need more examination”.\(^{14}\) Adiga’s narrative holds no surprising turns for the reader either, but the structural solution of nocturnal epistles may recall the 1001 Nights as much as ETA Hoffmann’s Golden Pot, both of whose narrators present their alternate realities in narratives of the night, and the novel’s animal-imagery makes it also as transparent as a tale of Aesop’s. The characters’ names invoke not only antique European literature but Indian traditions as well, with Mr Ashok, the master of narrator Balram, compared to a Lamb, rather than the Lion his historical namesake, Emperor Ashoka was associated with, and instead of the Dharma Chakra, the wheel of law, it is at the wheel of his car and his fortune where we can find Balram, the White Tiger, another symbolic, national animal, representing not only the nation but also its lack of freedom at the same time. Mantel’s Wolf Hall, although the most daring in its scope (and length), also relies on mainly linear chronology, and the setting of Tudor England, of all places and times, but apart from its subjective re-presentation of history it is still defined more by the tradition it continues than the way it breaks away from the same. It comes as no surprise that quite a few critics laud Mantel’s novel (similarly to its sequel, Bring Up The Bodies, the most recent recipient of the Booker Prize) as a “brilliant historical novel”\(^{15}\), locating them thus in a genre which, more than any other label, invokes associations of tradition and continuity rather than experiment and innovation. Julian Barnes’s The Sense of an Ending is similarly haunted by a variety of literary ghosts, not only through the title’s reference to Frank Kermode’s 1966 collection of essays, but in the form of diverse narrative devices as well. As reviewers offered comparisons to praise this intelligently compact narrative, they referred to Barnes as “a disciple of Flaubert”\(^{16}\), and listed thematic connections from The Turn of the Screw\(^{17}\) to Ian McEwan’s On Chesil Beach\(^{18}\), to name but a few.

\(^{13}\) Moseley, “Tidy and Untidy Novels,” 301.
textual continuities exemplified by the short novel. The inheritance of traditions is therefore more a general, indeed generic feature, rather than some shared fountain of inspiration the Booker-winning authors would have been drinking from, as we can see from the wide-ranging list of names invoked by reviewers.

Still, the inheritance of past forms that is such an inherent characteristic of the novel is seen as an indirect link that connects the genre to the reality it describes, at least by Frank Kermode in The Sense of an Ending, a text relevant here not simply by virtue of its connection to the Barnes novel but as one of the seminal texts of the twentieth century on the interpretation of literature. Kermode characterises the history of the novel as “the history of forms rejected or modified, by parody, manifesto, neglect, as absurd. Nowhere else, perhaps, are we so conscious of the dissidence between inherited forms and our own reality”19, observing how the apparently non-innovative and traditional surface may also carry meanings, suggesting contrast and creating tension, but never losing sight of reality.

Apart from the fact that most Booker-winners are seen as traditional pieces of writing, although in various senses of the word, the thematic or stylistic features of the novels offer no peculiar connections among them, and at first sight, there appears to be nothing that would bind all novels into one cohesive group, although the variety of national and social backgrounds where the authors have come from is narrower than it could be – two Irish, two Indian and two English novelists to represent the best of six years’ writing in the whole of the Commonwealth and the Republic of Ireland. The politics of prize-giving appears to have resulted in a remarkably balanced judgment: three of the authors are female, three are male; three of them (John Banville, Julian Barnes and Hilary Mantel) had been established novelists before they were awarded the Booker prize, while the others were, if not fully unknown, certainly from outside the group of great names. The sub-genres the novels may be labelled with are also quite diverse, ranging from a confessional self-disclosure through a post-colonial romance to a historical novel.

There is no unity in more superficial details either: three of the novels are narrated in the present (Enright and Mantel, and partly Barnes), the other three in the past; three narrators are first person singular (Enright, Adiga and Barnes), the other three third person, although Hilary Mantel’s Wolf Hall displays an interesting mixture of the two, referring to Thomas Cromwell as “he”, but never leaving his viewpoint and therefore creating an intimacy that is comparable to a first person narrator. In the same way, it is not reliability or unreliability of narration that comes to one’s mind with all of these novels (although Anne Enright’s The Gathering does


strike the reader with its highly conscious instability and unreliability, and Barnes’s *The Sense of an Ending* is an equally complex tour-de-force that gradually deprives the reader of the last shreds of certainty as well), but it is the personal, self-searching, we could even say confessional mood and tone of voice, even in the non-first-person narratives. This regretful confessional aspect may appear to be helpful in staking out the common ground the novels share: a desire to find acceptance, together with a consciousness of some irretrievable loss. As common ground, however, this introverted, soul-searching attitude never appears as a powerful organising principle or a marked feature that would strike the reader as part of a conscious trend; to the contrary: the inward-looking mode of the narratives reinforces the individual, particular tone of each narratorial voice.

By arguing for loss and acceptance as keywords, I certainly do not wish to imply that other approaches, of postcolonial or trauma studies, are either irrelevant or ineffective in providing interpretations for contemporary literature in general, or some of these novels in particular. Nevertheless, I personally feel that both trauma and postcolonial studies would be able to account only for a segment of the works discussed, whereas the sense of loss can be found wherever we look (it would be equally easy to find supporting evidence from among the rest of Booker winning novels in the twenty-first century).

It is also true that the centrality of loss may not appear to be much different from the notion of trauma, and would therefore need further justification if we tried to argue for its presence as opposed to that of trauma in the past decade of English writing. Another term that we have already mentioned but which also needs to be distinguished from both trauma and loss is absence, and I have found Dominick LaCapra’s argument in his essay “Trauma, Absence, Loss” the most helpful in making this distinction. Absence, he argues, is “not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future)”. Its opposite is presence, whereas the opposite of loss is gain.20

By contrast to absence, loss is situated on a historical level and is the consequence of particular events. The nature of losses varies with the nature of events and responses to them. Some losses may be traumatic while others are not, and there are variations in the intensity or devastating impact of trauma.21

Juliet Mitchell’s definition of trauma also appears to place loss at a lower, less extraordinary or more common level, when she states that “trauma, whether

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21 La Capra, 712.
physical or psychical, must create a breach in a protective covering of such severity that it cannot be coped with by the usual mechanisms by which we deal with pain or loss.”

According to Mitchell, then, pain or loss are apparently connected to the usual sphere of existence and can also be dealt with in this sphere.

As La Capra claims, it is not only the original event or its non-existence that is different in the case of absence and loss, but also our ways of dealing with them, together with their relation to conventional narrative structure. However, what I find slightly problematic is his notion of structural trauma, related to absence rather than loss, which “may not be cured but only lived with in various ways.” On the other hand, he argues that

...historical traumas and losses may conceivably be avoided and their legacies to some viable extent worked through both in order to allow a less self-deceptive confrontation with transhistorical, structural trauma and in order to further historical, social, and political specificity, including the elaboration of more desirable social and political institutions and practices.

This final statement is, in my opinion, contradicted by fiction in which historical traumas also have to be and can be lived with – even if the getting out of the closed, repetitive cycles of mourning and melancholy takes place only partially, in a way that the absence or lack resulting from the loss will remain as a haunting presence that victims need to learn to live with. On the level of the narrative, this appears not only as a loss related to the past, but also as an absence experienced in the present, moving towards a resigned attitude of acceptance in the face of the unchangeable nature of both. This may explain at least partly why the novels display such a conscious focus on memory, an attempt to fill the gaps experienced in the present, even if the process may unearth losses and thus leave destruction and pain in its wake.

After this slight detour into trauma theory, let us see in what ways loss appears on various levels of the selected novels themselves. John Banville’s *The Sea*, winner of the 2005 Booker Prize, is an example that seems to be too evident to need any justification. The narrator of the interwoven double plots is mourning, and trying to reconcile himself with the recent loss of his wife, together with the death of a pair of twins he spent a summer with as a child, at the very place he has now come

23Ibid., 703.
24Ibid., 727.
25Ibid., 727.
back to over fifty years later, after the death of his spouse. However, it is not only on the level of the plot, but also on a textual level that loss appears, from the very first sentence of the novel: “They departed, the gods, on the day of the strange tide.”

This godforsaken existence he lives in and tells the reader about, is full of echoes and laments, references to grief and bereavement, and also a loss for words, like in “a panic-stricken sense of not knowing what to say, where to look, how to behave,” and a loss of faith and hope, of childhood and innocence: “Everybody seems to be younger than I am, even the dead.” And although by the end the narrator seems to be able to face his losses and his role in the events, there is no real sense of gain or triumph, not even much of a lesson learned: “indeed nothing had happened, a momentous nothing, just another of the great world’s shrugs of indifference.”

Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* opens at dusk, a melancholy time of day, with its teenager heroine, Sai missing her lover, asking the question “Could fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss?”

And then at the end of the day, at dinner with her uncle, the judge, “they sipped and ate, all of existence passed over by nonexistence.” Sai is no stranger to loss by then, as we learn that as a child, at the time she lost her parents, it turned out that her story had already been lost to the memory of the nuns in the convent school: “There were other parts of the tale that none of them would be able to piece together, of course, for some of the narrative had been lost, some of it had been purposely forgotten.”

And the conclusion of the novel, after the actual physical loss or disappearance of some of the most likeable characters, does not offer more than the reinforced melancholy of shattered dreams and lost hopes in the existence of a central narrative: “Never again could she think that there was but one narrative and that narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own mean little happiness and live safely within it.”

In the same vein, Anne Enright’s *The Gathering* is full of the absences of childhood fantasies, of the sense of loss characteristic of adulthood when trying to recreate childhood, and of the losses of the present and past that left painful wounds in the narrator. The rather minimal plot of the novel is centred around the suicide and funeral of Liam Hegarty, born into a family of twelve children, and thoroughly wasted by his early forties. The story is narrated by his sister Veronica, who contemplates that “everyone loses someone,” and thinking of her brother, she

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27 Ibid., 22.
28 Ibid., 35.
29 Ibid., 264.
31 Ibid., 5.
32 Ibid., 37.
33 Desai, 431.
realises “it is not just his mood I feel as a warmth at the base of my spine. It is his disappeared, dead, essential self. It is the very heart of him, all gone, or going now.”\(^{35}\)

The absence of words is also significant in the novel, and may imply the uncertainty about how to tell the story. This novel is indeed a trauma narrative, one that psychological interpreters may be glad to lay their hands upon, as it gives all the clear signs that they are looking for: a desperate search for words and meaning, uncertainties and a lack of understanding, together with a desire to come to terms with the event and its aftermath. There is a hint of the crime story in the novel, too, but in fact, this must be part of the nature of death: it is hard not to interpret death as a crime, as even natural death is violent in a way, with its finality and irreversibility.

The task of the mourner is, however, to accept that even violent death is natural in another, vital way, and this is how Veronica sums up what lies ahead of her: “I do not want a different destiny from the one that has brought me here. I do not want a different life. I just want to be able to live it, that’s all.”\(^{36}\)

Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*, the only first novel among the selection, displays its losses both in temporal and spatial terms. Although the past of the novel’s narrator, Balram Halwai, was not devoid of losses, the plot is centred around a traumatic event in which he is the victimiser – the murderer – and also the beneficiary of the event, and could therefore not adequately be described as someone undergoing trauma\(^{37}\). He is the entrepreneur whose fortune, whose present identity in fact was created by the crime he sets out to relate in an attempt to represent the truth about himself and his world – still, the text bears all the traces of confessional narratives, which connects *The White Tiger* to the other novels examined here. Moreover, the self-destructive nature of crime is also exemplified by Balram’s story: as a result of the murder he commits, Balram loses his employer who was like a father to him – already no more than a substitute for the real father he lost to TB as a child – and the future he faces is as unpromising as the fate that the rarest animal in the jungle, the white tiger faces in the zoo – that of solitude and extinction: “All this dreaming I’m doing – it may well turn out to be nothing.”\(^{38}\) At the same time, what the novel’s main, if underlying, theme seems to be can only be interpreted by reading the text as an allegory of India as a nation, as a political unit that has never been an organic union, and whose future is constantly undermined by the fact that corruption, crime, violence and an endemic poverty necessarily set individuals against each other. This confessional narrative can therefore not truly hope for an absolution, not to mention a solution for its problems, and the only kind of

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{36}\) Enright, 260.

\(^{37}\) The trauma that criminals may experience is, I believe, a different psychological issue that I would not like to deal with here.

acceptance that makes sense in this context is resignation to failure, an understanding that life can and has to be constructed from negation, too.

Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*, a historical novel, and a very different stylistic achievement, on one level displays a similar desire to live with the losses of the past. Memory devices and feats of memory play a considerable role in the narrative, as Thomas Cromwell, the protagonist of the novel makes a name for himself by his ability to remember; at the same time, his life is defined by trying to forget and not to forget what has happened to him, a childhood and adulthood abounding in loss. His inheritance of traumatic memories, the ghosts that never leave him, the regrets that he carries with him, make his life a haunted place and time, and whatever he achieves is shadowed by all that he has lost – in fact, almost everything that was dear to him, in private and public life as well. Unrest and a lack of peace appear in different forms in different characters who keep searching for acceptance, calm and quiet – but mostly in vain.

When placing Mantel’s novel against Adiga’s *White Tiger*, however, the remarkable differences between various meanings of loss, absence, acceptance and even memory may become apparent. The fragmented narrative of *Wolf Hall* is a textual manifestation of the prismatic nature of human identity, at once a wonder of creation and a work of conscious effort and remarkable skill, rather than a reference to the state as an (absent) unity. Even though Tudor England is defined by faction politics, all the infighting and backstabbing confirms is the unity of the kingdom as an ideal, an abstract but still tangible being that emanates power that is always worth fighting for, a Rome where all roads lead.

Finally, Julian Barnes’s *The Sense of an Ending* suggests an atmosphere of loss already through its title, not only by referring to an ending, whatever it may be that has come to termination, completion or conclusion, but even more by the instability that the qualifying first half of the phrase adds to the notion. And even if I find it hard to agree with the vitriolic critique of the novel given by Geoff Dyer on the pages of the *New York Times*, claiming that the phrase the narrator, Tony’s ex-girlfriend, Veronica keeps telling him, namely “You don’t get it”⁴⁹, could be used to describe the reader’s experience as well, the novel is indeed woven around the sense of a meaning lost, no longer retrievable from the past, since the ones who may offer the explanation have long departed, and what remains of them is no more than a few broken lines, a single diary page, and an equally unintelligible human being, a damaged child-adult. Barnes’s novel ponders about time more than anything, but again, his time moves in a circle, rather than ahead, leaving us with no way out of despair. The time structure of its narrative entraps the reader from the very first words suggesting the presence of the past (“I remember”), and still on the same page, the claim of a lack of understanding (“We live in time – it holds us and moulds

us – but I’ve never felt I understood it very well”\(^{40}\), to the final general description of history, which is a memory of a past event already told, while also an uncomprehending, even fearful vision of the future and what it may bring: “There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest.”\(^{41}\) This is also seen as the crime of ignorance in the past: “None of us had thought about the child, or the future.”\(^{42}\) This future, with the great unrest we face there, is represented thus by a child, “one born to a mother […] at a dangerously late age. A child damaged as a result. Who was now a man of forty, lost in grief”\(^{43}\), in whose figure past and present get dangerously mixed up. Still, this child provides the clue to all events told earlier, including the open equations in which the narrator recognises himself as the one element in a chain of responsibility that has remained incapable of change, and thus can see no hope for redemption, even if understanding finally has made him capable of remorse.

Barnes’s novel, maybe even more than any of the others in the selection, makes it therefore particularly easy to connect our discussion back to the beginning, to the contemplation on the role of memory in the face of dispersal, loss, absence and forgetting. Moreover, the clear desire in the narrative to remember and commemorate past events, to bring them back from the realm of forgetting, is accompanied by a metafictional trait as well, suggesting that what the novel is doing may have no more chance of success in sharing human experience, but also that the desire to unburden our pasts, to work through and accept memories, whether collective or personal, is an inherently human characteristic.

Even if I claimed above that the novels show no remarkable innovative or experimental features, there is no denying that we can find many features of trauma narratives, and indeed of postmodernism in these novels, the most obvious of which may be the centrality of language and communication, with clear barriers between people, and the impossibility to communicate, even an inability to understand each other. The desire to create texts (but without the belief in any grand narratives or histories) is also omnipresent – all of the narrators are struggling to tell stories in an attempt to understand the past, with its painful losses. The desire to tell stories is combined with a self-reflexive, metafictional interest in practically all texts, all of which offer themselves to be read as not only resigned allegories about contemporary reality but also as parables on the nature of discourse, on the futility of the effort to communicate, on the absence of an all-resolving denouement as well. Lost narratives, lost words and stories crop up in several of the texts mentioned here, but this type of metafictional reference only confirms the medium’s inability to offer

\(^{40}\) Barnes, 3.  
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 163.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 154.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 162.
any reliable take on reality or truth, and in this way systematically undermines the representational qualities of the novel as a genre, rather than establish a common narrative feature. These overarching tendencies seem to define themselves again by negation, by representing an absence or loss, not solely of grand narratives but of any intelligible narratives at all – the human predicament at the beginning of the twenty-first century appears to be defined by what is absent but remembered from the past.

Something is positively missing here, though, which is the reason why I cannot and would not call all of these novels trauma novels. To me, trauma implies an event, a traumatic turn of fortunes, which has to be worked through to be lived with. Here, however, although there are traumatic events either in the foreground or in the back, what is at stake and what is in the focus is the present absence, a consequence of a past loss, for which no cure can be offered, other than resignation and maybe a cleverly crafted revenge on those who inflicted on us the wounds of the past. This desire to have revenge by words is the one in which Thomas Cromwell finally includes the reader as well, in Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*: “It’s the living that turn and chase the dead. The long bones and skulls are tumbled from their shrouds, and words like stones thrust into their rattling mouths: we edit their writings, we rewrite their lives.”44 And indeed, what else could we do?

**Bibliography**


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Abstract

This article reviews the British Studies project, organized by the British Council in the 1990s, based on the idea of 'intercultural' perspectives. I deconstruct that term 'intercultural' to expose its basically colonialist impulse. Bearing this in mind, I suggest that perhaps we should look at the process of studying foreign cultures and literatures from a “transcultural” rather than an “intercultural” perspective. We have to learn to think beyond national boundaries and look instead at the ways in which individuals respond to such products. Studying literature from a transcultural perspective prompts discussion about the relationship between local and global issues: how can we draw upon our various responses to a text as a basis for negotiating cultural and/or ideological differences? This is a profoundly important task, for it is only through negotiation (not necessarily resolution) that we can learn to understand one another.
Transcultural Literary Studies

Laurence Raw

Literature and British Studies: The British Council’s Intercultural Initiative

15 May 2013 marked the passing of Alan Mountford, one-time English Language Officer at the British Council in the Republic of Turkey, who subsequently headed the short-lived British Studies unit at the Council’s headquarters in Manchester, United Kingdom. From 1992 to 1999 I worked for the Council in Ankara and İstanbul as British Studies Officer (later retitled British Studies Manager or BSM for short), having been taken on by Mountford to launch the discipline in a variety of secondary and tertiary institutions. The initiative was launched amid a great deal of ballyhoo with a generous annual budget (around £30K) provided by the Council. A Certificate programme was created in association with the University of Warwick’s Centre for British and Comparative Cultural Studies (as it was known at that time); those who produced the most noteworthy assignments subsequently went to the United Kingdom for two terms to complete their Master’s degrees. One of the best-known alumni is Derviş Zaim, who has subsequently made a name for himself as a film director.

The Turkish project was part of a pan-European initiative by the Council to introduce British Studies into educational institutions. Described in the Council sponsored anthology British Studies: Intercultural Perspectives (2000) as “a study project of diverse and wide-ranging nature,”¹ it took several forms, including the organization of national and regional seminars, the provision of Council-sponsored staff (academics and teacher trainers) based in specific institutions or travelling countrywide, and the publication of resources including conference proceedings and teacher training booklets. This “diverse and wide ranging” project comprised two distinct strands: one adopted “an interdisciplinary line of critical enquiry into the cultures of Britain in all their heterogeneity and intra-cultural diversity of forms and practices,” while the other involved “research and application of culturalist concepts, such as cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness” to enhance to pedagogy of English Language Teaching.²

Within a decade of its inception, the project was abruptly discontinued. Funding for seminars dried up; most of the Council-sponsored staff were let go

¹ Alan Mountford and Nick Wadham-Smith, British Studies: Intercultural Perspectives (Harlow: Longman in association with the British Council), x.
² Mountford and Wadham-Smith, British, x.
(including myself); while the British Studies unit morphed into something called the Intercultural Studies Initiative. Mountford retired from the Council to write poetry. In the Republic of Turkey the Council’s priorities shifted more towards English Language Teaching, while many of the institutions who had established British Studies-related curricula simply absorbed them into existing models. While several explanations can be advanced as to why the project failed, which have a lot to do with political and economic necessities, the single most important reason was an academic one. British Studies, as conceived by the Council, simply did not address the wants of local educators and learners. It was too much preoccupied with source cultural values – British life, institutions and people – and did not take into account how such values are reconstructed in different cultures. Hence the project was considered by many colleagues across Europe as another form of cultural colonization in a postcolonial world – a deliberate attempt to disseminate British values without first ascertaining whether such values had any significance in specific territories.

In this article I want to explore the project in more detail using extracts from the text quoted earlier - British Studies: Intercultural Perspectives. I will try to deconstruct the term “intercultural” – a popular phrase in Council circles during the Nineties, which was consciously manipulated so as to ensure that learners and educators would focus predominantly on the target culture (i.e. Britain), rather than pondering the relationship between source and target cultures (which is what the term “intercultural” implies). Bearing this in mind, I argue that perhaps we should look at the process of studying foreign cultures and literatures from a “transcultural” rather than an “intercultural” perspective. We have to learn to think beyond national boundaries that separate “Turkish,” “British” or any other cultures and their products, and look instead at the ways in which individuals respond to such products. The semantic difference between the two terms is significant: “intercultural” in its present sense implies collaboration between two cultures, whereas “transcultural” encourages the participation of colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Studying literature – for example – from a transcultural perspective prompts discussion about the relationship between local and global issues: how can we draw upon our various responses to a text as a basis for negotiating cultural and/or ideological differences? This is a profoundly important task, for it is only through negotiation (not necessarily resolution) that we can learn to understand one another. The rationale here is very different from that embraced by the British Council: all individuals and the cultures they represent are treated with equal significance.

For Mountford and Wadham-Smith, writing in 2000, “interculturality” was the watchword. Drawing on the example of American Studies programmes worldwide, they argued that all country studies courses needed to be
“contemporary, visionary, dynamic, populist, and innovatory.” This could be achieved by drawing on the example set by cultural studies – as understood in the British context – which treated “culture” in the abstract sense “as a complex network of signs and signifying practices, in which the point of view of the participant is an active and crucial element in the account.” Susan Bassnett, perhaps the most influential consultant involved in the entire project, suggested in her edited collection *Studying British Cultures* that “Anyone studying a culture needs to construct their own map of knowledge recognising that any such map needs to be modified as the contours of the cultural landscape shift and evolve.” The question still remained as to how to determine that new “map of knowledge” that comprised British Studies. Inspired by recent events in post-Cold War Eastern Europe, where country after country made strenuous efforts to reform their respective education systems, Mountford and Wadham-Smith claimed that the “new” British Studies (their phrase) was preoccupied with “reassessment and self-questioning.” “Facts” were no longer to be accepted without question; educators and learners should create their own agendas “whether anthropological […] or linguistic […] or historical […] or […] literary.” British Studies could be seamlessly accommodated into a variety of different curricula as well as providing the basis for new, bold experiments in educational thinking.

Although British Studies by its very nature involved the promotion of British values, Mountford and Wadham-Smith claimed that the discipline adopted a critical perspective towards its material, and hence could promote “intercultural dialogue”: “It recognises the anti-hegemonic temper of the times we live in where intellectual autonomy and critical independence are prized qualities. Indeed, it simply cannot be yet another mechanism for linguistic and cultural imperialism, for now we know such mechanisms cannot work because they fail to […] [promote] interactivity and respect for the other.” As an employee of Mountford’s during the early years of the project, I was invited to contribute to his co-edited collection. In my piece “Perspectives on British Studies in Turkish Universities,” I argued vigorously for an intercultural approach based on encouraging learners to draw comparisons between the material in a given curriculum and their own experiences. By such strategies they could not only discover more about the target culture, but acquire sufficient self-confidence to reflect on their own cultures. Ultimately a British Studies course prompted speculation on “the nature of cultural difference, which lies at the heart of

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4 Ibid., 3.
6 Ibid., 5.
7 Ibid., 6.
8 Ibid., 8.
intercultural communication,” as well as initiating a shift in learning away from “learning what people do, to understanding what people think.”

While this point of view has its virtues in positing a collaborative approach to learning, it has its origins in the philosophical framework of positivism and presupposed tenets associated with western imperialism. Maria Tymoczko has observed how academic investigations of this nature “generally excluded concepts […] developed outside Western contexts,” and thereby reduced “non-Western cultures to primitive curiosities […] positivism implicitly and uncritically asserts the dominant (and hence Western) perspective as the basic of observation […] Thus a local Eurocentric perspective was presumed to be the only possible view of the world.” Even while attempting to promote respect for cultural difference, I was working within a dominant paradigm – that British Studies (as constructed by the British Council) would provide the academic basis for promoting this kind of understanding. A non-British perspective – forged, perhaps, within the framework of Turkish literature, sociology, or anthropology – was not considered suitable for my pedagogical agenda. Gönül Pultar and Ayşe Lahur Kırtoğlu remarked with some justification that courses such as mine were intended to compete “for the allegiance of Turkey’s English-speaking academics and students,” by promoting respect for British Studies at the expense of competing forms of country studies. For all its anti-hegemonic claims, British Studies aimed to create an alternative hegemony based on disseminating the kind of perspectives proposed by Mountford and Wadhams-Smith, designed to promote intercultural dialogue within the framework of studying Britain.

What they would not (or did not want) to recognize was the basic notion that foreign literatures and cultures are consumed differently in different contexts. One glance at a book such as Anthony Mandal’s and Brian Southam’s magisterial The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe should prove this. In France, for example, Austen has failed to make much of an impact in popular cultures, as “non-academic appreciation is now entwined with anglophilia and functions as a sign of aesthetic sophistication.” By contrast in Germany, Austen appeals to all types of readers, especially after reunification in the Nineties: several new translations appeared, while adaptations such as the BBC’s Pride and Prejudice (1995) attracted high ratings.


in “a non-anglophone culture unfamiliar with the world that Austen depicts.”
What the British Studies project in Turkey overlooked was the potential of difference: readers, learners and educators did not need to create “anti-hegemonic” perspectives towards British products, but could rather develop new strategies of their own.

**Transcultural Perspectives**

Bearing this notion of plural responses in mind, perhaps we ought to consider alternative models of talking and reading about texts. To do this, we need to remember that national identities – as constructed in the terms British Studies or English Literature – are socio-political entities created by specific communities to distinguish themselves from others. Jerome Bruner believes that we consistently tell and retell our national stories to meet of the situations we encounter, “and we do so with the guidance of the memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future.”

“British Studies” in its British Council-sponsored incarnation was planned as a response to political upheaval in Eastern Europe, and drew upon a tradition of country studies as an instrument of “soft” diplomacy, designed to promote respect for so-called British values such as democracy, multiculturalism and the primacy of the individual. While such stories are undoubtedly important, they can prove constricting. Everyone likes to create a conviction of autonomy by believing, for instance, that they can create their own lifestyles and/or educational agendas. On the other hand, we have to learn how to relate to others – to friends, colleagues, family, as well as representatives of other cultures. Such commitments might curtail autocracy: precedent obligations assume greater significance. Some cultures formalize such obligations through ritual – for example by demanding that citizens of a particular country should swear an oath of allegiance, or undergo some form of test or ceremonial. Through such strategies certain turning points in an individual’s life are conventionalized.

A transcultural – rather than an intercultural – approach to studying a culture and its products (for example, literature) should concentrate on the ways in which individuals deal with this conflict between autonomy and self-expression. Through this deconstructive process we learn “new ways of looking at the world,” as well as redefining our relationship to those around us, whether physically or virtually: “we listen with a more open ear […] [and] pay more attention [to difference].” This is achieved through a shift of focus: in the British Studies model of intercultural analysis learners and educators identify themselves specifically with national stories.

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15 Bruner, *Stories*, 82.
16 Bruner, *Stories*, 84.
by comparing their reactions to specifically British cultural products. In the transcultural model national stories are cast aside: individuals treat texts as products authored by other individuals. Cultural differences are still significant, but no sense of hegemony exists: we do not need to “know” more about Britain in order to understand its literature. On this view Jane Austen is not approached as a representative of British cultural values, but rather someone exploring through her novels the ways in which individuals deal with their relationship to the societies they inhabit. By trying to understand why Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse behave as they do, we might learn something about ourselves as well as others around us.

This kind of intellectual openness determined the ways in which foreign literatures were taught and studied in postcolonial India. Whereas Hindi was enshrined as the principal language of communication, English remained part of official discourse, following the creation of the new constitution in 1947. This gave the members of India’s different races and nationalities the time and space to develop new literature curricula. Now both languages are used in schools, whether in the state or private sectors.\textsuperscript{17} The colonialist model of education, in which western literatures were imposed on local people, was superseded by a negotiated compromise that took local interests into account, while still acknowledging the importance of cultivating foreign language teaching and developing cultural awareness.

The important word here is “negotiation”: a transcultural approach to literature should involve everyone, irrespective of status or cultural background, in determining why and how they are going to study particular texts, without any \textit{a priori} judgements being imposed on them. Sigmund Freud once observed that every individual psyche resembles the \textit{dramatis personae} in a novel or play; just as writers construct works of art by creating different characters and working out their relationships to one another, so multiple \textit{personae} compete for prominence within an individual. Through group negotiation we can make sense of these \textit{personae} within ourselves, as well as gaining an insight into the ways in which our peers view similar phenomena. Such knowledge empowers us to construct new stories – understood in this instance as ways of making sense of the world – that transform ourselves as well as the cultures we inhabit.\textsuperscript{18}

Let me elaborate on this point through an example from my own work. Recently I completed an American Drama course with a group of learners who had spent two years taking a variety of subjects within the English and American literary


canon – Introduction to Literary Terms, Survey of American Literature, American Romanticism, and so on. Rather than defining the objectives of my course in advance, I negotiated with learners about its purpose: should it be text-based, ability-based, or both? While the option of looking at dramatic texts as American cultural products was a popular one, the majority of learners chose to use the experience of studying and performing drama as a means of personal development – to improve their abilities to communicate in two languages (Turkish and English), as well as developing self-confidence. As the course unfolded, these aims were subject to continual critical scrutiny: did the inclusion of a particular text (for example, Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*) provide sufficient opportunities for the learners to fulfil their negotiated purpose? At the end of the course we reflected once more on what had been learned during the previous thirteen weeks. What became increasingly apparent was that learners had developed considerable empathy with the characters in the dramatic texts; there is a Stanley Kowalski lurking deep in all of our psyches. Exactly how we deal with that trait is very much dependent on individual choice; we should bear “precedent obligations” in mind as well as sustaining our autonomy.19 Studying American drama helped learners create new stories for themselves, using their experiences of literary texts to develop self-awareness as well as enhancing their communication abilities.

This form of transcultural learning can be most effectively accomplished if we bear in mind that “cooperation is the foundation of human development, in that we learn how to be together before we learn to stand apart.” Critical thinking about texts stems from communal activity; the more negotiation there is, the more likely it is that learners and educators can forge a shared sense of purpose.20 Formulating new stories about oneself is not the opposite of collaboration: learners develop imaginative empathy with fictional characters in a novel or play through the experience of group work. This form of textual work promotes openness by encouraging everyone to participate in schemes of work where no one person has all the answers to a particular question, and where answers can only be discover by sharing ideas and information.

Just how radically transcultural learning differs from its intercultural equivalent can be discovered if we consider *why* we are studying specific literary texts. Mountford and Wadham-Smith’s principal aim was to establish a new “map of knowledge” that promoted “reassessment and self-questioning,”21 implying that learners still had to acquire a certain corpus of information about the target culture in order to speak interculturally. A transcultural approach shifts the focus from

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21 Mountford and Wadham-Smith, *British*, 5.
information on to abilities: in what ways can the experience of *A Streetcar Named Desire* help to improve learners’ confidence in themselves, as well as their abilities to understand human behaviour? One way of achieving this might be to emphasize the importance of storytelling as the foundation of any culture; by comparing Williams’ construction of life in late 1940s New Orleans with our own existences, we can learn something about our relationship to others, as well as understanding the processes of historical change. Such conclusions prove the truth of Bruner’s assertion that “all narratives […] offer a ready and supple means of dealing with the uncertain outcomes of our own plans and expectations. Sometimes these narratives do not work, not just because we don’t know enough, but also on account of the way we know things.” Exposure to *A Streetcar Named Desire* might help us to discover narratives that do work, and thereby adapt ourselves to new situations and new experiences. This capacity is essential to human development.

It might be argued that transcultural learning of literature represents a return to universalist notions that dominated criticism before the onset of postmodernism. Everyone can somehow discover themselves through exposure to classic texts, especially those incorporated in the English and American literary canons. To invoke the term universal implies the presence of its opposite – the particular; this kind of opposition proved an effective strategy to reinforce the western colonialist project. Universal western values could be imposed on particular contexts – for example, in British India prior to independence in 1947. By contrast the transcultural method of analysis makes no distinction between universal and particular, but rather determines its own agendas through negotiation and collaboration. American and British literary texts can be studied, but there is no reason why other texts in different languages should not be incorporated into a given curriculum, if the group decides on that course of action. The point here is to ascertain the purpose of the course, which might focus (for instance) on how the concepts of universal and particular mean different things in different socio-historical contexts. This kind of knowledge helps learners to discover the extent to which literary texts can aid them in their process of adapting “to the particular narratives and worldviews of [individuals] […] from diverse professional and cultural backgrounds.”

Such concerns are not just significant in the literature and/or humanities department; they relate to every aspect of our lives. Tim Harford maintains that the most successful organizations – whether commercial or intellectual – are those that value the capacity to adapt. Their leaders listen to and learn from their employees, who are not frightened of creating new agendas, and believe that the success of such agendas depends on collaboration and reflection. This process can help “transform

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our lives for the better [...] so long as we don’t engage in denial or chase our losses.”

Practically speaking, the experience of business life might seem far removed from the day-to-day business of studying literature. Yet the organizing principle remains the same: by undertaking the responsibility of co-creating a course of study designed to reflect on the relationship between autonomy and community responsibility, learners and educators alike acquire the kind of confidence that transforms their lives for the better. This spirit stimulates experiment; for example, by trying out new culture-specific ways of talking about or performing literature (in staged and/or rehearsed readings, for example). Such experiences not only increase cultural awareness; they also develop the kind of abilities (team-building, negotiation) that are eminently transferable to other contexts outside the education institution.

Theoretically speaking, the transcultural approach to studying literature represents a considerable advance from the viewpoints expressed in the Nineties, when the Scottish academic Willy Maley could claim that it might be difficult for anyone “to juggle the demand for exclusion from incorporating totalities while at the same time voicing a desire for inclusion in a network of different identities.”

Transcultural approaches exclude no one; on the contrary, individuals learn how to collaborate with one another. No one needs to create new networks of “different identities”: the entire group ethic depends on a mutual recognition of difference. In the same volume, Michael Byram defines “active citizenship” thus: “[it] presupposes identification with a particular polity, […] individuals [in Europe] need to feel they have a European identity, and I have suggested that the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence in one or more languages and culture […] is essential to the development of that identity and access to the rights and responsibilities that accompany it.”

Transcultural learning assumes that group members identify with a variety of polities at the national and local levels; in the Turkish context for instance such polities might include “Europe,” “the Middle East,” “Asia,” “Anatolia” and “İstanbul.” The concept of a unified European identity doesn’t exist: individuals have different understandings of the significance of that term. Transcultural learning implies the presence of several languages and cultures within a group situation: “competence” can be achieved through study and reflection on a variety of literary texts (as the example of my learners in the American Drama course illustrates).

In outlining the process of transition from an intercultural to a transcultural model of learning literature, I have come to understand how transculturality treats all viewpoints equally. Everyone within a representative group – of learners, educators, or a combination of both – should have the freedom to express whatever opinions they wish in a non-judgmental atmosphere, and subsequently feel that issues of particular significance to them will be debated within the entire group. This kind of approach to learning promotes self-belief through the kind of openness and mutual trust that transforms our lives for the better. If literature is first and foremost concerned with human beings, then it follows that a transcultural approach to studying and learning that subject can only benefit humanity as a whole, irrespective of race, class, nation or gender. I sincerely hope so, otherwise I would have left the profession long ago.

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Charles Dickens and Italian Opera

Robert McParland

Abstract

Italian melodrama and opera was an attraction and a resource for one of the greatest British novelists of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens. With his keen ear, his immense love of theater, and his sharp wit, Dickens, in 1844, visited Italy. Experiencing the sounds and songs of the Italian spirit on the streets as well as in the opera house, he contrasted the artistically crafted world of opera with the sounds borne on the breeze of the ordinary day. He critiqued popular expressions of music with his caustic wit, while recognizing the roots of Italian opera in melodrama and popular culture.

This essay explores Dickens’s connection with opera in relation to Dickens’s characters. In addition, the Italian environment inspired his uses of sound in his Pictures of Italy. Dickens’s account of his 1844 tour of Italy also expresses this sense of a continuum from the sublime music of the opera hall to the common sounds and musicality of the street. In Pictures of Italy, Dickens is so visually descriptive that it may be easy to overlook the auditory in his text. Yet, there are rhythms in his writing and there are sounds everywhere. There is an interplay of art and daily life and of the vocal and the melodramatic. This essay demonstrated that Dickens was entranced by Italian opera and melodrama as it extended its impact across the continent in vigorous fashion in the early and mid-nineteenth century.
Charles Dickens and Italian Opera

Robert McParland

Italian melodrama and opera was an attraction and a resource for one of the greatest British novelists of the nineteenth century, Charles Dickens. With his keen ear, his immense love of theater, and his sharp wit, Dickens, in 1844, visited Italy. He brought his family to Rome, Milan, Genoa and other Italian cities where he feasted on the energetic sounds of the streets and the rousing art of the Italian opera. Dickens found Italy auditory, vocal, and expressive. Experiencing the sounds and songs of the Italian spirit on the streets as well as in the opera house, he contrasted the artistically crafted world of opera with the sounds borne on the breeze of the ordinary day. He critiqued popular expressions of music with his caustic wit, while recognizing the roots of Italian opera in melodrama and popular culture.

Dickens was entranced by Italian opera and melodrama as it extended its impact across the continent in vigorous fashion in the early and mid-nineteenth century. When Dickens was still a child, to London had come The Barber of Seville of Giacchino Rossini (1792-1868), the gifted composer who soon moved on to grand opera in Paris with the Theatre Italienne in 1826. From La Scala in Milan came the operas of Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) and those of Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) By the time of Dickens’s young adulthood, opera in London had become associated with an audience of the upper classes. Dickens’s Mrs. Sparsit turns to opera to declare her sophistication: “I certainly, sir,” returned Mrs. Sparsit, with a dignity serenely mournful, “was familiar with the Italian Opera at a very early age.” From Mrs. Sparsit’s aristocratic pretentions we may go back only a year and a half earlier to the concluding thought in Dickens’s essay “Amusements of the People” about Joe Whelks and melodrama:

When the situations were very strong indeed, they were very like what some favourite situations in the Italian Opera would be to a profoundly deaf spectator. The despair and madness at the end of the first act, the business of the long hair, and the struggle in the bridal chamber, were as like the conventional passion of the Italian singers, as the orchestra was unlike the opera band, or its “hurries” unlike the music of the great composers. So do extremes meet; and so there is some hopeful
congeniality between what will excite Mr. Whelks, and what will rouse a Duchess.¹

A sense of this congeniality between high and low forms of theatre winds through Dickens’s works. Melodrama plays out wildly, often in the spirit of parody, in his novels. His heroes are resourceful and his villains are melodramatic. Indeed, the monologues of Mr. Micawber, for example, may strike one as much like extended arias. No doubt the Italian opera’s blending of the high and low, the folk tale and high art, had something to do with the appeal of the Italian opera for Dickens. The spirit of Risorgimento found in melodrama one of its artistic expressions. This was exported across the continent. From the 200 performances in London of Gasparo Spontini’s *The Vestal* to the popularity Verdi’s *Aida* and *La Traviata*, Italian opera, embracing the melodrama, entered British culture with its romantic plots and emotional crescendos.

Dickens’s account of his 1844 tour of Italy also expresses this sense of a continuum from the sublime music of the opera hall to the common sounds and musicality of the street. In *Pictures of Italy*, Dickens is so visually descriptive that it may be easy to overlook the auditory in his text. Yet, there are rhythms in his writing and there are sounds everywhere. There is an interplay of art and daily life and of the vocal and the melodramatic. We hear in *Pictures of Italy* the bells of churches, the step of dragoons in Rome at the execution of a criminal, and the voices of a festival and the songs of choristers at St. Peter’s. There are the bells at the rusty gate at the ‘Pink Jail’, the Villa Bagnerello in Genoa where Dickens observes servants in hot July “where the brave courier plays all sorts of musical instruments of his own manufacture all the evening long.”² There is a man who imitates the crowing of a rooster upon the denials of St. Peter. Dickens writes of the wind that “ran on into Genoa harbour instead, where the familiar Bells ring sweetly in my ear.”³ He tells us that “the bells of the churches ring incessantly; not in peals, or in any form of sound, but in a horrible, irregular, jerking, dingle, dingle, dingle: with a sudden stop at every fifteenth dingle or so, which is maddening. The performance (and I note the word) is usually achieved by a boy up in the steeple […] The noise is supposed to be particularly obnoxious to evil spirits.”⁴

When we are first introduced by Dickens to Genoa, he describes a gate by his new home. Situated amid the narrow lanes of the city, it is a passageway by which we readers enter further description of the place: “The rusted old gate has a bell to

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²Dickens, *Pictures of Italy*, 24-26
³Ibid., 91.
⁴Ibid., 41.
correspond, which you ring as long as you like, and which nobody answers, as it has no connection whatever with the house.\(^5\)

Like the bells, the sounds of greeting from passers-by move like a joyful music through his text. Men named “Baptista” are called out to in the Genoese patois, which sounds to Dickens like “Batcheeta.” These arias of the street-life of Genoa are matched by chaotic music performances he hears in the churches.

Music and noise, professionalism and amateur theatrics, are contrasted throughout Dickens’s Italian tour. In *Pictures of Italy*, we learn that Dickens attended an opera at La Scala in Milan, although he does not say what opera it was. Dickens tells us in *Pictures of Italy* that he saw one act of Bellini’s *Norma* at the theater in Cararra. He describes the Genoa opera house Carlo Felice as “a very splendid, commodious and beautiful theatre.”\(^6\) He says that a company of comedians “were acting here when we arrived and soon after their departure, a second rate opera company came.” The sentence suggests that he is confident in his ability to make such distinctions.

Dickens finds the audience in Genoa also making distinctions, in a less amiable fashion. He writes, “Nothing impressed me so much in my visits here (which were pretty numerous) as the uncommonly hard and cruel character of the audience, who resent the slightest defect, take nothing good humouredly, and seem to be always lying in wait for an opportunity to hiss, and spare the actresses as little as the actors.”\(^7\) Dickens describes some of the music of the city as lively and enthusiastic but not always professional. At the festa days of St. Anne and St. Nozaro a small band with an organ plays in the evening: “the organ played away, lustily, and a full band did the like [...]” There “a conductor in a little gallery opposite to the band hammered away on the desk before him, with a scroll, and a tenor, without any voice, sang [...] The band played one way, the organ played another, and the unfortunate conductor banged and banged.” Dickens adds: “I never did hear such a discordant din.”\(^8\)

Dickens invites us to see the city with him as he goes on to describe the Teatro Diurno, or the Day Theatre, as “a covered stage in the open air, where the performances take place by daylight in the cool of the afternoon.” “It is curious,” he says, “sitting among the audience, to have a fine view of the neighboring hills and houses, and to see neighbors at their windows, looking on, and to hear the bells of the churches and convents ringing at most complete cross-purposes with the scene.”\(^9\)

There is also the Theatre of the Puppets, or marionetti, a famous company from Milan, whose production about Napoleon he finds “ridiculous.” The festivity is

\(^{5}\text{Ibid., 40.}\)
\(^{6}\text{Ibid., 43.}\)
\(^{7}\text{Ibid.}\)
\(^{8}\text{Ibid., 30.}\)
\(^{9}\text{Ibid., 43.}\)
announced by “the shrillest trumpet that ever was blown.” Here “a procession of musicians enters, one creature playing a drum and knocking himself off his legs with every blow.”

The extraordinary visual imagery of Dickens’s “Italian dream” section in Venice is balanced by auditory imagery in a preceding section of his text. In Bologna, a little man at the cemetery is given voice, as if he were singing at La Scala in Milan: “Only the poor, Signore! It’s very cheerful. It’s very lovely. How grand it is, how cool! It is like a meadow!” This play of voices and church bells, music and discord, enlivens Dickens’s narrative and he gives us Italy, in all its raucous splendor. For Italy has given to Dickens an auditory world in the delights and declamations of the Italian opera.

The Italian opera was familiar to Dickens from the time he began attending opera in the 1830’s. Through his sister Fanny, on scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music, he met John Hullah with whom he wrote the musical play *The Village Coquettes*, which was staged with some success in 1836 at the St. James Theatre. John Hullah and Fanny Dickens studied with Crivelli, a notable Italian tenor. Gaetano Crivelli (1774-1836) was Don Ottavio in Mozart’s *La Clemenza*. He often sang in Milan. It was his son Domenico Crivelli, who sang much of Rossini, who went to sing in New York in 1825 and then settled in London as a teacher. Hullah sounds rather enthusiastic about his teacher in his references to him in the Dickens-Hullah correspondence of December 29, 1835 to January 1837, which is at Yale’s Beinecke Library.

In April 1841, Dickens accompanied his friend and sometime benefactor Miss Coutts to see Beethoven’s *Fidelio*. There is opera vocalist Adelaide Kemble to whom Dickens refers in a letter as “the classic Addle Head.” Yet, it is specifically the Italian opera that made a considerable impression upon the British author. Kathleen Tillotson points out that the style of a review of *La Favorita* in October 1843 is “unmistakably in Dickens’s style.” This was the time that Dickens began *A Christmas Carol*. In 1844, Dickens wrote to John Forster about “Il Parata,” which he attended at the Theatre Italien in Paris and speaks of “the passion and fire of a scene between her [Giulia Grisi], Mario, and Fornasari” that “was as good and great as it is possible for anything operatic to be.”

Following his time in Italy, back home in England, Dickens’s attendance of operas continued. The Royal Italian Opera was formed in 1847 in London under the direction of Michael Costa. This set it in competition with the Italian opera of Her

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10Ibid., 44.
11Ibid., 65.
12Beinecke Library, Special Collections, Yale University. Dickens-Hullah Correspondence.
14Dickens, *Pictures of Italy*, 81.
Majesty’s Theatre at Haymarket. Dickens attended both. He writes that they have “a box at the other house and can run over and hear Jenny (Lind) if we be in the mind.”16 We see some of Dickens’s opera attendance noted throughout his letters. He recorded that he saw Bellini’s Norma again and Donizetti’s La Favorita and Lucrezia Borgia and Meyerbeer’s Prophete. With Catherine, Georgina Hogarth and Dr. John Elliotson, the mesmerist, Dickens went to hear Jenny Lind sing in Donizetti’s La Fille du Regiment in Italian. In the letters we read that he objected to the doorkeeper’s rudeness.17 He welcomed John Leech to join Catherine and himself for Lucia di Lamermoor on April 26, 1849.

We learn from his letters that Dickens went with Miss Coutts to see Donizetti’s Lucrezia Borgia at Covent Garden in 1855.18 In the 1860’s, Dickens responded to Gluck’s Orphee and Gounod’s Faust. Both deal with losses and Bledsoe claims that resurrection themes in A Tale of Two Cities and Our Mutual Friend parallel these operas. One can add the suggestion – with a bit of a stretch – that Bellini’s Norma, with Norma’s self-sacrificing gesture may have had something to do with Dickens’s culminating scenes of A Tale of Two Cities.

Opera is filled with such broad gestures. Reading Pictures, we may be struck by the correlation of the sound and pageantry of church services with gesture and opera. At St. Peter’s in Rome, the “performance” of High Mass appears connected with opera. Dickens writes that: “A large space behind the altar was fitted with boxes shaped like those at the Italian Opera in England, but in their decoration much more gaudy. In the center of the kind of theatre thus railed off, was a canopied dais with the Pope’s chair upon it […] The singers were in a crib of wirework (like a large meat-safe or birdcage) in one corner; and sang most atrociously.”19

There is a kind of theatre at work when we hear of choristers at the Sistine chapel where “the chaunting was very monotonous and dreary.”20 Of rituals like the washing of feet as a “pious office (that) is performed.”21 Of the Pope’s benediction from the balcony on Easter Sunday.22 When the benediction was given “drum beats, trumpets sounded, arms clashed, and the great mass below, suddenly breaking into smaller heaps and scattering here and there in rills, was stirred like parti-coloured confetti.”23

By festivals of the streets and races, Dickens is often reminded of the theatre: On the Corso in Rome, “Shop-fronts were taken down and the windows filled with

16Dickens, Pilgrim Letters 5: 522.
17Ibid.
18Dickens, Pilgrim Letters 2: 800.
19Dickens, Pictures of Italy, 108.
20Ibid., 132.
21Ibid., 142.
22Ibid.
23Ibid., 147.
company, like boxes at a shining theatre.”  There is spectacle and sound: sellers shouting on the streets, horse-races, where “the cannon are fired and clapping of hands are renewed, the cannon fired again. The race is over.”

As if witnessing an opera in the streets, Dickens describes the scene:

We hear “Senza Moccolo! Senza Mocollo!” four times across his narrative. He describes a crowd: “some bending down, some leaning over, some shrinking back- delicate arms and bosoms- glowing lights, fluttering dresses, Senza Moccola, Senza Mocolla, Senza Mococo-lo-o-o-o! – when the wildest enthusiasms of the cry, and the fullest ecstasy of the sport, the Ave rings up from the church steeples and the Canival is over in an instant – put out like a taper, with a breath!”

Dickens seems to write associatively, full of sound and memory, next recalling “a masquerade at night, as dull and senseless as a London one.” Of a show at La Scala in Milan, Dickens writes this:

In the splendid theatre of La Scala, there was a ballet of action performed after the opera, under the title of Prometheus: in the beginning of which some hundred or two of men and women represented our mortal race before the refinements of the arts and sciences, and loves and graces, came to earth to soften them. I never saw anything more effective. Generally speaking, the pantomimic antic of the Italians is more remarkable for its sudden and impetuous character than for its delicate expression; but, in this case, the drooping monotony, the weary, miserable, listless, moping life: the sordid passions and desires of human creatures, destitute of these elevating influences to which we owe so much, and to whose promoters we render so little, were expressed in a manner really powerful and affecting. I should have thought it almost impossible to present such an idea so strongly on the stage, without the aid of speech.”

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24Ibid., 112.
25Ibid., 115.
26Ibid., 128.
27Ibid., 87.
Clearly, music is an often unnoticed source of Dickens’s art. From *A Christmas Carol* through *Bleak House*, to *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Our Mutual Friend*, music in Dickens appears to have a connection with time and with memory. As David recalls in *David Copperfield*, Agnes “touched the chords of my memory so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke.”

Robert Bledsoe, in “Dickens and Opera,” remarks that “For Dickens music was almost always associated with memory [...].” Music, of course, is an art that dwells in time and unfolds in time in our listening.

On re-reading *Pickwick*, Longfellow wrote in his journal on March 28, 1861: “Afternoon and evening, read *Pickwick*. It contains all of Dickens in embryo, as an overture does an opera: themes and motives just touched upon, which are more elaborately developed in later works.” *Bleak House* has this quality of an overture in its opening chapter, which sets forth motifs that will follow throughout that novel. There is the fog, the images of death, the recidivistic, entropic quality of something monstrous sliding in mud that suggests the newly stated second law of thermodynamics. There is the slow gathering of phrases and rhythms that come stacked upon each other like the houses of Genoa on the hill, or like the gathering fog of Chancery and of London.

The music and the bells of Italy evidently opened up something in Dickens that remained a fresh memory. For shortly after Dickens’s time in Italy, come the Christmas books, each one with a reference to sound or music within it: We have the cricket that chirps on the hearth and the kettle that sings, as if in a duet with it. We have *The Chimes*, written in Italy, in which Trotty Veck is heartened by the sound of the chimes in the church tower which seem to say, “Toby Veck Toby Veck, keep a good heart.” Early in *The Battle of Life* we hear of music and dance and witness a scene of animation. The dancing is described as “Not like opera dancers. Not at all.” We hear that Doctor Jeddler “came bustling out to see what was the matter and who the deuce played music on his property before breakfast. For he was a great philosopher, Doctor Jedder, and not very musical.” This is followed by “Music and dancing today, said the doctor, stopping short and speaking to himself.”

Dickens’s attention to rhythm continued on into his literary efforts in 1848, even as Italy and all of Europe burned with the spirit of revolution. In the “structural logic” Edgar Johnson has seen in his novel of that year, *Dombey and Son*, which John

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28 Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, Chapter 60.
Forster called “a turning point” for Dickens, there is the careful planning to which Kathleen Tillotson and others have drawn attention. There is also a considerable attention to sound and rhythm that William Axton spent some time detailing in *Circle of Fire*.  

Dickens’s attention to sound has been noted by a few critics like Garrett Stewart, for example, but it is not frequently mentioned in most studies. Yet, it is quite an important part of his style. We tend to recall his daughter’s comment that he was seen making faces in a mirror one day while apparently working out characterizations. However, he was also sounding them out. He did so, not only with an ear for London, but also with some memory of his time in Italy.

One may wish to ponder further the connections of Italian opera with melodrama in relation to Dickens as a search for feeling. George Eliot observes that Franz Liszt criticism views Rossini as “il maestro di color che sonno” - the greatest dramatic genius, as I conceive, who ever used Music as a form of expression, Liszt regards as the culmination of a style which aimed at Feeling above all things […] We have yet to fully explore the influences of Dickens’s trip to Italy upon his later work. The influence of Italian culture upon Dickens’s fiction, from his early experiences of opera and his trip to Italy to the 1860’s, has not been fully accounted for. However, it may be said with some certainty that Dickens was a fellow traveler with the spirit of the Italian quest for nation and renewal. The spirit of Risorgimento parallels that spirit of reform which was always important to the British novelist. Dickens remained actively engaged in England on behalf of the Risorgimento. Notably, he offers his story “The Italian Prisoner” in *All the Year Round* 17, later collected in *The Uncommercial Traveler*. Dickens’s narrator begins: “The rising of the Italian people from under unutterable wrongs, and the tardy burst of day upon them after the long long night of oppression that has darkened their beautiful country.”

On February 1, 1861, Dickens wrote to W.W.F. De Cerjat:

> The Italian state of things is not regarded as looking very cheerful. Apart from one’s natural sympathies with a people so oppressed as the Italians, and one’s natural antagonism to a Pope and a Bourbon… I agree with you concerning Victor Emmanuel, and greatly fear that the Southern Italians are much degraded. Still, a United Italy

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would be of vast importance to the peace of the world […]36

That the Risorgimento was on Dickens’s mind throughout the 1850’s is clear from his novels. An Italian nationalist character is a key to the resolution of Little Dorrit (1856) and A Tale of Two Cities (1859) also makes reference to the movement. Indeed, there appears to be a through-line from Hard Times (1854), which Dickens dedicated to Thomas Carlyle, writer of The French Revolution, to A Tale of Two Cities (1859) that sets a story of human liberation within the context of the French Revolution. Dickens was clearly sympathetic to Italy’s national aspirations.

It remains for us to consider in more detail the multiple ways that Italian culture, beginning with melodrama and opera in the first years of his career, intersected with Dickens’s art. The art of Rossini and the young Verdi that Dickens knew of from popular productions in London and Paris spoke to him of the Italian spirit. In Household Words, the music critic George Hogarth, Dickens’s father in law, writes that “the Muse […] is taking up with the humble and needy and leaves nothing better to her aristocratic friends than their much loved Italian Opera.”37 Yet, Dickens appears to have drawn upon that much loved Italian Opera and to have brought elements of it into his stories that speak to us of the everlasting worth of the humble and the needy.

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Inside/Outside the Nation-State:
Screening Women and History in *Song of the Exile* and *Woman, Demon, Human*

Kai Kang

Abstract
The theme of women and history has long been an interesting topic for writers, directors and critics. In Chinese cinema, which is dominated by male directors, women are frequently represented in stereotypical ways: they are either conventional women who lack self-consciousness, modern women who enjoy successful careers at the price of a happy family, or they are portrayed as the femme fatale who brings disaster to men and the country. In this article, I will compare Hong Kong director Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* (1990) and mainland Chinese director Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987) and investigate the two women directors’ exploration of the themes of exile and ostracism, the mother-daughter relationship and the relationships among women, nation-state, and history.

Both films represent regional, national and international histories through the portrayal of the female protagonist’s life and experiences. Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* (1990) locates a complex mother-daughter relationship within entanglements among Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Macau from the 1940s to the 1970s. Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987) delineates the artistic journey of a female actress Qiu Yun in China from the 1950s to the 1980s. In this article, I endeavor to explore these questions: How do the two films represent the mother-daughter relationship, the relationship between women and history, between family and nation-state? How do the two women directors view women’s agency in national and international histories? What kinds of cinematic techniques do they employ to explore these topics? Do these women directors’ works reflect, challenge, or comply with the official histories in mainland China and Hong Kong?
Inside/Outside the Nation-State: Screening Women and History in *Song of the Exile* and *Woman, Demon, Human*

Kai Kang

The theme of women and history has long been an interesting topic for directors; however, in many films of male directors, women are frequently represented in stereotypical ways: they are either conventional women who lack self-consciousness, modern women who enjoy successful careers at the price of a happy family, or they are portrayed as the femme fatale who brings disaster to men and the country. To counter these stereotypes, feminist directors employ different techniques to highlight women’s agency in their works. Due to socio-historical and cultural differences, feminist directors in different parts of the world have diversified understanding of feminism. In this article, I will examine the features of feminist films in Hong Kong and mainland China through a close reading of Hong Kong director Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* (1990) and mainland Chinese director Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987).

Before I dive into the analysis of the two films, I will outline the development of feminism and women’s movements in China and Hong Kong. Yenna Wu points out women’s movements in China dates back to late seventeenth century. In pre-modern times, women’s movement in China mainly centered on efforts to ban foot-binding. From the early twentieth century to the foundation of People’s Republic of China in 1949, western feminism was introduced to China with other western ideas such as Enlightenment, Marxism, and socialism. The distinctive feature of Chinese feminism is its close association with and subordination to nationalism and socialism. The establishment of the socialist government organization All-China Women’s Federation (*Fulian*) has improved Chinese women’s social status but meanwhile it has strengthened Chinese Communist Party’s control over women. Moreover, the equality between men and women in the Mao Era (1949-1976) is based on the erasure of the gender difference, and women are measured against a male standard. The development of women’s non-governmental associations and grass root women’s movements in the Post-Mao era provides soil for the birth of the regionalized Chinese feminism which distinguishes itself from western feminism.

Wu pinpoints differences of major concepts in Chinese and Western feminisms. For instance, the anti-essentialist claim of western feminism is unsuitable for women in post-Mao China since the gender difference between men and women is erased in the Mao era. Chinese women have to suppress their biological differences
from men so that they can be viewed as equal with men. Besides, western feminism’s binarism of male dominance and female subordination does not work in modern Chinese society because women’s suffering is often not caused so much by their gender but as by political movements, poverty and backwardness in development. Both men and women suffer in various political campaigns in the Mao Era\(^1\).

Despite their shared concern over women’s empowerment and well-being, Hong Kong feminism differs from Chinese feminism in its relationship with the government. In her study of the history of Hong Kong feminism, Gar-yin Tsang points out women’s movements in Hong Kong have been greatly influenced by western feminism and advocated by individuals and nongovernment organizations, such as Hong Kong Council of Women (HKCW), the Association for the Advancement of Feminism (AAF), and the Hong Kong Women Workers Association (HKWWA). These organizations set up women resource centers to provide refuge for battered wives, offer counselling services and various programs for individual empowerment. They also organize lectures and exhibitions to raise public awareness of women’s issues, and launch different campaigns to address women’s problems and exert influences on policy makers. All these activities enhance public understanding of women’s issues and improve women’s living conditions in Hong Kong\(^2\).

The difference between Hong Kong feminism and Chinese feminism is exemplified by Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* and Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human*. The two films reflect different socio-political conditions of Hong Kong and mainland China, and represent regional, national and international histories through the portrayal of female protagonists’ lives and experiences. Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* (1990) locates a complex mother-daughter relationship within entanglements among Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Macau from the 1940s to the 1970s. Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987) delineates the artistic journey of a female actress Qiu Yun in China from the 1950s to the late 1980s. In the article, I endeavor to explore these questions: How do the two films view women’s agency in national and international histories? How do they represent the mother-daughter relationship, the relationship between women and history, between family and nation-state? What kinds of cinematic techniques do the two directors employ to explore these topics?

As one of the most renowned directors in modern Hong Kong film industry, Ann Hui has produced more than twenty films in diverse genres and styles. Hong Kong identity and the relationship between women and history have been Hui’s two favorite topics. Such interests derive largely from her personal experience. Born into

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a family of a Chinese father and a Japanese mother, grew up in Macau and Hong Kong, and received her education in Hong Kong and London, Ann Hui has come under the influence of various cultures from an early age. After finishing her studies at the London Film School in the mid-1970s, Hui returned to Hong Kong, and initiated the Hong Kong New Wave with other directors, such as Tsui Hark, Patrick Tam, and Allen Fong.

Since her cinematic debut *The Secret* (1979), Hui has shown great concern for Hong Kong identity and the life of marginalized social groups, such as immigrants and ordinary Hong Kong women. Though Hui refuses to be called a feminist, many of her films reflect female point of view, critique patriarchy’s oppression and regulation of women, and emphasize women’s agency in a patriarchal society. Elaine Yee-lin Ho contends that Ann Hui’s early films from late 1970s to late 1980s focus mainly on cultural contestation and neglect issues relating to women and gender, but Hui’s films since the 1990s have taken a feminist turn and pointed toward “the emergent formation of Hong Kong civil society from the bedrock of individual and familial changes wrought by women in different locations and the collective strength of their aggregation.”

Often considered a semi-autobiographic film, *Song of the Exile* centers on the fraught relationship between a Japanese mother Aiko and a Chinese-Japanese daughter Hueyin. Through the depiction of the conflict and reconciliation between the mother and the daughter, the film urges the audience to consider women’s lives transnationally across various linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries.

Similarly to Ann Hui, Shuqin Huang is a woman director who persistently explores women’s lives in a changing Chinese society; however, her personal and artistic journey has not been as smooth as that of Ann Hui. Shuqin Huang was born into an artistic family in 1939 in Shanghai. Her father Zuolin Huang is a famous Chinese playwright and director who studied drama in London in the 1920s under the supervision of George Bernard Shaw, and her mother is a famous Chinese actor who studied psychology in Columbia University in the 1920s. The couple went to London in 1935 to study drama at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Having learned of the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937, the couple went back to China to use their artistic training to help mobilize Chinese populace to fight Japanese. The couple’s dramatic expertise influenced their daughter Shuqin Huang,

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3 The Hong Kong New Wave: A cinematic movement in Hong Kong from the late 1970s to the 1980s, which stressed a contemporary Hong Kong identity and was heavily influenced by Italian Neorealism and French New Wave. Its major figures include: Ann Hui, Tsui Hark, Patrick Tam and Allen Fong.
who chose to study directing at the Beijing Film Academy\(^6\). Graduated from the Director Department of Beijing Film Academy in 1964, Shuqin Huang, like her colleagues, strived to free Chinese cinema from the impact of Chinese opera and established modern Chinese cinematic language\(^7\); however, this dream was shattered by the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During the Cultural Revolution, Huang’s family members were persecuted. Her mother died, and her father and she were prohibited from making films.

It was only after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 that Shuqin Huang resumed her directing career; however, she faced great challenges. Unlike the Hong Kong film industry, which had relatively loose censorship, various funding and distribution channels, the Chinese film industry in the 1980s was controlled by the state. Thus, Chinese film directors enjoyed less freedom compared with their Hong Kong counterparts. Despite these difficulties, Shuqin Huang has produced eight films and three television dramas to this day. With a focus on the life of Chinese women, her major cinematographic works include *Forever Young* (1983), *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987), *La Peintress* (1994), *Hey Frank* (2001), and the made-for-television movies *Rouge* (1994) and *The Village Whore* (2000)\(^8\).

Among these films, *Woman, Demon, Human* (1987) is considered to be “the first and the only woman’s film in China”\(^9\) by the famous Chinese film critic Jinhua Dai. Though it is arguable whether this film is “the first and the only woman’s film in China”, it is a consensus among Chinese film scholars that *Woman, Demon, Human* is a woman’s film. Based on the life of the Chinese female artist Pei Yanling, the film centers on the female protagonist Qiu Yun’s psychological development, her artistic journey, and her life from the 1950s to the 1980s. Though most critics are aware of the biographic feature of this film, few notice its self-referential characteristic. I argue that *Woman, Demon, Human* is both a biographic film of the life of the female artist Pei Yanling, and a self-referential film which reflects on the painstaking cinematic journey of the director Shuqin Huang and the plight of a modern woman in a

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\(^7\)Early Chinese cinema is heavily influenced by Chinese opera, especially Beijing Opera. The early directors and investors make many Chinese opera films to cater to the taste of the populace at that time and meanwhile to use Chinese opera as a national form to compete with the powerful Euro-American films.


socialist patriarchal society. The importance of this self-referentiality will be discussed in the later part of the article.

In the following part, I will compare Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile* with Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human*. By examining characterization, gender relationships, the relationship between family and nation, and cinematic techniques, I will explore the ways in which the two directors deal with the theme of exile and ostracism, and the relationship between women and history, and between family and nation in their films.

*Song of the Exile* can be viewed as a coming-of-age story of the female protagonist Hueyin. At the heart of the film’s narrative is the complex relationship between Hueyin and her Japanese mother Aiko. Growing up with her paternal grandparents and her mother in Macau, Hueyin feels emotionally attached to her grandparents rather than to her mother. In the eyes of little Hueyin, her mother is a silent cold woman who rarely speaks or smiles. In contrast, her grandparents are tender and loving. They always cook her tasty Chinese food, play with her, and take her to interesting places.

In the film, the director uses mirror images to demonstrate the alienation and conflict between the mother and the daughter. The two haircut scenes are apt examples. The first haircut scene occurs before the wedding of Hueyin’s younger sister. In order to show others that they are from one family, Aiko asks the two daughters to have the same haircut as hers. The sequence begins with a medium shot of the younger sister sitting in front of a mirror and waiting for the haircut. Panning slowly from the left to the right, the camera stops at such an angle that the audience can see the back of the mother, the barber and Hueyin in the mirror. Then in a series of shot reverse shot, Hueyin expresses her discontent with the haircut whereas Aiko insists on the importance of having a family haircut, a short curled hairstyle, which is regarded by Aiko as the latest Western trend. Finding that she cannot change her mother’s mind, Hueyin agrees to the haircut in anger and frustration. Aiko is irritated by Hueyin’s disobedience and reluctance, and the younger sister is also annoyed by the quarrel between her mother and her elder sister Hueyin. The sequence ends with a long shot showing the faces of three unhappy women after the dispute over haircut. During the whole sequence, there is not any shot of Hueyin and her mother in the same frame. The communication between the two is accomplished through shot reverse shot and shots of their images in the mirror.

Immediately followed after this haircut scene, a flashback brings the audience back to an earlier unpleasant haircut scene in Hueyin’s childhood. In the scene, Aiko forces Hueyin to have a Japanese elementary school haircut; however, Hueyin refuses to have the haircut and asks her grandpa for help. Irritated by her daughter’s disobedience, Aiko catches Hueyin, throws her onto the bed, beats her and then holds her up to give her a haircut. Moreover, Aiko locks the door to avoid the
interference from Hueyin’s grandparents. A long shot shows that inside a large mirror, little Hueyin sits on the bed tearfully, with fear and frustration. In both haircut scenes, the mirror shots reveal the alienation and antagonism between Hueyin and her mother.

Probing into the troubled self-identification of both Hueyin and Aiko, Patricia Erens argues that the use of mirror shots “highlights the illusion of a unified identity”\(^\text{10}\), and the mother Aiko “seeks to mold [Hueyin’s] looks and to create a traditional identity pleasing to her”\(^\text{11}\) in the two haircut scenes. I agree with Erens that the mirror shots emphasize the illusion of a unified identity for both Aiko and Hueyin, but my interpretation of the mother’s motivation in the two haircut scenes differs from that of Erens. Instead, I contend that the two haircut scenes reveal Aiko’s identification with the supposed superior Japanese and western cultures.

Though she marries Mr. Cheung and lives in China over twenty years, Aiko experiences a strong sense of alienation. Such experience is well illustrated in her life in Macau in the 1950s. With the absence of her husband, who works in Hong Kong at that time, Aiko lives as an outsider in the Cheung family, with little communication and acceptance from other family members. Her knowledge of Chinese language is so weak that she can barely communicate with other Chinese. To make things worse, the fraught Sino-Japanese political relationship intensifies her Chinese parents-in-law’s strong sense of hostility towards her. Other Chinese neighbors ridicule and humiliate her because of her Japanese nationality. Interestingly, Aiko maintains her sense of superiority despite the pressure of the dominant anti-Japanese discourse in China at that time. Such superiority comes from the sharp contrast between a powerful Japanese nation and a weak Chinese nation, and between Aiko’s powerful wealthy Japanese family and the humble Cheung family.

Thus, in the first haircut scene in Macau in the 1950s, Aiko asks her daughter Hueyin to follow the (supposedly superior) Japanese tradition by having a Japanese elementary haircut and wearing a Japanese elementary school uniform. Similarly, in the haircut scene before the wedding in the 1970s, Aiko follows and identifies with the western hair fashion and asks Hueyin to have a short curly haircut, which turns out to be the popular hairstyle of the 1950s in the West. In both scenes, Aiko does so not to “create a traditional identity pleasing to her” but to identify with Japanese and western cultures which are regarded by her as superior; however, her trip to her hometown Beppu in Japan after her younger daughter’s wedding changes her rosy vision of her loving homeland. During her stay in Japan, Aiko feels disconnected.


\(^{11}\) Ibid, 49.
with her former friends and even with her family members. The confrontation between Aiko and her nationalistic younger brother makes her realize the powerful nationalistic discourse in Japan, which causes her disillusion with her homeland.

In contrast with the mother’s ambivalent self-identification, the film delineates the daughter’s psychological development and growing sense of self-awareness. In the beginning of the film, Hueyin is a young film school graduate who socializes with her British friends in various entertainments and cares little about international politics, such as the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and the 1973 Middle East War. As the narrative progresses, the audience sees the conflict between Hueyin and her Japanese mother Aiko. Only when she accompanies her mother to the latter’s hometown Beppu in Japan, does Hueyin begin to understand her mother’s alienation of living in a foreign country with little knowledge of its language and culture. By the end of the film, Hueyin resolves the conflict with her mother, and moreover, she associates her life with the life of ordinary people in Hong Kong.

In this sense, the film can be viewed as the delineation of Aiko’s alienation and Hueyin’s growth. Then an interesting question arises, why would the director juxtapose the mother’s alienation with the daughter’s growth in one film? In my view, such juxtaposition reflects the director Ann Hui’s contemplation on women’s different statuses in history and Hong Kong identity. The mother Aiko’s alienation results from her disillusion with her homeland Japan and her reluctance to succumb to the dominant social discourse in both Japan and China. Her early choice of abandoning her homeland Japan and living in China with her Chinese husband demonstrates her brave resistance against the dominant Japanese imperialistic discourse. But after her twenty years’ experience in China, Aiko begins to realize that the dominant discourse in China is a nationalistic and xenophobic one, similar to that in Japan. Feeling her disability to directly confront the dominant social discourse in China, Aiko chooses to identify with Japanese and western cultures and meanwhile adjusts herself to local Cantonese culture by speaking the language and following the customs; however, her ambivalent sentiments towards Japan and China intensify her feeling of living as an exile in a foreign land.

In contrast, the daughter Hueyin finds her own identity and the way to combat the dominant social discourse. Troubled by her Japanese and Chinese heritage in her childhood and adolescence, Hueyin gradually learns the way to resolve the conflicts between the two. During her trip to Japan, she experiences exoticism, alienation, and exclusion. At the same time, Japanese people’s kindness and efforts to communicate with her make her realize the possibility of crossing linguistic, cultural and national boundaries. Thus, for Hueyin, the trip to Japan is an epiphany, during which she resolves the conflict with her mother, and achieves a new sense of her own identity. Working as a journalist at a local Hong Kong television station, Hueyin has the ability and opportunity to create a counter
discourse against the dominant discourse. Her investment in supporting Hong Kong people’s anti-corruption demonstration is an apt example. Hueyin’s visit to her grandparents in Canton uncovers the absurdity of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) in mainland China, and allows her to question her Chinese identity.

Seen in this light, the mother Aiko symbolizes the marginalized women who lacks the ability to combat the dominant social discourse whereas the daughter Hueyin stands for modern women who master skills to cross various national, cultural and linguistic boundaries and challenge the dominant social discourses. Through juxtaposition of the mother’s and the daughter’s different identifications and their consequences, the film uncovers both the mother’s and the daughter’s disillusionment with their homelands (Japan and China) and stresses the uniqueness and importance of a local Hong Kong identity. In the end of the film, Aiko finds herself missing the hot Hong Kong soup rather than the cold Japanese food, and Hueyin identifies herself as a Hong Konger and devotes herself to social activism in Hong Kong.

Similar to Song of the Exile, Shuqin Huang’s Woman, Demon, Human (1987) is also a film about women’s silence and agency. Based on the biography of the famous Chinese female opera artist Pei Yanling, the film tells a story of the female protagonist Qiu Yun who both denies and desires femininity, and whose success only comes from her theatrical role as a male (ghost). Through the representation of Qiu Yun’s psychological development from a female perspective, Shuqin Huang uncovers the plight of modern Chinese women and questions gender policy in contemporary China.

In Song of the Exile, the obstacles to Hueyin’s self-identification are her multiple national and cultural identities, whereas in Woman, Demon, Human, the obstruction to Qiu Yun’s self-identification comes from her contradictory attitudes towards her sex as a woman and her female role. The paradoxical situation of female identity is illustrated in the title of the film. The film’s Chinese title is Ren, Gui, Qing and literally it is translated as Human, Ghost, Love. The title creates ambiguities: it can be read as the love between human and ghost or the love among humans and among ghosts. More importantly, the Chinese title Ren, Gui, Qing does not stress the gender identity of ren (human) whereas the official English title of the film Woman, Demon, Human accentuates the gender identity of the film.

The conscious questioning of female identity is evident in the opening sequence. The film begins with a close-up of three bowls containing white, black and red pigments respectively. Then, three Chinese characters roll onto the screen, with “human” (ren) superimposed over white pigments, “demon/ghost” (gui) over black pigments, and “love” (qing) over red pigments. Following the title, the credits of the

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12The official English translation of the Chinese title Ren, Gui, Qing is Woman, Demon, Human, which translates Guias Demon; however, a more accurate translation of Guiisghost.
film crew roll, with theatrical images as the background. Interestingly, the theatrical images begin with a male ghost image Zhong Kui\(^{13}\), and ends with an anonymous female image. Then the audience sees the female protagonist Qiu Yun sitting in front of a dressing mirror as she prepares for a performance. A series of close-ups shows her applying makeup and putting on the costume. The process of her preparation alternates with lines of credits, and ends with an intriguing theatrical image which juxtaposes Zhong Kui’s face (on the left) and a young woman’s face (on the right) in a way that the two seem to confide to each other.

After she finishes her transition from a beautiful young woman to an ugly male ghost, Qiu Yun sits in a room full of mirrors. Then, the audience sees that Qiu Yun studies herself in the mirror, and meanwhile the male ghost also studies himself in the mirror. As the camera slowly pans from left to right, the image of the actress and that of the male ghost merge with each other and become indistinguishable. The proximity between the actress Qiu Yun and the theatrical male ghost Zhong Kui indicates the theme of this film. The mirror scene reveals the inner world of Qiu Yun, and raises some important questions: Is the person female or male? A real person or a theatrical persona? A human being or a ghost?

In flashbacks, the audience sees Qiu Yun’s personal and artistic trajectories and her paradoxical attitudes towards her sex as a female. In *Women Through the Lens: Gender and Nation in a Century of Chinese Cinema*, Shuqin Cui offers a detailed reading of Shuqin Huang’s *Woman, Demon, Human*. Probing into Qiu Yun’s relationship with her mother and with the men in her life, Cui argues that,

> The core relationships that entangle the heroine [Qiu Yun] throughout her life involve male figures—her father, a male teacher [Zhang], and her husband. However, the original base from which all further relationship derive is the mother-daughter bond, a powerful shadow always haunting the female protagonist. Because of the threat posed by the memory of maternal betrayal, the daughter’s desire for a conventional, traditional female identity established in relation to a male figure fails at each stage of her development. To become someone not identified with her mother forms the heart of Qiu Yun’s lifelong struggle for selfhood\(^{14}\).

\(^{13}\)Zhong Kui: A Chinese mythological figure, which is traditionally regarded as a guardian spirit, the King of ghosts, and a vanquisher of ghosts and evils.

Similar to Cui, I believe that the troubled relationship between Qiu Yun and her mother exerts great influence on her relationship with men in her life, but I don’t think Qiu Yun desires “a conventional, traditional female identity”. Instead, I contend that Qiu Yu possesses ambiguous attitudes toward her female identity. Moreover, the estranged mother-daughter relationship and Qiu Yun’s failed relationships with the three men largely derive from the dominant patriarchal values and the discriminatory household registration policy in China at that time.

In the following, I will first analyze the development of Qiu Yun’s female consciousness, and her relationship with her mother, her father, Teacher Zhang and her husband, and then I will investigate deep reasons for Qiu Yun’s ambivalent identification with her female identity and her failed relationship with men in her life. The film delineates three stages of development of Qiu Yun’s female consciousness: her initial recognition and denial of her female identity in her childhood, her desire for the female identity in her adolescence, and her negotiation and compromise in her adulthood.

Qiu Yun’s initial consciousness of her female identity comes from her confrontation with the powerful social discourse that interpellates her as the daughter of an adulterous mother in her childhood. Playing a game with a group of boys, Qiu Yun hides in a hay-filled barn, where she happens to see a woman and a man having sex. Observing the woman for a while, Qiu Yun finds that the woman is her mother. Confused and scared by the scene, she runs away screaming. Before Qiu Yun understands what has happened, Qiu Yun’s mother deserts her daughter and her husband, and elopes with the unknown man the next day. Her mother’s colleagues ask her purposefully, “Where is your mother? Why don’t you watch for her carefully? That woman really has no shame”. Such mockery and humiliation cause great shame for Qiu Yun. Her encounter with the boys further uncovers the cruel social realities and the power of social discourse.

In a scene after her mother’s elopement, a medium shot shows that Qiu Yun alone, molding clay figures from mud. A group of boys come to her, and destroy her work. Among them, there is a close playmate Qiu Yun calls Second Brother. When the boys begin to abuse her, Qiu Yun implores Second Brother to protect her. Second Brother hesitates shortly and then joins the other boys, and taunts her “Who is your brother? Go home and find your whore mother and father”. Feeling greatly offended, Qiu Yun goes to fight with Second Brother, but she cannot win and is pressed down by him. Her weak cry is swallowed by the boys’ malicious taunt. During the whole process, the only word Qiu Yun says is her plea to Second Brother, which is cruelly turned down by the latter. This scene vividly depicts the way in which the powerful social discourse suppresses the female’s voice. It interpellates Qiu Yun as the shamed daughter of an adulterous mother, and it punishes and suppresses the discordant voices. Second Brother’s betrayal forces Qiu Yun to face
her identity as a female. More importantly, as Dai Jinhua points out, this traumatic event urges Qiu Yun to understand that men will not ally with women when the latter decide to rebel against the patriarchal system.\(^\text{15}\)

The humiliation and trauma brought by her identity as a daughter of an adulterous mother causes Qiu Yun’s resistance to womanhood as represented by her mother. Though she denies her womanhood, social discourse forces her to recognize and admit her sex as a woman. The restroom incident is an apt example. In one scene, Qiu Yun hides in women’s restroom to escape teacher Zhang’s pursuit; however, she is thrown out of the restroom due to her tomboy appearance. Though Qiu Yun and her female friends try to convince others that she is a girl, people distrust them, and some even suggest that she take off her trousers to prove her sex. For these people, sex, gender and gender performance are one and the same. They believe that a short-hair boy like person must be a boy, and a person who plays male theatrical role must be a male. Thus, the short-haired Qiu Yun is regarded as a sexual transgressor and needs to be punished. The crisis is solved when teacher Zhang appears and convinces people of Qiu Yun’s sex. Intriguingly, Qiu Yun’s female identity can only be proved by a man. The explanations of herself and her female friends are null in the face of the dominant (male) social discourse.

Her denial of her gender begins to change when she meets her first love—teacher Zhang in her adolescence. As a famous handsome actor in a provincial troupe, teacher Zhang appreciates Qiu Yun’s theatrical talent and recommends her to the provincial troupe. Qiu Yun’s female consciousness begins to wake when the two fall in love with each other. Though she still plays male roles on stage, she endeavors to make herself look more feminine and forbids others to call her a tomboy. But when Zhang confesses his love to Qiu Yun one night in a hay-filled barn, she refuses him and flees away. The relationship with Zhang evokes her consciousness of her own sex and meanwhile it also activates her memory of her mother’s adultery in the same barn. Once again, the social discourse displays its disciplinary function. As the romantic relationship between Zhang and Qiu Yun develops, various gossips fill the dressing room, “They are having an affair…. They meet in the barn…. Her mother did the same thing…. Like mother like daughter”. The rumors tear off Qiu Yun’s male mask and uncovers her sex as a woman. The social discourse affirms Qiu Yun’s womanhood, and regulates her action. It demands her to maintain her proper position, and reminds her that any violation of patriarchal morals will cause severe punishment. The nail incident is a convincing example.

When she replaces teacher Zhang and becomes the first actress who plays leading male roles in the provincial troupe, Qiu Yun becomes the target of discontent and jealousy, and consequently she falls victim to the conspiracy of the nail incident.

\(^\text{15}\)Jinhua Dai, *Film Criticism*, 257.
In the scene, Qiu Yun’s hand is punctured by a nail which has been inserted on a table purposefully before her performance. As Qiu Yun finishes acting and returns to the dressing room, all her colleagues come close to examine her hand. Rather than comforting her, they feel satisfied by watching Qiu Yun’s wound and misery. The incident is analyzed by Xingyang Li in the article “The Voice of History and the Voice of Women: A Study of Shuqin Huang’s Women’s Films.” Contextualizing Huang’s cinema in the background of the roots-seeking and self-critique art movement in China in the late 1980s, Li argues that this film resonates with the leading art trend at that time and it reviews the illness of traditional Chinese culture. Li contends that,

It [The nail incident] exposes the deviousness of those who are jealous of talent; it satirizes the hypocrisy of those who make a display of virtue; and it laments the way in which the vulgar masses take pleasure in the pain of others.16

I want to add that the incident also reveals the powerful social discourse’s disciplining of a woman who transgresses her gender position to replace a man to play a male role.

The dominant social discourse’s regulation of Qiu Yun’s female identity is also found in her experience in her adulthood. In this stage, her primary identification fluctuates between her familial role and her theatrical role. The difficulty in fulfilling both roles comes from her husband and the dominant social discourse. Though the husband is invisible throughout the film, he stands for the dominant male discourse. He is a narrow-minded man who neglects family duty and shows little support for his wife’s career. He gambles all day and is deeply in debt. Through the conversation between Qiu Yun and her female colleague, the audience learns about the husband’s attitudes towards Qiu Yun’s performance: He thinks she is ugly when she plays male roles, but he feels upset if she plays female roles. Qiu Yun’s decision to play male roles reflects her compromise under the constant regulative male gaze.

Apart from the intervention of her husband, Qiu Yun also lives under the surveillance of public discourse. This time, public discourse transforms from gossips and rumors to comments in print. In one scene, a man visits Qiu Yun’s home and claims to be a friend of her husband. He informs Qiu Yun that he holds a large portion of her husband’s gambling debts. When Qiu Yun responds that it is not her affair, the man shows her a journal article titled “Qiu Yun’s Happy Family”. The article reports that during the Cultural Revolution Qiu Yun’s husband did not betray her, and instead he supported her career, and accordingly, her husband “deserve[d]"
part of her money and honors". This scene reveals public discourse’s regulation of a successful woman. As a famous actress, Qiu Yun is required by society to play the role of a good wife and a loving mother and exhibit herself as a public model. The failure to fulfil such roles will lead to the failure of her career as well as of her family life.

Though she faces many obstacles in her artistic journey and life, Qiu Yun negotiates with the dominant social discourse through her transgender masquerade. The phenomenon of masquerade is analyzed by Mary Ann Doane in “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator”. Probing the relationship between the female spectator and masquerade, Doane argues that,

> Above and beyond a simple adoption of the masculine position in the relation to the cinematic sign, the female spectator is given two options: the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire, in assuming the image in the most radical way. The effectivity of masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman.\(^{17}\)

Doane’s analysis of the relationship between the female spectator and the masquerade is applicable to the case of the theatrical actress Qiu Yun. By playing a male role, Qiu Yun is able to obtain a distance between herself and the male persona; therefore, she finds a way to negotiate with the binary gender politics in the society. But her mask is only temporary and she has to play her socially assigned female role in real life. As the previous analysis demonstrates, any transgression of her female role will result in punishment and exile. For instance, when she replaces the male actor Zhang and becomes the leading actress who plays male roles, Qiu Yun becomes the target of rumor and verbal assault in the provincial troupe. She falls victim to the nail incident and is ostracized from the troupe.

Qiu Yun’s ambivalent attitude towards her male theatrical role and her female role in real life is largely influenced by gender policies in China from the 1950s to the 1980s. In the article “From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women’s Public Sphere in China,” Mayfair Mei-hui Yang explores the vicissitudes of the category of gender in modern China, its relationship with the modern state and market economy, and the historical conditions for the emergence of a women’s public sphere in contemporary China. Yang argues that,

\(^{17}\) Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator,” in *Screen* 25, no. 3-4(1982): 87.
What is put forth in this essay in that the modern category of gender in China is a fragile formation and that its emergence was so overshadowed by the project of nation building that it did not develop into a category of affirmative self-identity for a women’s movement led by women themselves.

Examining its mechanism on gender regulation, Yang reasons that the Chinese socialist state replaces the traditional family patriarchy with the new state patriarchy, and accomplishes gender erasure and subordination of other kinds of difference to class difference in the Mao era. The establishment of the state bureaucracy—All-China Women’s Federation (Fulian) in 1949 improved women’s social status to some extent, but at the same time, it contributed to the socialist state’s regulation of women. In the Post-Mao era, state feminism has declined under the influence of the market economy, but meanwhile Chinese women face new problems, such as objectification by the consumer culture and the reemergence of gender discrimination against women in the market economy.

As many scholars have pointed out, the slogan of gender equity “whatever a man can do, a woman can do too” in the Mao era actually measures women against a male standard. If a woman wants to be successful, she needs to meet the male criteria. Such is Qiu Yun’s case in the film. When she makes up her mind to receive theatrical training in her childhood, her father warns her of two paths awaiting an actress: she will either become either a good woman who will be bullied by men or a bad woman who will degrade her mother. To escape these two pathetic fates of women, Qiu Yun chooses to play male roles on stage. But Qiu Yun finds that she needs to play the female roles demanded by a male-dominated social discourse off stage. In this sense, she is still trapped in the pathetic fate of women: to avoid being “a bad woman who will degrade as her mother”, Qiu Yun chooses to be a good woman, who is bullied by the male-dominated social discourse.

Qiu Yun’s plight in the film mirrors the dilemma of modern women in contemporary China. Though women’s rights are guaranteed by laws and the state bureaucracy and All China Women’s Federation (Fulian), Chinese women still face sexual discrimination in many fields, such as education, employment, and social welfares. The reason is simple: laws which protect women’s rights are not enforced, and All China Women’s Federation (Fulian) often avoids direct confrontation with

18 Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, “From Gender Erasure to Gender Difference: State Feminism, Consumer Sexuality, and Women’s Public Sphere in China,” in Spaces of Their Own: Women’s Public Sphere in Transnational China, ed. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 36.
19 Yenna Wu, “Making Sense in Chinese ‘Feminism’/Women’s Studies,” 42.
the existent regime when it deals with women’s problems. The structural gender inequality determines that a woman cannot fully articulate her own voice in a male-dominant society.

Apart from depicting the female protagonist Qiu Yun’s ambivalence about her sex and gender, *Woman, Human, Demon* also represents Qiu Yun’s troubled relationship with her mother. Differing from the fraught yet empowering mother-daughter relationship in Ann Hui’s *Song of the Exile*, the mother-daughter relationship in *Woman, Demon, Human* is traumatic and suppressed. The mother’s adultery and elopement, and other people’s humiliation result in Qiu Yun’s rejection of her sex as a woman and her determination to play male roles on stage in her childhood and adolescence. After she becomes a mother herself, Qiu Yun begins to understand her mother, and the mother-daughter relationship improves. This can be illustrated in Qiu Yun’s obedience to her mother’s request to visit her biological father when she returns to her hometown to give a performance as an internationally renowned opera artist.

Unlike Hueyin and Aiko who have reached a mutual understanding after their trip to Japan, Qiu Yun and her mother remain alienated at the end of the film. In *Woman, Demon, Human*, Qiu Yun’s mother is a marginalized figure. Her marginality is reflected in her namelessness and silence. Through the narrative, the audience knows only that she is a nameless adulterous village opera actress who elopes with a man in Qiu Yun’s childhood. She is a silent woman, who lacks any chance to explain the reason for her affair and elopement. The mother’s affair becomes a major barrier to the mother-daughter relationship. The regulative social discourse labels her as a shameful woman and irresponsible mother, and deprives her of her right to explain or defend herself.

Similar to the alienated mother-daughter relationship, the father-daughter relationship is also regulated by social discourse. In the film, Qiu Yun has two fathers: her biological father and Mr. Qiu. Like her mother, her biological father is also a nameless and mysterious figure about whom the audience has little information. Moreover, he is a faceless figure. The first time, he appears as the back of a head to Qiu Yun in a hay-filled barn in her childhood, and the second time, he still appears as a faceless person who hides his face in a bowl and escapes from the gaze of his adult daughter. In contrast with the nameless faceless biological father, Mr. Qiu is portrayed as a loving responsible father who supports Qiu Yun’s career and loves her deeply. He helps train Qiu Yun in opera and sends her to a provincial troupe. Even so, the bond between Mr. Qiu and Qiu Yun is severed by the regulative social force—the Hukou system in modern China.

The Hukou system is the household registration system in mainland China with a long history of over two thousand years. A household registration record officially identifies a person as a resident of an area and includes identifying
information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth. The modern Chinese Hukou system divides Chinese citizens into two groups: urban residents and rural residents. Urban residents enjoy much better treatment than rural residents in many fields, such as, education, housing, and social welfare. The Chinese Hukou system from 1949 to 1978 restricts the mobility of residents. Under this circumstance, a rural resident needs to get several permits to move to the city. The migrant resident cannot enjoy several social welfare services, such as housing, education and medical care. In the film, Mr. Qiu and Qiu Yun are separated from each other when Qiu Yun works in the provincial troupe due to the Hukou system. For Qiu Yun, her identity will change from a rural resident to a city resident because of her new job whereas Mr. Qiu has to stay in his rural hometown as a rural resident.

Besides the alienated parent-child relationship, the film also depicts the Chinese Communist Party’s interference in individuals’ love and family issues. The relationship between Qiu Yun and Zhang is a convincing example. Like most Chinese people in the 1950s, Zhang has an arranged marriage. Though Zhang has been married to his wife for many years, he has little communication with her. When Zhang and Qiu Yun fall in love with each other, they face obstacles from the powerful system. The previous analysis shows the systems’s punishment of Qiu Yun in the nail incident. Likewise, Zhang also faces great pressure from the Chinese Communist Party. The party leader talks to Zhang and cautions him about his position as a role model as the leading male actor in the provincial troupe; moreover, the party leader invites Zhang’s wife and children to the provincial troupe so as to surveil him and regulate his behavior. Under the pressure of the Party and the social discourse, Zhang and Qiu Yun have to end their relationship and separate from each other. Zhang moves back to his hometown and leaves Qiu Yun in the provincial troupe.

In Woman, Demon, Human, Qiu Yun’s unfulfilled love and the distant parent-daughter relationship largely result from the regulative social force in a socialist patriarchal society. The absence of a powerful protective father and a loving mother figure reflect an orphan complex in Chinese society after various political movements from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. Such an orphan complex is self-referential for the director. Similar to the female protagonist Qiu Yun, the director Shuqin Huang and her artist parents suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution. Shuqin Huang’s parents Zuolin Huang and Yunzhi Jin studied drama in Britain in the 1930s. As the leading director and actress in Chinese drama of that time, they made great contributions to the development of Chinese drama and film. Under the influence of her parents, Shuqin Huang chose to study directing in Beijing Film Academy in the 1960s. However, the Huang family were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution due to their close association with western “bourgeois” film and drama.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\)“Zuolin Huang, Danni and Tianjin Drama”, Tianjin Municipal Bureau of Archives.
censorship in China, the director implicitly criticizes the socialist patriarchal society’s oppression of both men and women in her delineation of the alienated parent-child relationship and the Community Party’s intervention in the individual’s private life.

Differing from socialist patriarchal state’s control over family in Woman, Demon, Human, nationalism causes antagonism and alienation in family in Song of the Exile. Aiko’s alienation in the Cheung family and her early estranged relationship with her daughter come from the impact of the anti-Japanese nationalistic discourse in China. Similarly, the nationalistic discourse in Japan causes her younger brother’s hatred and humiliation of her.

The female protagonists in Woman, Demon, Human, and Song of the Exile are portrayed as exiles. In Woman, Demon, Human, Qiu Yun’s exile mainly comes from her transgression of her female role in a socialist patriarchal society whereas in Song of the Exile, the Japanese mother Aiko’s exile results from her disillusionment of her homeland Japan and her equivocal attitudes towards her own cultural identity. Compared with Woman, Demon, Human, Song of the Exile is more positive in its view in women’s agency in history. The daughter Hueyin’s mixed heritage and western education enable her to work as a journalist to create a counter discourse against the dominant masculinist discourse, for women as well as for other subordinated groups.

Despite their different backgrounds, Ann Hui and Shuqin Huang use their films to narrate repressed traumatic stories, refute stereotypical representation of women and demonstrate women’s agency in history. The two films’ examination of the entanglement between nationalism, socialism and patriarchy, and their explorations of women’s various forms of negotiation with these forces in the late 1980s can shed light on the study of the history of women’s movements and the development of feminist films in Hong Kong and mainland China.

Bibliography


A God or a Biological By-Product?
Rethinking the Imaginative Place of Man in the Post-Copernican Cosmos

Bryce Christensen

Abstract

Though some Enlightenment poets (including Pope and Thomson) hailed the Scientific Revolution as a great human accomplishment, that Revolution has unsettled a good number of creative writers (including Donne, Milton, Tennyson, and Waugh). For the common interpretation of modern science is one that consigns the earth to a trivial spot in the cosmos and reduces man to insignificance as a species. Such an interpretation of science necessarily robs literature—an inherently anthropocentric art—of its traditional high status. But another interpretation of science—one that affirms rather than threatens literature—emerges in the recognition that terrestrial humans are the only known creatures doing science, just as they are the only known creatures creating art. Such a recognition of human uniqueness can foster a cross-disciplinary union of science and literature, to the benefit of both.
A God or a Biological By-Product?
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Bryce Christensen

“Nature and Nature’s Laws lay hid in Night:/God said, Let Newton be! And all was light,” wrote Alexander Pope in a couplet so fulsome in its praise for the great scientist that Samuel Johnson found it blasphemous.¹ In only slightly less ecstatic terms, 18th-century poet James Thomson lauded Newton as an “All-piercing sage!” and as “our philosophic sun!” so marveling at the brilliance of Newton’s work that he rhetorically asked, “Did ever poet image aught so fair,/Dreaming in whispering groves by the hoarse brook,/Or prophet, to whose rapture Heaven descends?”²

But many are the creative writers who have not shared Pope and Thomson’s enthusiasm for the modern scientific project. In responding to a Copernican science displacing the earth from its traditional cosmic centrality, John Donne famously lamented in the early 17th century:

...[N]ew philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and th’ earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world’s spent,
When in the planets, and the firmament
They seek so many new; they see that this
Is crumbled out again to his atomies.
‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply, and all relation:

This is the world’s condition now . . . .³

Donne’s perspective on the Copernican revolution may seem bleak and dark, but others shared that perspective. The growing perception in the 17th-century that science had marginalized the earth and its human inhabitants indeed helps explain why Milton deliberately set that science aside in setting his Paradise Lost in a pre-Copernican Ptolemaic cosmos. Thus, when Milton sends Satan and Raphael soaring, it is in an essentially Ptolemaic, earth-centered cosmology. Thus readers of Milton’s masterpiece find God and his angels “in Heav’n, above the starry Sphere,” while the exiled Satan walks “upon the firm opaquè Globè/Of this round World, whose first convex divides/The luminous inferior Orbs, enclos’d/From Chaos and th’ inroad of Darkness old.”

To be sure, as critic Merritt Y. Hughes has pointed out, “Milton was as well aware as his enlightened contemporaries were of the inadequacy of the Ptolemaic view of the heavens.” Indeed, Milton had visited Galileo in Fiesole and seems to hint at his own intellectual, if not aesthetic, acceptance of the new Copernican science in the angel Raphael’s reflection on the speculative possibility that “the Sun/[might] Be Centre to the World, and other Stars/By his attractive virtue and their own/incited, dance about him various rounds.”

The growing cultural power of the Copernican worldview, which seemed to push man and his planetary home out of the center of the universe, however, makes it all the more remarkable that at almost the very same time that Donne was mourning the loss of all human-scale pre-Copernican coherence, Shakespeare was penning Hamlet’s famous reflections on man as a creature singularly “noble in reason . . . infinite in faculties . . . in form and moving . . . express and admirable; in action . . . like an angel . . . in apprehension . . . like a god! The beauty of the world.”

But if Shakespeare’s encomium on man appears implausible within the Copernican cosmos, it seems even more strikingly implausible within the worldview offered by Darwin’s theory of evolution, a theory that mathematician Christopher Potter has plausibly identified as fundamentally just an extension of the Copernican thesis, another potent scientific assault on the view that man is the center of the universe. Indeed, Potter sees the cosmological displacement of the earth, which so
distressed Donne, as central to the entire modern scientific project. Potter thus asserts,

Modern science could be said to have begun . . . when Copernicus removed the earth from the centre of the universe and put the sun there. With this single act he set out a principle by which science has been guided ever since: that not only is mankind not at the physical centre of the universe, it is not at the centre in any fashion, literally or metaphorically. What launched the scientific revolution was not the placing of the sun at the center of the cosmos (from where, anyway, it is later removed) as much as the removal of the earth. It’s not about us.\(^9\)

Underscoring the same point, twenty-first century philosopher Massimo Pigliucci has remarked, “Human beings have always desperately tried to differentiate themselves from the animal world. . . . But . . . science has made it increasingly difficult to find clear-cut differences between us and other animals.”\(^10\)

It is therefore not surprising that we hear a mournful echo of Donne’s laments over science in Tennyson’s perplexed broodings over Darwinian science. Tennyson seems particularly disturbed by the possibility that in the evolutionary process that generates the “seeming-random forms” that populate the earth, “Man, [Nature’s] last work, who seem’d so fair/Such splendid purpose in his eyes” and who seemed “The herald of a higher race‖ of life might at last prove no more than “a monster . . . a dream,/A discord. Dragons of the prime,/That tare each other in their slime/Were mellow music match’d with him.”\(^11\)

Nor is it surprising that almost a century after Tennyson’s dark broodings about the dubious position man holds in Darwinian science, we find Evelyn Waugh indulging in his 1928 novel Decline and Fall in a sardonic parody of Hamlet’s marvelings about man’s angelic and even godlike character. Waugh, in fact, explicitly invokes Darwinian science in mocking man as “obscure and gross [in] his prancing and chattering on his little stage of evolution” and in ridiculing as “loathsomely and beyond words boring [in] all the thoughts and self-approval of this biological by-product”\(^12\)


When Tennyson voices fears about the place that modern science assigns to man, when Waugh indeed mocks post-Darwinian man as a mere biological accident, we see creative writers taking to heart what Potter and others have identified as one of the central messages of modern science: Namely that, when it comes to the meaning of the universe, “It’s not about us,” as Potter puts it. Philosopher John Gray even believes that when its theories are interpreted with tough-minded honesty, “science [can serve] as a remedy for anthropocentrism”; after all “Darwin’s theory shows the truth of naturalism: we are animals like any other,” so that a rigorously interpreted science means that “humans can never be other than straw dogs” in the cosmic scheme of things.”

But the belief that modern science has demonstrated the cosmic unimportance of man almost immediately entangles its advocates in a quandary. For those who argue this position must somehow deal with the fact that, so far as we know, the only creature in the entire universe that can do science—whether it be Copernican, Darwinian, Newtonian, or Einsteinian—is man. As Potter somewhat awkwardly concedes, “only we humans among the life-forms we know of possess neural connections complex enough for the kind of consciousness to have emerged that allows us to comprehend the universe.” On pages 79 and 80 of his book, Potter proclaims that for centuries post-Copernican science has been guided by the understanding that “not only is mankind not at the physical centre of the universe it is not at the center in any fashion, literally or metaphorically,” and yet by page 264 he must admit that “For the time being at least, the story of the material world remains our story alone” because “something about our brain . . . appears to grant us [a unique] privilege in the world,” namely that of using science to tell the story of the universe. No wonder Gray laments that even though he believes that a rigorous understanding of science should serve as an antidote to anthropocentrism, in fact “science has been used to support the conceit that humans are unlike all other animals in their ability to understand the world.”

Gray might wish to dismiss as a foolish and vain “conceit” the belief that among the creatures in the universe, humans are unique in “their ability to understand the world,” but how would he or anyone else seriously challenge it? True, modern science allows for the possibility of non-human intelligent life forms on other planets, life forms that could do science as well or better than humans. Potter is hardly alone in his “hope that there are many other [scientific] storytellers in other parts of the universe, spread across space and throughout time, telling the same story.” Potter even admits that the supposition of “their existence is . . . often the

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14 Potter, op. cit., 268.
15 Potter, op. cit., 79-80, 264-266, emphasis added.
[scientists’] defence against human privilege.” But so long as empirical verification remains an essential part of science and so long as—as Potter sadly concedes—no alien intelligences have “been in touch,” then human privilege remains a reality, a reality starkly evident in the unique status of humans as the doers of science. 17

We simply have no empirical evidence of non-terrestrial forms of intelligent life doing science anywhere else in the cosmos. And we will look in vain on this planet for chimpanzees or bonobos or dolphins or any other non-human creature doing science. Copernican and Darwinian scientists may inform us that their work has demonstrated that there is nothing special about our planet, nothing special about our species, but so long as earth remains the only setting where we can find scientific thought and man remains the only creature we can find doing scientific thinking, we may reasonably regard their attack on anthropocentrism not only as dubious but as self-defeating.

The singularity of terrestrial humans as the only scientists in the cosmos has even emboldened religious thinkers, such as physicist-priest Stanley Jaki, who actually affirms the cosmic centrality and uniqueness of the human species. Jaki, in fact, argues that it was Christian belief in man’s uniqueness as the only creature created “in the likeness of God” (Gen. 5: 5) that inspired the kind of intellectual confidence necessary to launch science. “Man figured in the Christian dogma of creation as a being specially created in the image of God,” Jaki explains. “This image consisted . . . in man’s rationality as somehow sharing in God’s own rationality . . . Man’s reflection on his own rationality had therefore to give him confidence that his created mind could fathom the rationality of the created realm [of nature].” 18

Though some of Jaki’s fellow scientists have resisted his line of thinking, his perspective has been endorsed by other scholars. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead is clearly thinking along the same lines as Jaki when he asserts in his Lowell Lectures that “faith in the possibility of science” is ultimately “derivative from medieval theology.” 19 (qtd. in Stark 147). Developing the same point, historian of science Rodney Stark remarks, “To the extent that religion inspires efforts to comprehend God’s handiwork, knowledge will be forthcoming, and science arises as ‘the handmaiden’ of theology.” 20

Of course, questions about the place of man in the cosmos demand attention from students of literature as much or more as they demand attention from scientists. Christian poet and critic G.K. Chesteron attaches great significance to “the impulse of

17 Potter, op. cit., 266.
20 Stark, op. cit., 149.
"art" because such art comes to us from a "creature . . . truly different from all other creatures": "Man is the microcosm;" Chesterton insists, "man is the measure of all things; man is the image of God." 21

As Jaki and others would likely point out, the insistence on the uniqueness of man as an artist harmonizes quite well with the thinking of those who recognize the stunning singularity of humans as the only creatures in the cosmos who do science—even Copernican and Darwinian science. And serious students of literature have reason to endorse this two-fold affirmation of the uniqueness of the species. For, inevitably, the status and meaning of literature depend upon the place of man in the universe. Literature, after all, is a decidedly anthropocentric art.

Modern literary scholars might recoil from the flat didacticism of Pope’s declaration:

The proper study of Mankind is Man,

... Created half to rise, and half to fall;  
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;  
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl’d:  
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world! 22

But virtually everyone who cares about literature will understand that novelist Virginia Woolf is focused fixedly on terrestrial human life when she asserts that the purpose of literary art is to deliver “life [as] a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end” and when she holds up for particular praise the literary artist who can “reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain.” 23 (2089-2090).

Woolf might be singular among creative writers in her literary talents and in her critical acumen, but she is entirely typical in her unwavering focus on the human condition. It is the terrestrial human life, the flickerings of the terrestrial human brain, that will forever command center stage in literature. If a few daring science-fiction writers do focus their attention elsewhere, chronicling the lives of non-human and non-terrestrial creatures, they should not be surprised if relatively few students of literature follow them into their artistic explorations. Indeed, the censure that Woolf deals out to writers who “write of unimportant things” would seem, in the eyes

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of most lovers of literature, to apply to any writer who turns away from a focus on terrestrial man.

On the other hand, if modern science persuades us that man himself is an unimportant thing—a “loathsome . . . biological by-product,” in Waugh’s phrasing—then it inevitably follows that anthropocentric literature, which is virtually all of literature—is likewise loathsome, trivial, and inconsequential. The imaginative status of literature must inevitably rise or fall with the cosmological status of man.

At least since Donne, many writers and thinkers have concluded that science has decisively diminished that status. Science, they have concluded, has shown us that man is merely a random and accidental “biological by-product” inhabiting an equally random and accidental planet. The literary art of such a negligible creature on such a negligible planet can hardly count for much. But perhaps it is time for those who care about and value literature to ask ourselves again if that is what science has really shown us. For regardless what Copernican and Darwinian scientists may tell us about the supposed marginality of man and his terrestrial home, one inescapable fact remains: so far as empirical science can tell us, man is the only creature in the cosmos doing science.

If science is a valuable and meaningful pursuit, man’s unique status in advancing that pursuit inevitably confers on humans an elevated, singular, and central status—a status entirely consistent with the ineradicably anthropocentric nature of literary art. The intrinsically human status of science thus lends force to critic Morris Sweetkind’s argument for an explicit cross-disciplinary anthropocentrism that will resolve the modern tensions between science and literary art. “Instead of being enemies,” writes Sweetkind, “poetry and science should become allies in investigating the mystery of human existence and in exploring the joys and agonies of the human condition. Our best hope for survival,” Sweetkind adds, “lies in ending this cultural schism [between poetry and science] and establishing a harmony between these two essential activities of mankind.”

Of course, that harmony can emerge only when scientists join literary artists in recognizing—and affirming—the singular and central status of the man as the only creature doing science, or creating literary art, and the singular and central status of the earth as the only known planet on which that creature and his astounding work in science and art is taking place. That is, we must embrace the magisterial wisdom of T.S. Eliot, who declares in the conclusion of The Four Quartets that “the end of all our exploring/Will be to arrive where we started/And know the place for the first time,” and thus to join Eliot in re-claiming “the last of earth left to discover/ [As] that which was the beginning.”

centrality of earth as the only planet home of the only known species that creates art or does science. This reclamation will not only elevate literary art to a status of dignity and honor but will also help heal the tragic breach separating students of literature from students of science, a breach famously lamented by physicist and novelist C.P. Snow in his landmark lecture *The Two Cultures*. The persistence of this gap, Snow asserts, has meant “practical and intellectual and creative loss” for both the literary and scientific cultures. This gap has, in Snow's view, fostered “total incomprehension of science” among literary intellectuals, often to the point of making their outlook “anti-scientific,” and it has resulted in an imaginative narrowness among many scientists, who end up “self-impoverished” because their “imaginative understanding “ has been nourished by “almost nothing at all” from “novels, history, poetry, [or] plays.”

Underscoring the pressing need to bridge this chasm separating science from literature, the physicist and Nobel laureate I.I. Rabi has declared, "Only by the fusion of science and the humanities can we hope to reach the wisdom appropriate to our day and generation. . . . Only with a unified effort of science and the humanities can we hope to succeed in discovering a community of thought, which can lead us out of the darkness, and the confusion, which oppress all mankind." As Donne, Milton, Tennyson and others have understood, an interpretation of science as the discovery that man counts for little in the cosmos offers no promising basis for a fruitful union of science and literature. But a cross-disciplinary anthropocentrism based on recognition of the artistic and scientific uniqueness of the human species can unite students of literature and of science in a shared appreciation for the creature Shakespeare extols as one “in apprehension . . . like a god. The beauty of the world.”

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A God or a Biological By-Product?
Rethinking the Imaginative Place of Man in the Post-Copernican Cosmos


Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: Narcissus Subverted and the Death of Desire

Andrea Lloyd

Abstract

Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* has been extensively studied as everything from a treatise on romanticism, to the first example of modern science fiction, to a study of human psychology before its time. Many studies have argued that Shelley’s novel is a reinterpretation of the myth of Narcissus and that Victor Frankenstein is a classic narcissist. I argue that Frankenstein is not just an ordinary Narcissus but instead a Narcissus *subverted*. In attempting (and succeeding) to create a physical being Frankenstein both transcends and subverts the myth of Narcissus. First, in giving life to the creature—who is in fact the outward manifestation of Frankenstein’s self-desire—he surpasses the transgression of Narcissus who can never attain that which he loves. In his inability to recognize the creature as his own reflection Frankenstein also becomes a Narcissus subverted, characterized by self-hate rather than self-love. As desire brought to life the creature is an imperfect reflection of Frankenstein, the subverted Narcissus. Finally, Robert Walton, whose voice frames the tale, acts as a Narcissus who is cured by his confrontation with the broken ruin of his fellow scientist, Frankenstein, thus creating a mythic framework that echoes as a warning through the ages.
Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*: Narcissus Subverted and the Death of Desire

Andrea Lloyd

Introduction

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* has often been studied as a hallmark of romanticism and the gothic, and as a harbinger of science fiction. The neuroses of Victor Frankenstein have also been treated extensively: he has been revealed to display characteristics of narcissism, and Joseph Kestner goes so far as to argue that the entire book, as a tripartite framework story, is structured as a narcissistic narrative wherein the tales of the creature, Frankenstein, and Walton each reflect upon the others. I would argue, however, that the tale of Frankenstein goes beyond a simple retelling of the myth of Narcissus and that Victor Frankenstein is more than a simple narcissist. Rather, it can be read as a simultaneous subversion and extension of the myth: Frankenstein, a subverted Narcissus, actually attains (and thus destroys) his desire by bringing to life his creation, which as a living reflection of Frankenstein then repeats the myth on his own terms.

I will first discuss how the myth of Narcissus serves as a study on human psychology and as an example of the unattainable nature of desire, which once attained ceases to exist. Narcissus is incapable of loving anyone other than himself, and it is ultimately his own reflection that becomes his hell and his prison. In giving into his libido, his self-desire, Narcissus is trapped by it. Secondly, I will detail how Victor Frankenstein, as a new Narcissus, ultimately commits a greater transgression than his mythic forebear and yet also becomes a Narcissus subverted. Frankenstein is bewitched by his scientific desire, which as we shall see is a conflation of the intellect with sexual libido, and seeks to create someone who resembles him. This is in fact none other than a narcissistic desire to seize his projection of himself. Frankenstein attains his desire, thereby surpassing even the transgression of Narcissus, and thus his projected image reveals itself to be illusory, even demoniacal. Frankenstein is nonetheless unable to recognize his own reflection and so also becomes Narcissus subverted, characterized by self-hate rather than self-love and forever trapped in Lacan’s mirror stage.

Thirdly, I will discuss how the creation, which as the *imago* or self-projection

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of Frankenstein, becomes a Narcissus twice subverted. The creation, whom as desire brought to life is a transgression of nature, is a Narcissus deformed because his creator Frankenstein, otherwise stated the object of which he is the reflection, does not recognize himself. Similarly the creature struggles at first to recognize his reflection because what he sees does not correspond to his conception of himself. Unlike Frankenstein, the creature is ultimately able to pass beyond the mirror stage and project his desires outside of himself. However, because his self-identity is necessarily formed by the projections of others who recognize him as a transgression of the laws of nature and thus hate him, he too is doomed to hate himself. He thereby becomes a monster that reflects the monstrous nature of the desire of his creator, Frankenstein. Finally, I will discuss the case of Robert Walton, who begins the tale as a potential Narcissus, enamored by his scientific desire or intellectual libido to the point that he puts the lives of others at risk in his attempt to reach the North Pole. His encounter with Frankenstein, who recounts his horrific tale as a warning against the dangers of giving into that very intellectual libido, serves to prevent him from following through with his aim. Thus, Walton becomes a Narcissus cured who can then transmit the myth of Frankenstein to posterity.

**Narcissus: Desire Never Attained**

The myth of Narcissus is fundamentally a tale of love between a man and the projection of his self-desire, represented in literal fashion by the reflection in the fountain. Narcissus’ reflection can be understood to be a phantasm, which in Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy is the reproduction of an object as an image in the mind. In other words, what Narcissus sees and desires to possess is not a physical object but rather an image, his own reproduction of reality. This is the key to his downfall, but also to his self-preservation in the Freudian sense of preserving a repressed desire that protects the ego and the pleasure principle.

A brief explanation of Freud’s pleasure principle and its relation to the act of desiring an object will clarify this point. The pleasure principle is predicated on the idea that all desire is the expression of a repressed instinct to repeat perfectly the first instance of satisfaction, which takes place before the formation of self-awareness. Though what the subject truly (narcissistically) desires is his own ego, “the true and original reservoir of libido,” this desire cannot be fully attained because the primary experience cannot be perfectly repeated. In addition, after coming to self-awareness

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4 Ibid., 62.
the subject recognizes that he (ego included) is separate from others, and thus undergoes the trauma of loss. The true nature of desire is repressed in an act of self-preservation, and is projected onto objects other than the subject’s ego. This act creates an insatiable gap between desire and fulfillment of desire: predicated on loss, desire can only exist while it remains unfulfilled, and repression has turned the original pleasure into the unpleasant.

Hence, because Narcissus desires his reflection, which is a projection of his self-love onto an object, the surface of the water, he cannot fulfill his desire. This is underlined by his repeated attempts to seize his ever-fleeting reflection. His ipseity remains forever separate from his alterity and so he dies without ever attaining that which he loves. In other words, he is killed by desire but his desire never dies.

**Victor Frankenstein as Narcissus**

As has been remarked by critics, Victor Frankenstein displays many symptoms of narcissism, and can in some senses be considered to be a reproduction of Narcissus. Like his forebear, Frankenstein enjoys a mythic status characterized by a distinguishing trait that sets him apart from all his fellows, a seemingly unavoidable and predetermined fate, and above all, that primary characteristic of self-love, which in the case of Frankenstein is an intellectual libido. Whereas Narcissus is renowned for his beauty and adored by all manner of beings, male and female, human and immortal, Frankenstein is celebrated for his intellectual prowess: “my ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students, and my proficiency that of the masters.” It is this thirst for knowledge that will ultimately be his downfall and force him to turn away from others, just as the beauty of Narcissus is the cause of his vanity that ultimately dooms him.

It is when he comes to know “himself,” or recognize his thirst for knowledge and his aptitude for the natural sciences, that Frankenstein’s fate is sealed. This is the equivalent of Narcissus first gazing into the fountain. His intellectual prowess, or his aptitude for “natural philosophy,” is the “genius that has regulated [his] fate,” the passion that rules his destiny. His yearning for knowledge goes above and beyond a desire to learn for learning’s sake however; from childhood he dreams of gaining glory: “wealth was an inferior object, but what glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!” This narcissistic desire to be admired by others becomes a

5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 8.
8 Ibid., 24.
9 Ibid., 26.
conflation of sexual desire and intellectual curiosity, creating a hybrid intellectual libido.

It is not insignificant that it is at the age of fifteen that Frankenstein observes a flash of lightning destroy an oak tree;\(^\text{10}\) it is this moment, symbolic of a sexual awakening, that also awakens his intellect. Frankenstein converts his natural sexual desire into a desire for scientific prowess, and thus represses his instincts. Like Narcissus, rather than follow the course of nature and love another other than himself, he turns inward to seek sexual satisfaction. Chris Baldick comments that Frankenstein’s efforts to create a human being constitute a “solitary and guilty attempt to achieve reproduction without a sexual partner.”\(^\text{11}\) In fact, Frankenstein himself remarks that: “a new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs.”\(^\text{12}\) Here we can see clearly that what Frankenstein desires is to (re)produce a new race, to become a lone father without a mother, a new God.

The case for Frankenstein’s scientific studies as a symptom of an intellectual libido and of his narcissism is further supported by his inability to sustain his relationships with others while feverishly pursuing that which he desires—to create a living being. This forms a marked contrast with his privileged upbringing, where for years he was his parents’ sole child: “my mother’s tender caresses and my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me are my first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by heaven.”\(^\text{13}\) Much like Narcissus, Frankenstein is an object of adulation and affection from an early age, but significantly it is not until he begins his scientific pursuits that he turns away from his friends and family.

Frankenstein even comments that during his quest for this ultimate scientific achievement, the creation of life, he “seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit” and that he both forgot his friends and deliberately ignored his family: “I wished, as it were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed.”\(^\text{14}\) His quest is all-consuming, and while his desire yet remains out of

\(^{10}\) Ibid: “I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump”


\(^{13}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 40.
his reach, he wastes away, like Narcissus at the pool: “my cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement.”

**Seductive (Ir)reality: Narcissus, Frankenstein and the Mirror Stage**

What Frankenstein desires is on the surface to create another human being, but as Baldick’s above comment suggests, this human being is really none other than the projection of Frankenstein’s own self-desire, his libido. In other words, the creature, while it is still but an idea in Frankenstein’s mind, is a phantasm, or, when studied through the lens of Lacan’s theory on the mirror stage, it is his *imago*. I would argue that the mirror stage is fundamental to gaining a full understanding of the nature of Frankenstein’s subversion and transgression of the myth of Narcissus.

Lacan’s theory on the mirror stage of development concerns the relation between a child and his reflected image, which he subsumes as an extension of his own reality or identity. In this pre-linguistic stage the child is incapable both of recognizing the illusory nature of his own reflection and of creating a conception of himself as separate from others. This leads him to mistake his own reflection as the ideal and perfect representation of the Self, the *je-idéal*, which he loves in a narcissistic fashion. Narcissus, before he realizes that he is looking at himself, adores and glorifies his reflection as a perfect being, just as Frankenstein celebrates his creation before it comes to life and chooses its parts based on their beauty: “his limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful...his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness.” It is necessary to underline the fact that what the infant, Narcissus, and Frankenstein love is nothing more than an illusion, known as the *imago*, a representation of the ego which is situated “before its social determination, in a fictional direction.” The reflection is a mere representation of reality, a sort of phantasm, rather than reality itself.

At the end of the mirror stage the child comes to realize the illusory nature of his reflection, which heretofore has constituted his self-identity, and in so doing must confront the paradox that he sees himself and yet does not see himself in his reflection at the same time. This event constitutes the shattering of the idealized *imago* and forces a reevaluation of the self-identity. It is at this moment, the transition from the mirror stage, that the child begins to feel anguish, which often manifests itself in the form of nightmares. This is when the mythical Narcissus at last

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15 Ibid., 39.


17 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 42.

recognizes his reflection, and enters into even greater despair, helpless as he is to cease loving his own illusion. We will see that Frankenstein instead flees from the mirror, refusing to confront the shattered *imago*. Where the child once projected his self-identity into the reflected image, he now begins to project his self-image onto the people and objects around him, thus formulating the object-desire of the other that is inherently a narcissistic desire for the self.\(^{19}\) Neither Frankenstein nor Narcissus is capable of reaching this point, doomed as they are to hate or love only their own images, though Narcissus is at least eventually capable of recognizing that which he loves.

David Marshall comments that the creature is a *semblable* of Frankenstein,\(^ {20}\) and if we hold this to be true, then the creature can also be seen as the ultimate reflection of Frankenstein’s desire. We have already seen that Frankenstein’s attempt to create a living human is an attempt at sexual reproduction, and we can now understand that this reproduction is in fact the very extension of Frankenstein’s ego, or self-image. The creature starts out as nothing more than an illusion, a phantasmatic ideal existing only in his mind, just as the *imago* is nothing more than an illusion held dear by the child. In fact, Frankenstein speaks of his vision as being ecstatic and pure: “No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success.”\(^ {21}\) While his desire remains unfulfilled, the reflection unmarred by reality, he is able to project his libido onto the inanimate form. It is an extension of his own ego, a reflection of himself, and thus a beauty wholly worthy of admiration.

However, unlike Narcissus who never attains his desire due to the empty and untouchable nature of his reflection, Frankenstein is able to transgress the laws of nature and actually bring his *semblable* to life. In so doing he attains and simultaneously destroys his desire, as desire can only survive in a state of tension and lack. Otherwise stated, the creature, which once represented Frankenstein’s desire, transforms into the hated “figure of anti-desire.”\(^ {22}\) The animation of the creature thus constitutes the breaking of the mirror: Frankenstein is forced to confront the reality of that which he has loved, and he is utterly horrified, decrying, “I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 5-6.

\(^{21}\) Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 38.
Andrea Lloyd

heart.”23 Where once the creation’s physique seemed beautiful, now the “luxuriances” of his features form “a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.”24 The confrontation between the ideal imago and the reality of the illusion is too much for Frankenstein, and he flees from the ruined mirror, refusing to recognize in his creation his own image.

The (anguished) dream immediately following the animation of the creature serves as further evidence of Frankenstein’s confrontation with his creation as exemplary of the mirror stage. He dreams of his beloved Elizabeth who then transforms into the corpse of his dead mother, and upon waking he sees the creature grinning down at him.25 The symbolism is evident: the creation, the culmination of Frankenstein’s pursuit of his intellectual libido and symbol of his self-projection, has replaced the more natural object of his sexual desire, Elizabeth. Desire is nevertheless predicated on lack, and in actually attaining that which he most wanted, Frankenstein causes the death of his own desire. Here his myth and his transgression pass above and beyond that of Narcissus.

Because his desire is destroyed, Frankenstein is unable to project it onto others, and this failing coupled with his refusal to recognize his creation for what it really is, his reflection, entraps him in the mirror stage. Where the Narcissus of myth in the end succeeded in recognizing that his loved was his own reflection, Frankenstein is incapable of overcoming the shattering of his illusion: he first flees from his creation and then embarks on a quest to destroy it. In so doing, he unwittingly seeks his own ruin.

It’s Alive! The Creature as a Living Phantasm

We have now seen that the creature is at first a phantasm, an ideal that exists only in the mind of Victor Frankenstein. It is upon coming to life that the desire of Frankenstein is transformed into a monstrous form, but more than this, the creature ultimately shows himself to be capable of thinking, of reasoning, of acting on his own. This will later be essential to the concept of the creature as a twice-subverted Narcissus, but first we will study the impact of this rational, breathing phantasm, on Frankenstein himself.

Whereas the reflection of Narcissus can only mimic his every action exactly, incapable as an empty projection of taking on a life of its own, the phantasm of

23 Shelley, Frankenstein, 42.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 43: “I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created.”
Frankenstein, because it is brought to life and given physical form, does not simply linger on the surface of the fountain. Instead it becomes its own person, and as we will see ultimately deals with the myth of Narcissus, or his status as a reflection of a Narcissus, in its own way. The creation is able to become more than a pure reflection of Frankenstein, and so it increases his creator’s sense of horror: in viewing his reflection brought to life, Frankenstein is confronted with an even more powerful and perturbing sense of alikeness and not-likeness than is experienced by those passing through the mirror stage in a more traditional fashion.

Furthermore, though he tries to flee from the mirror, Frankenstein is unable to escape the reality of his reflection, of his desire brought to life, because it too is capable of movement. Consequently the creature haunts the existence of Frankenstein like a ghostly shadow or alter-ego, appearing at key moments in which his creator is confronting the horrific nature of what he has done in giving life to his intellectual libido. It is an outward physical display of the torment within. It is thus highly significant that many of his viewings of the creature take place in the presence of, or through windows, which serve as reminders that every confrontation with the creature is equivalent to Frankenstein viewing himself in a mirror. Because the creature is the physical expression of self-desire, each of his appearances also constitutes a confrontation with the monstrous libido brought to life.

As we have already discussed, following the initial animation, Frankenstein first sees the creature upon waking from his dream of his dead Elizabeth-mother. He next confronts it upon his return to Geneva following the murder of his brother William. Significantly, the creature is illuminated by a flash of lightning, which recalls the oak tree shattered in a storm, the original inspiration of Frankenstein’s quest to satiate his intellectual libido.

It is here that Frankenstein first realizes that the creature might be responsible for his brother’s death, which realization will eventually lead him to understand that he is ultimately the responsible party.

The third encounter with the creature takes place in the wild, on the glacier near Mont Blanc, and it is in this meeting that the creature tells his own tale. The location of this encounter is once more of particular significance. In the novel, nature has come to replace God, and it is in his long solitary walks that Frankenstein confronts his own thoughts and attempts to find peace. To come across his alter ego while surrounded by the nearly mythical peaks and the cold ice of the glacier has a double signification.

Firstly, it is in his search to find himself, to find peace that Frankenstein confronts and has a lengthy conversation with his reflection, the creature. His imagois

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26 Ibid., 59: “I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me...A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy demon to whom I had given life.”
alive and able to explain its own point of view, and this meeting offers Frankenstein’s chance at redemption, the chance to confront what he has made and accept it, the chance to turn from self-hate and self-denial, to self-love and self-recognition. This might then afford him the opportunity to project his desires once more onto the other and pass out of his infernal entrapment in the mirror stage. The ultimate act of acceptance Frankenstein can offer his creature is to make him a companion, but of course this is not to be. The second signification of the location of this encounter, on the ice of the glacier, is to once again recall the intellectual libido of Frankenstein that causes him to reject the warmth of human affection. It is the pursuit of scientific desire to the point of conflating sexual libido and intellectual thirst that has made Frankenstein incapable of possessing women. Science is comprised of cold facts and figures and the warmth and passions of humans become mysterious and fearsome by comparison.

The final confrontations between Frankenstein and his creation occur once more in the context of windows, recalling their reflective natures. While working to construct a companion for the creature, Frankenstein looks up to see the monster observing him through the window. His monstrous reflection is observing his attempt to construct a second version of his original desire, and Frankenstein is repulsed and infuriated. Because his desire (to create a semblable) has already been attained and thus destroyed, transformed into horror at the all too real nature of his reflection, Frankenstein is unable to recreate his original task, and destroys his work with the monster watching on. In response, his reflection, the creature, warns him “remember, I shall be with you on your wedding-night.” It is a dire promise that his intellectual libido, represented in the form/image of the monster, will always haunt him.

Frankenstein is unable to escape his imago that he has refused to embrace, and thus cannot project his desires onto the female form. Instead his imago, the creation, literally prevents the consummation of the marriage with Elizabeth that is the stuff of nightmares for Victor. Once again, immediately following the discovery of Elizabeth’s corpse, Frankenstein sees his creation through a window: “with a sensation of horror not to be descried, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife.” Frankenstein’s reflection has stepped out of the fountain and has taken on power of its own, increasing its ability to haunt and torment far beyond that of the original Narcissus. Thus, Frankenstein’s experience becomes that of a new Narcissus, and as we will presently discuss, a Narcissus subverted.

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Desire is Dead: Victor Frankenstein as Narcissus Subverted

The sin for which Narcissus was condemned by the gods was a single transgression: he loved his own image and so defied the laws of nature that decree that desire must be projected outwards. However, as a Narcissus who surpasses the crime of his forebear, the transgression of Frankenstein is double: not only does he refuse to project his desire outward, insisting on loving his own phantasm and fearing women, he also defies nature a second time and actually produces the object of his desire in physical form, in so doing giving in to his once repressed libido. The monstrous nature of his reflection, his living phantasm, suggests the gravity of his misdeed. Desire can only be appealing when it remains firmly rooted in the land of fantasy, when it is masked and repressed; unveiled it is horrifying. In fact, it is above all Frankenstein’s very inability to accept the nature of his desire that makes it monstrous: “by misreading the figure of a man as a monster, by persisting in an illusion rather than granting him the name of man...he turns himself into a monster.”

This is the key to Victor Frankenstein’s existence as a Narcissus subverted. Where Narcissus after much lamentation is able to recognize that his own reflection, rather than another, is the object of his desire, Frankenstein never achieves this step. Rather he overcomes that pious distance between ipseity and alterity that ensures the conservation of desire or self-love; his horror, his refusal to face the shattered mirror, transforms his self-love into self-hate. No longer capable of loving his self-image, he desperately wishes “to extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed.”

Frankenstein’s creation is nonetheless capable of moving him to compassion with words, but as soon as he looks once more upon his reflection, his now-living libido, all turns once more to ash: “his words had a strange effect on me. I compassionated him and sometimes felt a wish to console him, but when I looked upon him, when I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened, and my feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred.” Unable to accept the true nature of what he has brought to life, he treats his reflection as a monster, and ironically in so doing creates exactly what he sees. Otherwise stated, rather than act as a benevolent father to his creature he once envisioned would be the start of a new and glorious race, Frankenstein selfishly abandons him to the cruelty of the world. Twisted by rejection, loneliness and betrayal, never having known the love that defined the

30 Shelley, Frankenstein, 74.
31 Ibid., 126.
happy childhood of Frankenstein, the creation becomes a murderer, responsible for the deaths of those who Frankenstein holds most dear.

If Frankenstein is Narcissus subverted, these deaths, which are caused by his desire brought to life, can be read as symbolic of his turning away from others, directing his love inward towards himself. When compared to the greatest gentleness and affection he was afforded by his own parents, Victor’s cold rejection of those he loves, and of his creation—his own “offspring”—is all the more striking. Nevertheless, because Frankenstein ultimately becomes a Narcissus who is characterized by self-hate rather than self-love, thanks to his transgression of the laws governing the repression of desire, it is not enough for him to abandon his loved ones. They too must be destroyed, because as object-people onto whom should be reflected his narcissistic self-love were he able to face his shattered imago and pass out of the mirror stage, they serve as ever-present reminders of his monstrous nature. Frankenstein laments (correctly) many times that it is he who is ultimately responsible for their deaths: had he not brought to life his own libido he might have remained a simple Narcissus, concerned only with himself. As a subverted Narcissus his punishment is to be even greater.

Consequently, like Narcissus before him, Frankenstein is tormented to the point of death by his futile pursuit of his reflection. Narcissus can only grasp at an empty image, but even the living phantasm of Frankenstein, his creation, is supernaturally agile, hovering always just beyond reach. Frankenstein wishes to grasp his image not to embrace it, as Narcissus before him, but to destroy it utterly. However, for all his differences Frankenstein is ultimately still a Narcissus, albeit subverted, and thus he will never fulfill his wish. Instead, he follows his creation into the arctic, where the cold and ice represent the impenetrable nature of desire, and there dies, emaciated and wasted away as Narcissus before him.

Imperfect Reflection: the Creature as Narcissus Twice Subverted

If the creation is the reflection of Victor Frankenstein, as his imago brought to life, and if Victor Frankenstein is a subverted Narcissus, it then holds true that the creation, as a living (and thus imperfect) reflection of a subverted Narcissus, is a twice-subverted Narcissus. In his encounter with Frankenstein, the creature describes his transformation from a new Adam into a fallen angel, which confirms his existence as a broken reflection of his creator. He is a broken reflection first and foremost because Frankenstein refuses to recognize what he sees in the mirror, fleeing from it rather than learning to incorporate it as his self-image, but also because the creature is, as we have seen, a living phantasm.
The creature decries his isolation from his creator, who should be his God, lamenting, “I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed.”\textsuperscript{32} This comparison to Adam is highly significant because Adam is created in the image of God, and so it is with the creature. Frankenstein is not God however, and the creature is a transgression of the laws of nature, doomed to utter isolation as the only one of his kind. The creature further hints at the fact that he is Frankenstein’s reflection, saying they are bound together “by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us.”\textsuperscript{33} So long as Narcissus is alive, he gazes at his reflection and his reflection gazes back; it is only upon the death of Narcissus that the reflection too can disappear. In the case of Frankenstein and the creature, the order of death is reversed, because the creature as a living phantasm is also capable of projecting his gaze. Thus the relation between Frankenstein and his reflection is doubly reciprocal, each the (imperfect) reflection of the other.

The creature is given life by Frankenstein, and so Frankenstein’s desires in a sense inform his own, albeit imperfectly. Hence, because Frankenstein (the subverted Narcissus) desired to create a semblable, or his ego in tangible form, so too the creature (the reflection of the subverted Narcissus) desires to have a companion, a semblable. Nonetheless, where for Frankenstein the creation of a semblable transforms his life into a nightmare, for the creature, whose existence is already wretched, a semblable will serve to erase his status as a monster. He is wretched and filled with hate because in his utter isolation, he is seen as a monster by those around him. Their views inform the creature’s self-image, and repeated rejection ultimately replaces his love with hate. Therefore, if he gains a companion, someone with whom he can wholly identify, he might have a chance at peace and happiness.

The creature’s status as a Narcissus is most directly referred to by the scene in which he looks into a pond and sees his own reflection. Up until this point, he has based his self-image on those people he sees around him, the De Lacey’s, who to the creature exemplify purity and gentleness. This is characteristic of point in the mirror stage where the child has not yet come to recognize his imago as an illusion nor himself as separate from those around him. The creature assumes that he too is like the De Lacey’s because he is inwardly like them, loving, gentle, and eager to help. Thus, when he confronts his own image for the first time, which is both the confrontation of Narcissus with his own reflection and the confrontation of the child with his imago, he is horrified, unable at first to accept that that which he sees is his own reflection.\textsuperscript{34} Yet as an imperfect reflection of Frankenstein, the creature is able to

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 94: “I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions; but how was I terrified when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully
tackle his status as a Narcissus in his own manner: like Narcissus, and unlike Frankenstein, he is able to grasp the fact that the fiend staring back at him is none other than himself. He is overcome with sorrow, or anguish, at the realization of the illusory nature of his self-image. Once again, this is symptomatic of his progression through the mirror stage, which is in itself reflective of Victor Frankenstein’s earlier experience in the same psychological terrain.

The creature subverts his status as an already subverted Narcissus (Frankenstein who hates but cannot recognize himself), when he moves beyond the mirror stage, an action neither of his predecessors is capable of undertaking. He projects his desire onto others, seeking love and comfort from the De Lacey’s and even from Frankenstein himself, and is simultaneously informed by the gaze of the other. Just as the child learns to construct his new self-identity via the other, the creature becomes a monster because he is seen as one. As a result, though he can recognize himself like Narcissus and unlike Frankenstein, he learns to hate himself, like Frankenstein and unlike Narcissus. Gavriel Reisner comments that this paradox confirms that the creature is a “dark Narcissus, his self-rejection an inverted mirror of narcissistic self-embrace.”\(^{35}\) The creature embraces the others’ hate of him and even intensifies it, directing it both at himself and at the creator who has brought him into a cursed existence. Essentially, the creature hates Frankenstein because he refuses to acknowledge him as his reflection and in so doing DAMNS him to utter isolation. Thus the transformation of the creature into a murderous monster can also be seen to be a warning against ignoring one’s own nature. Like Narcissus, Frankenstein has defied the laws of nature, and his fate is sealed by his refusal to recognize his living image as such.

As an imperfect reflection of a subverted Narcissus, so too is the creature doomed to descend into hell. Where the hells of Narcissus and most notably Frankenstein are of their own making, punishment for their hubris, their stubborn self-love and defiance of the gods, the hell of the creature is predetermined. His very existence constitutes a transgression of nature and thus he is doomed to lonely, painful isolation without even a semblable to pursue, to love. He mourns, “I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone?”\(^{36}\) It is this loneliness that leads him to those actions that will ultimately further his own misery: in murdering the loved ones of his creator he cements Frankenstein’s hatred of him and in the end even leads to his creator’s death. Upon discovering the corpse of Victor Frankenstein, he is overcome with even greater self-loathing: “in his murder my crimes are consummated; the miserable series of my


\(^{36}\) Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 82.
being is wound to its close! Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self-devoted being! What does it avail that I now ask thee to pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by destroying all thou lovedst.”

His isolation is now irrevocable; the object (Frankenstein) that has given him the reflection life is now dead. The image has reached out of the fountain and murdered Narcissus, and now finds itself without recourse, doomed to wander eternally lost.

**Robert Walton: Narcissus Cured**

The final Narcissus to discuss is Robert Walton, who like Frankenstein begins his tale consumed by his intellectual libido, which takes the form of an overarching desire to reach the North Pole. Significantly, he claims: “I had rather die than return shamefully, my purpose unfulfilled.” Like Frankenstein, he is willing to sacrifice everything in pursuit of his goal. The cold, impenetrable unknown reflects the nature of desire as lack, but also the conflation of sexual libido and intellectual curiosity, where the woman is replaced by the frigid, the unreachable, the hard figures of science that cannot return affection. Walton is at the same time protected by this exchange of desires: because the ice is ultimately impenetrable, he can never consummate his desire.

Here he differs from Frankenstein, in whom he sees a reflection of himself, an intellectual equal, a brother: “I have longed for a friend; I have sought one who would sympathize with and love me. Behold, on these desert seas I have found such a one.” Whereas Frankenstein—as a subverted Narcissus who also trespasses the original boundaries of the myth—does attain his (monstrous) desire and so dooms himself to a life of torment, Walton will be dissuaded from his rash and dangerous pursuit by the very man in whom he sees himself reflected. Just as the tale of Narcissus serves as a warning as to the dangers of self-love, so Frankenstein’s account of his horrific journey serves to convince Walton of the necessity of turning back, if not for himself at least for the sake of his men. Frankenstein beseeches him: “learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.”

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37 Ibid., 194.
38 Ibid., 1: “I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight”
39 Ibid., 191.
40 Ibid., 188.
41 Ibid., 38.
Frankenstein who, in bringing life to his self-image, irrevocably shatters his desire. After facing Frankenstein and the pressures exerted by his men, Walton relents and agrees to return: “it is past; I am returning to England. I have lost my hopes of utility and glory; I have lost my friend.” Walton has turned from the mirror, from Frankenstein and from his dreams that would have led to his doom, and so he will survive.

Conclusion

The motif of Narcissus is omnipresent in literature, from the ancient to the modern, in texts as diverse as the anonymous medieval French “Lai de Narcisse,” Dante’s *Inferno*, Rousseau’s *Les Confessions*, and the 1996 Italian bestseller *Seta*, by Alessandro Baricco. Why then is it important that Mary Shelley also incorporated this myth into her novel, and more than that, reinterpreted and expanded it? Shelley transforms her titular character Victor Frankenstein, into a subverted Narcissus who also transcends the myth by bringing his reflection to life, which reflection then, as an autonomous being, reinterprets his identity as the reflection of a subverted Narcissus on his own terms and so becomes a Narcissus twice subverted. I believe the answer lies in the third Narcissus of the novel, Robert Walton, who in encountering his possible future in the dying Frankenstein becomes a Narcissus cured.

Shelley demonstrates through these three personages the dangers of pursuing and consummating desire, because desire attained is desire dead, and in so doing predicts the psychological studies to follow nearly a century later. Her tale of transgressions, of self-love and self-hate resonates still today, because it is fundamentally a study on the human psyche, on the process of identity formation and the nature of desire. In applying a psychological lens to her text we can vicariously explore what it means to play god, to confront one’s own monstrous reflection, and to fall from grace, and perhaps in so doing come to know ourselves to a greater degree.

Bibliography


42 Ibid., 191.


Aldous Huxley: This Timeless Moment

David Garrett Izzo

ACT ONE

Words in bold print are Huxley’s.

Set: SC – table next to straight back armchair – on table: books, papers, laptop with screen up
SR – bed with small chair next to it
SL – large wardrobe trunk with lid open
Window on back wall

Music – Bach: serene and meditative:

Lights come up – Aldous Huxley, age 69, in medium gray suit with white shirt, sedate tie, full gray hair swept back; he is standing at window with a book just inches from his eyes and he is reading it using a magnifying glass; goes to table, puts book down and glass into his pocket.

Aldous Huxley: In 1911 when I was just sixteen, I went blind for a year and a half; my sight came back after that, but it remained rather poor – in any case, blindness tends to get one’s attention that life is not always easy – darkness, depression, and alienation seemed to be man’s natural condition: In that state of darkness, after having been in the light, the contrast was overwhelming, and one believed that in spite of language, in spite of intelligence and intuition and sympathy, one can never really communicate anything to anybody. No one can ever know what another person is really thinking.

It seemed that our life is a sentence of perpetual solitary confinement.

Blindness also forces one to inhabit more of his inner world and consider mysteries in the dark that one might never bother about in the light of day. It was as if one did this… (Claps his hands)

House brought to total darkness; Continues speaking in darkness:

The worst part of it for a teenage boy was that I was largely precluded from meeting girls, which was a terrible blow to a young fellow’s psyche. As for the psyche, permanent darkness is another worldly sensation and from that tender age onward I wanted to find a connection from my unseeing darkness to some mystical and transcendent world that was independent of my body. I suppose I was trying to believe in some alternate reality that was, for lack of a better word, spiritual. This search became my life’s work and too often the actual living of life at times was a distraction. Some of those distractions were quite wonderful… and some were terrible: World War I—the war that was supposed to end all wars.
Aldous Huxley: This Timeless Monument

(Flash image of WWI on back wall for instant and fade)
--the Great Depression
(Flash image on back wall for instant and fade)
--World War II
(Flash image on back wall for instant and fade),
just 20 years after World War I, proving that memories are too short,
McCarthyism and the height of paranoia,
(Flash image on back wall for instant and fade),
President Kennedy’s assassination
(Flash image on back wall for instant and fade)

Lights back on stage

— that terrible event moved every other bit of news to the side — including the fact
that I died that very same day: November 22nd 1963.

Otherwise, there might have been some fuss made, perhaps even on the front page,
and, no doubt, the obits would have started: “Aldous Huxley, author of Brave New
World….”
That novel from 1932 is what I am most remembered for; cloning was a big part of it,
although that word didn’t exist at the time. Brave New World is often said to be the
first modern science fiction novel. I meant it be a satirical commentary about what
the world might be like in the year 2600 if current trends of 1932 continued to an
extreme. In 2007, we are already there.

2007 is Brave New World’s 75th anniversary, which is why I am out and about,
enjoying the goings on if I may confess. One hopes the attention might remind
people to give another look to some of the other writings.

You may have by now gathered that I am British…. and that I am also a ghost
for lack of a better word. But don’t be alarmed. If you knew how often ghosts
surround you, you wouldn’t think twice about it. After all, every memory is a ghost
and every ghost is a memory.

Looks quizzically out at audience: It just occurred to me that since I left my physical
body 44 years ago that perhaps I need to reintroduce myself to your generation.
How many of you have heard my name before?
Huxley counts “raised hands” in audience: Not too bad. How many of you have read
Brave New World?
There will be only a few, if any, that answer yes and Huxley can answer accordingly such as:
Just a few.
How many of you know anything about me besides that I wrote Brave New World?
Points to an audience member: Yes, sir! Listens: In case you didn’t hear the young
fellow, he says he heard that I was some kind of early hippie because in the 1950s
and early 60s I took mescaline and LSD. Looks down at his conservative outfit.
Do I look like a hippie? That part isn’t quite correct, but I did experiment with the
drugs. Let me fill you in a bit on my life first so that when we get to my
experimenting with drugs you might have a better idea of how and why I did it.

[109]
I was born in England, 1894, to Leonard Huxley, editor and writer, and Julia Arnold Huxley, founder of the Priory school for children — Dora Carrington taught painting there — grandfather was T.H. Huxley, the famous scientist, known as “Darwin’s Bulldog”; great uncle was Matthew Arnold, poet, philosopher, and advocate for universal education. Their genes were a blessing and all credit goes to nature for my being a smart lad. Whatever gifts we are granted are a matter of luck for which we should be thankful, nature first, then hopefully some good nurturing from good influences in our young lives. That all sounds simple but there are many variations set upon each individual person. So many obstacles each person must face!

Thunder and Lightning, Dark and Light Flashes

Who are we? What is our Destiny? How can the often frightful ways of God be justified? Before the rise of science the only answers to these questions came from the poets and philosophers....

Earliest man was terrified of what he did not understand. We do not like to be afraid so we create stories to calm our fears. Thunder and lightning bring rain so perhaps they are not evil after all and man made them the gods of thunder and lightning and told stories about how they came into being; the stories became myths; the myths became rituals for planting and harvesting; the rituals became theology with God behind all of the natural wonders; theology became religion and philosophy — but all of this started with stories. We love to hear stories, and some of us like to create stories. We have a desire to record our own destiny.

Man’s destiny is a matter of the observable differences between individuals. Are these differences inherited or acquired, or inherited and acquired? For centuries it seemed reasonable to debate the problems of nature versus nurture. “Everything,” said the philosopher Rousseau, “is good that comes from God; everything is perverted by the hands of man.”

I don’t agree with Rousseau’s remark entirely, but there is something in it partially: The teaching of manners makes man, but on the other hand, you can’t make a silk purse out of a cow’s ear. Predestined by their heredity, human beings are postdestined by their environment. In other words, if one is not given natural gifts of intelligence and talent, no amount of money can compensate; for example, a world leader who is not the brightest candle in the chandelier.
Nature was kind to me; my nurture was also essentially a good one until age twelve when the period of unpleasantness began. I adored my mother; she died of cancer at age 49. On her deathbed she wrote last letters to her children,

*Photo of Huxley Children*

To me she wrote:

*Pause, Photo of mother; Darkened bed now lighted, walks and sits in chair next to bed, looks at bed and then to audience:*

"Don't be too critical of people and love much...."

*More and more I have come to see how wise that advice was. It's her warning against conceit and selfishness and it's a whole philosophy of life." In the 1920s I will admit, that cynicism prevailed, but, indeed, by the 1930s, I began to formulize this “philosophy of life” as something to strive for and that I would find it in a mystical spirituality. I do admit though that early on I was not shy about being sharply critical through my writings: *In them I gave vent to all the horrible thoughts and impulses which I was too timid to express or put into practice in real life.*

We, the Huxleys, did not suffer fools gladly. In the 1920s and early 1930s I attacked hypocrisy and used satire as my weapon of choice, which seemed to be the best way to point out some of society’s absurdities.

After mother left us came the year and a half that I could not see. I learned Braille and my greatest comfort was my older brother Trevenen.

*Photo of Trevenen*

Trev would sit with me, read to me, and jolly me along so I would not succumb completely to the depression I felt that might have swallowed me whole and left me mute.

**The blindness shaped and shapes me.** I developed a hard shell of introversion to hide my fears and vulnerability. I wouldn’t let my emotions out, but worse, I wouldn’t let others’ emotions penetrate in.

In August of 1914, after a very difficult year at school, Trev had an affair with a young woman he cared for deeply but, alas, she was not of his social class, which then was still an impossible barrier that could never lead to marriage. Filled with guilt, Trev went missing. After seven terrible days of anxious waiting...

*Pause, silhouette of hanging man*

he was found in a wood, hanging dead from a tree.

This third blow in a short span did little to help my severe introversion and shyness. Trev’s tragedy gave me an absolute abhorrence for class divisions, which would later become one of the main satirical targets in my fiction and essays. Without Trev I felt
rather isolated and still could barely see. My father had remarried in 1912 and was leading his own life.

I was adrift, confused, and prone to depression.

In 1915 seventeen-year-old Maria Nys and her family were émigrés from Belgium fleeing World War I, and came to England to stay at Garsington, the celebrated estate of Philip and Ottoline Morrell. Garsington was a first or second home to artists, intellectuals and conscientious objectors who had officially received alternative work deferments and

_Raises hands to do quotation marks_
“worked” on the manor. I met Maria…

_Photograph of young Maria_
and she was willing to listen to a shy boy’s intellectual ramblings, much of which must have seemed incoherent as I do recall her saying to me….

“Dear Aldous, one must not forget that you are talking to a poor girl who was taught by nuns.”

To which I answered, “I see . . . well then, there is much to undo.”

We fell in love, and were married on 10 July 1919 in her home of Bellem, Belgium.

Love in the spiritual sense holds the universe together. But even the word “love” has been made into an item up for sale.

_Peers into audience: I see a hand raised. Listens:_

What I mean is that our instinct for love has been commercialized. Our consumer culture spreads the myths of romantic love as a “can’t-miss-money-maker” and does so using advertising on a public that craves “love” or reasonable substitutes. Pop culture loves love stories, in song, or in the mass-consumed pop fiction such as the phenomenon of the “romance” novel, or in TV and movies. Advertising is employed to arouse superficial feelings of romantic love by idealizing it in a way people wish it could be permanently, but seldom is. This vicarious wish for love is a multi-billion-dollar industry. If one does not buy his mate a diamond that’s forever, one is not truly in love—or so the commercial tells us.

_It is a skill in advertising to not only manipulate vulnerable egos into believing what one wants them to believe, but to have them think they came to these beliefs independently._

Advertising panders to our fears of being rejected, of not fitting in, of societal ostracism; has us believe that if we do not give into the advertisement of the beautiful young woman to buy the product she sells, whether it is a car or soap, that one will be repulsive, impoverished, moronic, and stink, making the possibility of sex with the metaphorical temptress impossible, which will then be followed by humiliation, social disapproval, and one becomes an outcast.

This is, no doubt, a good joke as applied to advertising alone. However, the
lessons of advertising have become the tools of governments in the spread of propaganda. One loves his country, one improves the love by having an emblem of hate to feel superior to—the other religion, the other country, or in a more recent national election, to pretend the war hero was a coward and the coward was a war hero.

There is not much difference between today and 1920 when our only child, Matthew,

*Photo of Matthew*

was born. Maria was what is now called an earth mother in new age terms and a nurturer. She set about taking care of me so I need only concern myself with writing. And I did need taking care of. In the early years of our marriage I was guilty of a chilling aridity and a hard shell that made communication in or out extremely difficult. It was something that made the first part of our marriage very difficult at times, but Coccola—this was Maria’s nickname—was very patient and in the long run I learned to get through the shell and let the dust be irrigated. Unfortunately, when my son was a child, I was predominately in the crust and dust stage and so I am afraid must have been a bad father—indeed, knows that I was. Maria compensated by being a wonderful mother. She was more capable of love and understanding than almost anyone I have ever known and in so far as I have learned to be human—and I had a great capacity for not being human—it is thanks to her—she was communicator, explainer, and deepener of all our experiences.

And yet, and yet, even though I adored Maria, in 1922, I, at age 29, like so many stupid young males with limited sexual experience, became a fool over another woman—a notorious femme fatale who left many men in her wake—The woman became an obsession; for the woman, I was an occasional slight amusement—one of many. I followed behind her like a dumb dog, sniffing, but with little result. Practical intelligence does not always protect one from being an emotional fool.

*Back Wall: 1922—*

Many nights I came home very late. Maria had indulged me in what she hoped was a brief—if intense—fever of the brain. I certainly was sick from the obsession. Maria hated the morbid depression more than the sex urge. This one night she didn’t even pretend she was asleep. I saw the open trunk as she marched back and forth throwing clothes into it.

*Photo of Maria, Huxley takes steps toward the photo, addressing “Maria.”*

*Hangdog look: I am sorry that you waited up… What are you doing?*

Yes, I know you were worried about me…

*Listens, hangdog turned into shocked animation. No, you cannot go back to Belgium with Matthew; I couldn’t bear for you to leave me…*

*To audience: She kept packing the trunk.*

*Goes to trunk, shuts lid, sits on it; he ducks and “catches” thrown clothes.*

What she didn’t pack she began to throw at me and then out an open window on to
the garden below.

Huxley's head darts to and from window on back wall:

She was only five foot and slight but at that moment Maria was a volcano unleashed and cursed me in French: canard, canaille, cochon, et tricheur: which, if you must know, mean liar, dirty dog, pig, and deceiver.

To Maria: Please Stop!

Goes to window:

You are right to leave…. I am in the wrong, I am a fool, and I deserve this, but we will both go.

Walks back to SC, to audience: We left the next morning and the madness was over. But instead of going to Belgium, we landed in Florence, Italy and stayed there. My stupidity ultimately did serve a purpose — the pathetic incident was fictionalized in two of my novels.

In the 1920s I had poems published, short stories, many essays, and a first novel in 1921, the satire, *Crome Yellow* that made fun of the idle upper class that sat about being pseudo-intellectual dilettantes who pretended that World War I never happened, assuring another war would be inevitable. The book found a small but devoted following among artists and intellectuals. The publisher rewarded the moderate success with a decent advance so that I need only write for a living and by staying in Italy the advance went much further than it would have in England.

Italy was an adventure because Mussolini was in power and the secret police were everywhere. Things were a bit cruder then; the technology was not yet available for a government to snoop on millions of people without warrants as is done today. This meant that the secret police had to visit you in person.

Photo — Mussolini:

On wall — 1926

Huxley sitting next to table, writing:

To Audience:

We were at home, I was writing. I heard a banging and Maria loudly called me. I went to her. She was holding Matthew close. There were four ruffians with guns looking for an Italian professor who had spoken against Mussolini.

I reached out and pulled Maria and Matthew behind my back:

To police:

What do you want?

There is no one else here. To the Audience: They searched the house.

Aldous moves in sidesteps avoiding the four ruffians, keeping M & M behind him.

What are you doing? Leave the books alone. Aldous looks up then down, repeatedly and rapidly because the four are throwing the books to the floor.

To audience: One put his gun under my chin. Jerks head up: I put on a brave face for the sake of Maria and Matthew and shouted them out of the house, but one does not
forget guns in the face. ...it was an unpleasant business that only hinted at what fascism would become. We went back to England.

My fourth novel in 1928, *Point Counterpoint*, became an international bestseller, translated into 40 languages.

*Point Counterpoint* attacks the upper classes for not giving a damn about anything except their own good time. For example, an upper class male chauvinist claims he does evil for the perverse purpose of being able to compare it to goodness:

Reads from *Point Counterpoint*: He says: One way of knowing God ... is to deny him.... If you’re equally unaware of goodness and offence against goodness, what is the point of having the sort of experiences the police interfere with?”

A second upper class character answers, Reads: “Curiosity. One’s bored.”

Looks up

Everyone’s bored that has the money to be idle and bored:
Reads again: “There’s something peculiarly base and ignoble and diseased about the rich. Money breeds a kind of gangrened insensitiveness. It’s inevitable. Jesus understood. The bit about the camel and the needle’s eye is a mere statement of fact. And remember that other bit about loving your neighbours.”

To Audience

Conversely, the poor and working class hate the cruelty of the rich’s attitude of condescending noblesse oblige. A poor fellow named Illidge is the working class assistant to Lord Edward Tantamount, the scientist who conducts experiments that may be clever, but are ultimately of no service to humanity. Illidge has nothing but contempt for Lord Edward and his kind.

From book: “But being unpleasant to and about the rich, besides being a pleasure, was also, in Illidge’s eyes, a sacred duty. He owed it to his class, to society at large, to the future, to the cause of justice.... He thought of his brother Tom, who had weak lungs and worked at a machine at a motor factory.... He remembered washing days and the pink crinkled skin of his mother’s watersodden hands.

To Audience: It is such enormous fun for scientists to design bigger and better gadgets that they do not wish to realize human beings are being sacrificed and that the pious talk about science serving mankind is pure nonsense and hypocrisy.

Real progress should be progress in charity, all other advances being secondary.

Yes, I was very blunt and sarcastic in those days. I was a cynic precisely because I wished that the world would pay attention, and, as my mother said, “love much.”

Most human beings have an almost infinite capacity for taking things for granted. Yet, even amidst the bitterness in this book, there was still some hope. I never let go of the possibility that there is some other mystical world that transcends normal life.
Slowly: After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music. One can listen to Bach and feel something much like meditation on the infinite and that there are grand things in the world.... The Rondeau begins, exquisitely and simply melodious, this is a slow and lovely meditation on the beauty (in spite of all the evil), the oneness (in spite of such bewildering diversity) of the world. It is a beauty, a goodness, a unity that no intellectual research can discover, that analysis dispels, but of whose reality the spirit from time to time is suddenly and overwhelmingly convinced.... The music was infinitely sad; and yet it consoled.... It was able to confirm—deliberately, quietly... that everything was in some way right, acceptable. It included the sadness within some vaster, more comprehensive happiness.

The finest works of art are precious, among other reasons, because they make it possible for us to know, if only imperfectly and for a little while, what it actually feels like to touch the spirit and feel noble.

And there are some artists that seem works of art in themselves. In *Point Counterpoint*, there is a character named Mark Rampion that is based on my dear friend D. H. Lawrence who wrote *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Maria typed the original manuscript.

*Photo of Lawrence*
Lawrence was the most extraordinary person I ever met.

"After a few hours in Rampion’s company one really believed in noble savagery; one felt convinced that the proudly conscious intellect ought to humble itself a little and admit the claims of the heart, ... and the bowels, the loins, the bones and skin and muscles, to a fair share of life. The heart again!"

Lawrence did make one feel that passion could be a spiritual thing. Lawrence adored Maria and they were very close. He, with his visceral nature was a contrast to my introversion, about which, in fact, Lawrence was a great help in getting me to overcome. Maria had a natural intuition for nature and mysticism and she understood the force of nature that Lawrence was. On 21 February 1930, when Lawrence was very ill from tuberculosis, the very last letter he wrote was to Maria:

He said:  
I am much worse, such hard nights--and miserable. Seems to me like influenza, but they say not.  
When do you think of coming?  

D.H.L.
We left to go to him immediately. Once there we knew he was near the end. Along with his wife Frieda we kept vigil beside his bed. *Light on the bed; Huxley goes to the bed:*

At one point Lawrence took Maria’s two tiny wrists in his wasted fingers and looked up with his cloudy eyes. *“Maria, don’t let me die.”* The touch of her itself seemed to calm him a little. Maria then took him in her arms as a child; she, the Belgian earth mother taught by nuns. He fell asleep and Maria eased him down onto the pillow; then he died. Maria’s love went with him. My mother’s words, “to love much,” seemed at that moment to be the goal and purpose of all existence.

*To become capable of love—this is about two thirds of the battle; the other third is becoming capable of the intelligence that endows love with effectiveness in an obscure and complicated and largely loveless world. It is not enough merely to know, and it is not enough merely to love; there must be knowledge, love and charity, and understanding.*

Another issue raised in *Point Counterpoint* is that of ecology and the wasting of natural resources. Here Lord Edward the scientist is speaking to a rich upper class fascist based on the very real Oswald Mosley, in the book I call him Everard.

*Book up, blustery voice:*

**But what'll you do when the deposits of natural resources are exhausted?** *Acts this out: He poked Everard in the shirtfront. “What then? Only two hundred years and they'll be finished. Phosphates, coal, petroleum, --squander them all. That's your policy.***

*To audience: Has anything changed since 1928?*

*Puts book back on table:*

As for Oswald Mosley, too few people recall that in the 20s and early 30s there were fascist elements both in England and America. Mosley was an aristocrat—the 6th baronet of God knows where—and the leader of the British Union of Fascists that was fighting against the working class. He was not happy that I had put him in a book. Mosley’s fascists wore green uniforms—they looked just like the Hitler Youth Movement—and he thought of himself as Robin Hood, which was the height of irony since Mosley wanted to steal from the poor and give to the rich. He enjoyed the adoration of many in the upper class that admired his anti-liberal, anti-labor, anti-Semitic ranting.

*Wall — 1928 Photo of Mosley:*

One evening we were at a worker’s theater seeing a play written by a friend. Mosley and some of his boy scouts came to disrupt the play, in part because he knew I was there. His lads shouted down the actors from the center aisle. Mosley spoke through a blaring bullhorn, a form of bullying intimidation. The audience was terrified. I stood and faced him:
To Mosley: It seems that you are angry with me so perhaps it is you and I who should sort this out.

To audience: He began to answer with the bullhorn. Acts out jerking his back and his hands go to his ears as if deafened. “My good man, my sight is terrible but my hearing is normal—at least till now. Might we manage without the amplification?

To audience: Mosley handed the bullhorn to one of his boy scouts.

To Mosley: Thank you, Mosley, as you were saying...”

To audience: He said—pompous baritone, thrust out chest imperiously—“Unlike you and these arrogant workers who don’t know their place I believe my cause is just.”

I answered, “just what?”

Pause:
He didn’t find this amusing.

To Mosley: But, of course, one must believe. It then becomes a question of what one believes in.

Pretends to be Mosley—pompous baritone, thrust out chest imperiously: I believe you are against England and disrespect the sacrifices of the Great War.

To Mosley: I am not against England and I do respect the sacrifices of the dead and wounded, which is why I write about those who so easily led us into that War, which, I’m afraid, one cannot in good conscience allow again.

By the way, does your you refer to the one or the many?

Listen: Surely you don’t mean everyone here? Does that include the little children who came with their parents? Are they against you?

Pompous baritone, thrust out chest imperiously: Are you trying to humor me?

To Mosley: Not at all. Although I would wish for anyone to be in a good humor; it does one good to laugh on occasion.

Pompous baritone, thrust out chest imperiously: Humor is one thing, but personal ridicule is quite another.

To Mosley: And where was one so ridiculed?

—pompous baritone, thrust out chest imperiously: Don’t mess me about—in your damn book.

To Mosley: Have you read the book? No! You go by what others tell you—not always a good idea. In fact, the character of whom you perhaps speak is not ridiculed; his views are presented fairly with a background that explains why one might, in good conscience, believe they are the correct views. The character speaks in a quite rational manner. He is attractive, intelligent and he believes what he is saying....

Pause:

He just happens to be incorrect and misguided.

To audience: Mosley’s face became redder than a fresh tomato and I thought he was going to challenge me to a duel. Instead, he hissed at me and said that I was betraying our class because they knew what was best for England.

To Mosley: Does they mean you? Rather a bit arrogant and presumptuous don’t you think? I am for fair play so that the most capable have an equal chance rather than just the most rich. I simply have more respect for people that work for a living than those who don’t. You should try it some time.

To audience: His stare was now one of murderous contempt. He asked if I disliked people with money.
**To Mosley:** I am not against money if it is put to good use. I am only against the idle foolishness of people with *too* much money, too much time on their hands, and too little charity. And if you would look around you will see that there are not just workers here.

**To audience:** Mosley saw Maria step into the aisle, followed by many others that he recognized—people who knew his parents; people whose children attended school with his children; people he had visited in their homes. These were the traitors whom Wembley had dehumanized in his speeches when they had no faces or names. He had imagined these were his enemies. Now he could not look them in the eye. He told me to piss off and stomped out in a hissy fit. When Hitler became a reality, Mosley and his boy scouts became a non-issue.

**Mosley photo off:**

Before and after *Point Counterpoint*, I was a target for conservatives like Mosley, who then, as now, disliked intellectuals. The word conservative stands for “against change.” If so, then we would still have slavery, women would not vote, no social security, and no civil rights movement. Today conservatives say there is a liberal bias at colleges and universities. *Of course there is*, that is where the *smart* people are!

Liberal merely means freedom—anyone against freedom. One conservative rag published a scathing front-page story about me with the title:

**On back wall:** “Aldous Huxley — The Man Who Hates God.”

This was absurd but try telling that to rich morons. All one needed to do was read my essays about mysticism to know I did not hate God. But stupid people don’t read newspapers and then brag about their ignorance.

Mysticism was just one of many topics I wrote about in the old days long before they became popular in the 1960s as New Age thinking; some writers since the 60s have called me a godfather of the New Age regarding what I thought about many ideas that were ahead of their time. I wrote about nutrition, meditation, holistic health care, education, and other hopeful and positive issues that were later taken to heart by many people.... But I also wrote warnings about the coming negative possibilities and dangers that might lie ahead that have also, unfortunately, become true, such as the threat of global warming that only the misinformed don’t believe in.

**Goes to sit in an armchair next to a table:**

Mind-manipulation and brainwashing have been around for centuries, but with the advances in science and technology they have become more than just science fiction, which is precisely what I was warning against 75 years ago in *Brave New World*. The title is now recognized as a catch phrase for any person or idea that is cutting edge and may have a possible positive as well as negative duality.

Of course, I don’t want you think that I believe *all* technology is bad.

For example: Isn’t Google wonderful?
Pause for Audience reaction. Pulls laptop closer to edge of table and leans into the screen to see it.

One can find almost anything here. I was fascinated that under the Freedom of Information Act, my FBI file is on view for the world to see: The sum of their 26-year investigation was that they thought I was rather odd but essentially harmless. One example is an entire transcription of a talk at UCLA in 1960. Some of the imagined subversive words that I said included: “We must apply science to human need—this is a moral imperative.” I am sure J. Edgar Hoover thought that made me a communist.

Back to surfing:
Now here’s an odd one: The ABCs of Aldous Huxley's Relationships. This is not about my real life but a hypothetical description of what my mating potential would be according to an astrologist:
Reads screen: He is kindhearted and generous with both his money and his affections. Pettiness or stinginess is foreign to Aldous’ nature. Gracious and charitable, he enjoys sponsoring social events or cultural activities. Aldous Huxley has an optimistic, friendly attitude towards others and tends to bring out the finer side of people. He is likely to fall in love with someone who is noble and idealistic.

Can’t complain at all except that I don’t think I will be dating again anytime soon. The last part of the prediction is true; I married two noble and idealistic women: Maria and then Laura Archera.

Eyes back to laptop screen:
And speaking of propaganda, look here -- Oswald Mosley.com. He still has fascist admirers in England. Listen to this! “No rising star in the political firmament ever shone more brightly than Sir Oswald Mosley. What Mosley so valiantly stood for could have saved this country from the Hungry Thirties and the Second World War.” It fails to mention that what he stood for was an alliance with Hitler. There are many like Mosley today, poisoning the airwaves.

Peers into audience: Who said, “Like who?” So you want me to name names! Let’s just say that there are callous entertainers pretending to be news commentators who pander to people’s fears and prejudices. They think they are as sly foxes and have networked together to be more powerful. Pause --Their rants are just self-serving and crude propaganda that is harmful and polarizing. Indeed, mass media propaganda began with Hitler and Mussolini, which is why I warned about the effects of propaganda in Brave New World.

Eyes back to laptop screen fingers to keyboard inputting, then to audience:
If one Googles the three words “brave new world” how many hits do you think there are?

Responds to guesses from the audience:
You say ten thousand. Points right index finger upward to signify higher:
And you, one hundred thousand. Points right index finger upward to signify higher:
And over here, three hundred thousand. Points right index finger upward to signify higher:

Shakes his head.

There are over one million hits and the majority are not about my novel. Examples:
“Mental Health Review, Brave New World,” “Brave New World Astrology Alive!,”

Reaches for Letters of Aldous Huxley.

In 1931 I wrote this letter to my father:

I have been writing a comic, or at least satirical, novel about the future, showing the appallingness (at any rate by our standards) of Utopia and extrapolating the effects on thought and feeling of such quite possible biological inventions as the production of children in bottles (with consequent abolition of the family and of all the Freudian ‘complexes’ for which family relationships are responsible), the prolongation of youth, the devising of some harmless but effective substitute for alcohol, cocaine, opium, etc:--and also the effects of sociological reforms such as Pavlovian conditioning of all children from and before birth, universal peace, security and stability.

Puts letters down
But the price of peace, security, and stability was at the cost of independent thought and free will.

I warned of all this but never thought it would come so soon. In Brave New World there is genetic manipulation, drugs for all purposes with the super drug Soma overseeing a numbed but false tranquility, mass hypnosis, and high–tech diversions that make sex available at all times.
It is a dictatorship by pacification. If one is always drugged and sexually relieved, why then there is nothing to complain about. Mankind has succeeded in eliminating disease, aggression, war, pain, anxiety, suffering, hatred, guilt, envy, and grief. Does this not seem to be the ultimate freedom? But this so-called freedom comes at a terrible cost: independent thought is treason against the state, creativity is banned so that there exist only mediocrity, spurious contentment, trivial pursuits, shallow attachments, debasement of tastes, and souls without loves or longings.

There is no emotional passion whatsoever; in England the Supreme Controller, Mustapha Mond, runs the world. His foil is “John the Savage,” who is from a primitive New Mexican Indian reservation where life is as it was in the distant past. John enters the Controller’s Brave New World and almost turns it upside down.
Picks up Brave New World
The Controller and the Savage face off:

Mond says:
My dear young friend ... civilization has absolutely no need of nobility or heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society like ours, nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise.

   The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives or children or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there's soma.

   To audience: And I remind you that Soma is the all-purpose feel good drug that fixes everything; a populace in a fog is not inclined to be rebellious.

John the Savage answers:"But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin."

Mond responds: "In fact, you're claiming the right to be unhappy."

The Savage says defiantly, "Yes, I'm claiming the right to be unhappy."

Lowers book: John is actually claiming the right to have free will, choices, initiative, and spiritual freedom.... So who is really the savage?

Puts book back on table:
In a world where there is no dark, one cannot truly appreciate the light and think about why the light and dark need to be compared. Light and Dark, Strong and Weak, Good and Evil have no meaning without contrast and it is from thinking on their meanings that the collective mind moves towards an evolving spiritual consciousness. The mystics call this the Reconciliation of Opposites. The friction and fission of these opposites rubbing against each other creates the energy needed for consciousness to evolve. Without a Reconciliation of Opposites the body may be satisfied but the spirit knows nothing of what it means to be good, to be strong, to be heroic and noble. And without this knowledge life has no meaning.

In 1932 I thought that the Brave New World was still very remote and set the story 700 years into the future. By 1946 I knew it would be much sooner. And now, (pause) it is already here.

The most distressing thing that can happen to a prophet is to be proved wrong. The next most distressing thing is to be proved right.
In many places Brave New World was banned because of the free sex that the future society advocated. Some critics have said that my writing was preoccupied with sex… Well, of course—sex is a dominant, if not the dominant preoccupation of human beings whether we wish to admit it or not. In Brave New World the people are virtually ordered into promiscuity and they go see pornographic films called “Feelies.” Future technology enabled the viewer to not just see but to feel and smell the raptures of the sex portrayed, which felt even better than real orgies, which are never so exciting as pornography. In Pornography the girls and boys are young and their figures perfect; there’s no hiccupping or bad breath, no fatigue or boredom, no sudden recollections of unpaid bills to interrupt the raptures….

Today some very foolish people tell the young that abstinence should be their goal. This is absurd! Chastity is the most unnatural of all the sexual perversions. And to think that one can try to impose it as a national policy. They are told, “Just say no!” Sex is nature, and nature cannot be denied. Try telling volcanoes not to erupt and see where that gets you.

And today as well, the experts tell us, starting with Freud, that we should believe sex is the cause of all our inner miseries—too little sex—too much sex—no sex—or too afraid to even think about sex without seeing the devil behind it so that one runs off to his church to be forgiven in a form of self-hypnosis. Dogmatic church-chanting is for the purpose of producing numbness to blunt any thoughts of sex, which, in fact, does not work; the numbing may numb the plumbing but the sex urge is merely repressed and then will manifest itself as neurotic, psychotic, and even insane behaviour.

Peers out into audience: I see a hand raised.

Listens, answers: You want to know how I feel about different sexual orientations.

Pause

The body is a suitcase that carries the spirit around. The size, shape, or orientation of the suitcase is entirely coincidental and secondary to the nature of the spirit it contains. A loving spirit who is gay is preferred to one that is unloving. A society is taught morality and what is thought to be good or bad. But good and bad are in the eye of the beholder. Nietzsche said that the perspective of good and evil changes depending on who is in charge at any given time. Slavery was once acceptable; Hitler and his cronies thought that killing all the Jews was acceptable; men once thought that women were inferior and should not vote. History has not always condemned being gay; that is relatively recent. Nature itself is not always straight—witness certain other species. Today things have improved. This does not yet mean that gays and lesbians are fully free from bigotry and discrimination—unless they are celebrities. Why is it that Melissa Etheridge, Ellen DeGeneres, Nathan Lane, etc. appear regularly in living rooms through television—even in red states, but would be much less welcome in person by certain segments of the American population. Or is it that those people that previously didn’t give a damn have been inflamed by recent gay bashing? Maybe they still don’t give a damn but can’t admit to it in any
kind of public accounting such as on the job, at religious services of whatever denomination where there is always that pressure to conform and be one of “us” — whatever “us” means. The bashers talk about protecting the sanctity of marriage. What, with 1 of every 2 marriages ending in divorce? It is better to love than not to love however the different suitcases are paired together. I judged people by the nature of their spirits, not their sexual preferences. D.H. Lawrence was heterosexual; Gerald Heard and Christopher Isherwood were not. All three were the dearest of friends to me.

When it comes down to it the plumbing doesn’t matter because for many persons sex is not so ultimately important physically but is more important above all as a kind of nirvana, a liberation from both the body and the ego. In sexual love one transcends the all too human ego and this transcendence gives them momentarily a blessed sense of relief, which is why some people can never get enough of it.

In many different ways people have a great yearning for feelings of mystical transcendence without realizing that this is the end that they seek.

As for mysticism we learned more about it in 1937 when we moved to Los Angeles. Where we thought we had, like Alice, arrived in Wonderland or Dorothy’s Oz. The circus was in town everyday. We stayed in a house owned previously by a rather eccentric Hollywood type. The first thing we saw was a larger than life image of King Kong in whose hairy arms a sparsely dressed cutie was struggling while Kong looked around for a convenient spot to commit rape. We kept it the re as a symbol of this strange world we now lived in.

Near LA we had never seen so much light in our lives—and this was before the smog. We lived near the desert; the clear light of sun and sky was a natural meditation on the joy and power of nature—a joy that made one feel closer to some essence of spirituality. I had always believed in mysticism but in the beautiful light that filled the desert I felt it more keenly. My father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing. So do I.

Many people are misty about the word mysticism, imagining all kinds of nonsense when its meaning is quite simple: a mystic is anyone who seeks to feel the spirit, AKA God, within his own mind and intuition. Mystics from all religions have practiced meditation, which has been so popular since the 1960s, for thousands of years.

The beautiful light and profound silence of the desert helped me organize my thoughts about mysticism as the desert is the most completely adequate symbol of one of the aspects of God —God before and beyond creation, God in the “ground of the soul,” where the person goes beyond personality and the mind is aware of the ultimate source of awareness…. As a means of purifying insight into the divine otherness, there is nothing to compare with the desert’s silence.

Maria particularly loved the desert and would have strong visionary sensations from the light.
Not all people are enlightened, however.

In the early 1950s Matthew encouraged us to become American citizens. As you may recall McCarthyism was rampant then.

We arrived at the federal building in LA.

*Back wall: photo Federal Seal along with a picture of McCarthy:*
Maria and I were both asked standard questions and thought we were done. Then the judge asked a question that seemed irrelevant, as I was nearly sixty years old:

*Huxley addresses the seal:*
**No,** I am not prepared to serve in the U.S. armed forces.”

*To audience:*
I had been a life-long pacifist.

*To seal:*
**No,** I would not bear arms in the United States Army

**No,** I would not drive an army truck transporting armaments.

*To audience:*
I was asked: If the enemy were approaching your home, in defense of your wife and in self-defense, would you not pick up a gun and stand by your door, ready to fire?

*To seal:*
**I would not have a gun in the house.**

**Yes,** I would be willing to make bandages for the wounded.

**Yes,** I would serve in the Red Cross as an ambulance driver—if I could see well enough to drive.

*To audience:*
The judge went out for a moment and then returned. In those days pacifists were branded as soft on communism, which rather sounds like being soft on terrorism the way that you hear now....

The judge is back.

*To Seal:*
No, my objection is not based on religious views, **but on philosophical grounds only.**

*To audience:* He then said: “Citizenship cannot be given for any other reason than
that of religious convictions. Aren’t you a religious man?” I suppose I could have just said yes and gotten the whole thing over with but I chose to answer honestly.

To Seal: I am religious but my opposition to war is entirely philosophical. I was brought up as an agnostic and continued to reject a religious approach to life until about twenty years ago when I started to feel an ever-deepening concern with religious mysticism....

The killing of a fellow being is the breach of a cosmic law, and the question whether it is justifiable in certain circumstances to take life becomes more than a political problem; it involves loyalties to a Being superior even to the most highly honored of human institutions.

To audience: By the look on his face the next hearing would concern my sanity.... We left, told that we would hear in a few weeks. I was not optimistic. In fact we withdraw our applications and remained resident aliens. Alien is exactly the right word because the judge surely thought I was from Mars.

Back Wall Blank again.

In 1952 Maria developed cancer; she was very brave. I knew losing her would be like an amputation.

In 1955 after much radiation and other treatment Maria’s last hours were at home in her own bed; she was no longer conscious—at least not physical consciousness.

Very bright Light on bed; sits in chair next to bed stage right, leaning over; photo Maria, All Maria’s visionary and mystical experiences had been associated with light – Almost all mystics and visionaries have experienced the Ultimate spiritual Reality in terms of light. Light had been the element in which her spirit had lived and it was therefore to the light that all my words referred. I spoke to her – I began by reminding her of the desert she had loved so much, of the vast crystalline silence of overarching sky, of snow covered mountains at whose feet we lived, to see the blue light of peace soft and yet intense, gentle, and yet irresistible in its tranquilizing power; I would say the sun was setting and the sky more deeply blue than ever, but in the west there was the golden illumination of deepening red and this was the golden light of joy, the rosy light of love, and to the south were the mountains covered with snow and glowing with the light of pure being, and in which all the dualisms of our experience, all the pairs and opposites—positive and negative, good and evil, pleasure and pain, health and sickness, life and death, are reconciled and made one. And I asked her to look at these lights of her beloved desert and to realize that they were not merely symbols but actual expressions of the divine nature and of the peace that passeth understanding, an expression of the divine joys and of the love which is at the heart of things —I urged her to advance into these lights to open herself up to joy —I urged her to become what in fact she had always been, what all of us have always been, a part of the divine substance being identical with the one reality—peace in this timeless moment—when her breathing ceased, it was without any struggle.
Stage dark – end of Act One

ACT TWO

Darkness, Music, stage lights up, sitting in armchair by table, phone rings, gets cell phone out of suit jacket inside vest pocket:

Yes.
Listens:
I am here with a group of very nice people.
Listens:
We are having a rather stimulating conversation.

To audience: Maria says that means I am having a rather good conversation.
To phone: They don’t seem to mind.
Listens:
What’s that you say?
What do you mean, “lighten up”?
To audience: She doesn’t want you to think I am always so serious and that I don’t have a sense of humor.
To Phone, listens: Indeed, I will tell them about the time we were almost arrested.
But after that can I be serious again? Later I want to talk to them about the future, which is of the utmost importance.

Listens:
Good, see you later.
Phone back in vest pocket:

In California we loved to go for walks and picnics which set us apart from the majority of Southern Californians who are so dependent on wheels that they’ve lost the use of their legs except for getting in and out of their cars. Any person caught using his feet as transportation is suspect. On one bright and beautiful day in 1939 we decided to have a picnic and called many of our friends. We all dressed down to work clothes. We walked to the empty Los Angeles riverbed. Krishnamurti came with fellow Indians dressed in colorful saris; Anita Loos and Maria both were very short and made me seem like a circus giant at 6’4.” The philosopher Bertie Russell came; Charlie Chaplin came with his wife Paulette Goddard and Greta Garbo who, not wanting to be recognized, wore men’s baggy trousers and a wide-brimmed hat that hid her face—she really did want to be alone; Paulette wore a Mexican peasant outfit; Greta was on a diet of raw carrots and had a bag of them hung on her belt and seemed like a rabbit eating them; Gerald Heard came, and as always we would ask him for gossip, “And Now what has Gerald Heard? — We settled on the beach and somehow managed to not see the No Trespassing sign. While we were eating our food, we were shocked by a gruff male voice: Imitates American voice: “What the hell’s going on here?” There was a sheriff gun in hand because we obviously must have
looked like dangerous vagrants. He pointed to the sign. “Don’t nobody here know how to read?” I apologized for not seeing it and asked that if we did not desecrate the riverbed — already strewn with rusty cans and assorted rubbish — and cleaned up after ourselves — if we might finish our picnic. He remained stone-faced. I tried name-dropping and pointed out Charlie, Paulette and Greta but that day they looked like tramps, not movie stars.

He said, “Is that so?” He squinted at the motley crew. “Well, I’ve seen every movie they ever made and they ain’t them so you bums better get the hell out of here or I’ll throw you in jail for vagrancy.” We left because I envisioned a new Hollywood scandal with the headline: “Mass Arrest—Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, Paulette Goddard, Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Lord Bertrand Russell, and a strange group of foreigners arrested for having a wild sex orgy on the beach.”

Those were fun times in Hollywood — at least before World War Two started. I can remember them as if they were happening now, not separated but as if those moments were simultaneous with this moment, as if time stopped and one could see all of history as if a single giant mystical tapestry.

*Stands up at SC:*

And please do not think that thinking about such things requires academic training — not at all. In fact, the idea of an intellectual or a highbrow is one of the most fictitious myths devised by society, which for self-serving reasons encourages the idea that there are highbrows and lowbrows. Intellectuals and artists are often considered highbrow and there is often an antagonism toward intellectuals by the so-called lowbrows.

This distinction has been wildly exaggerated and is largely nonsense. The designations lowbrow and highbrow are more the result of propaganda than real differences. Originally the terms were meant to suggest the degree of one’s sensitive intellectual capacity — lowbrows have less; highbrows have more. Later, the terms also came to be associated with spending capacity. The upper classes having greater means to pursue higher education seemed more cultured and sophisticated. But intellectual sensitivity is not bestowed only on a basis of bank accounts. Whether it is a hereditary predisposition or nurtured in a certain environment, acute sensitivity is endowed upon some people and passes over others. A snob may wear his tuxedo well, but fall asleep at the opera, wasting a good seat that a prep school music teacher or music student would have enjoyed — if only he could have afforded it. Much of the access to the arts costs money and certainly there is resentment among those with less money who are precluded from enjoying certain of the performing arts or even some books because they can’t afford to. Their resentment was directed at those who could. Hence, with time, the conflict between the classes over money extended to the activities of those with more to spend. Higher education and the fine arts became suspect to the poor and working classes because they were associated with the upper classes.

There was a time, not so long ago, when people aspired to be thought intelligent and cultured. The current trend of aspiration has changed its direction. It is not at all uncommon now to find intelligent and cultured people
doing their best to feign stupidity and conceal the fact that they have received an education. In decent society it is not

Makes Quotation marks with hands

“cool” to be an intellectual highbrow.

To what do we owe these uniquely modern snobberies—the snobbery of stupidity and the snobbery of ignorance? Intellectuals, knowing that lowbrows mistrust them, want to seem to fit in with everyone else and deny having brains and restrict themselves to a smaller vocabulary with fewer syllables.

The pressure to be a regular guy or gal is enormous. Why?

Back Wall Dollar signs:
Capitalism!

If the majority of human beings began to take an exclusive interest in the things of the mind, the whole industrial system would instantly collapse.

Mass production is impossible without mass consumption. Other things being equal, consumption varies inversely with the intensity of mental life. A man who is exclusively interested in the things of the mind will be quite happy sitting quietly in a room to read and think. A man who has no interest in the things of the mind will be bored to death if he has to sit quietly in a room. Instead he rides bicycles or chops wood. Lacking thoughts with which to distract himself, he must acquire things to take their place; incapable of mental travel, he must move about in the body. In a word, he is the ideal consumer.

Now it is obviously in the interest of the industrial producers to encourage the good consumer and discourage the bad. Consequently, lowbrows are good; highbrows are bad. Long live Stupidity and Ignorance!

I digress. Let me continue with my biography. In the early 1950s Maria and I met a wonderful woman named Laura Archera, a concert violinist who shared many of our ideas and perspectives. Coccola was very fond of her. Before Maria passed away one had the sense that Coccola wanted Laura to look after me. I didn’t disagree and nine months after Maria went into the light,

Photo
Laura and I married.

Looks into audience for the “young man”:
Where’s the young fellow that asked me about LSD? There you are! How did you find out about that? Listens: Quite true, in the 60s that rock band The Doors took their name from my little book describing those experiences—The Doors of Perception, and my title comes from William Blake who wrote that, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is, infinite and holy.” This was how I felt when taking the drugs. What may seem to be a bad thing now was very different then.
First of all, mescaline and LSD were legal and could be had by prescription; second, I worked with doctors and always had people around to monitor me; third, do you remember that quintessentially American weekly, *The Saturday Evening Post*, that Norman Rockwell painted covers for? Mind-enhancing drugs were so proper then that in October of 1958, the *Post* had as a front-page headline my essay, “Drugs That Shape Men’s Minds.” Why did I take them? I was always interested in finding ways that would help me learn more about expanding spiritual consciousness and being somehow in touch with the divine essence. Meditation was the start of this effort.

Is it so terrible to let legal drugs help us get through life; after all, do not Prozac, Wellbutrin, Zoloft, and so many others help us deal with what might otherwise be overwhelming depression.

Overall, I took mescaline, then LSD, perhaps a total of ten times over about ten years. Not exactly an addiction. But the effects were profound and life changing. Under their influence, I knew that sense of affectionate solidarity with the people around me and with the universe at large—also the sense of the world’s fundamental allrightness, in spite of pain, death and bereavement. This All Rightness cannot be expressed in words or other symbols. There is an overpowering sense of gratitude as to give thanks to the order of things in spite of everything.

Of course, in my present state, I’ve learned that I wasn’t just imagining it. What a benefit it would be if people could feel this beautiful oneness with spirit. It would make the temptations of the ego including the collective egos of religious fanaticism or nationalistic fanaticism seem ridiculous.

And how odd it is that many sing the praises of alcohol and who wish to be regarded as good Christians and noble fellows, whereas anyone who ventures to suggest that there may be other and less harmful short cuts to self-transcendence is treated as a dangerous drug fiend and wicked perverter of weak-minded humanity. I do regret that some blame was put on me for drug use in the 60s. The last thing I wanted was the image of “Mr. LSD”; frankly, my vote goes to Tim Leary on that score.

The only people who don’t get anything from LSD or mescaline are Psychoanalysts.

I have seen LSD given to several Freudians. None of them got anything positive—except for one, who said that, when he went to the bathroom his excreta smelled stronger and sweeter.

Sings to tune Glory Glory Hallelujah:
Sig Freud’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave; but his anus keeps marching on!

Sits in the armchair, picks up Letters
It is absolutely fascinating to remember letters one wrote as long 86 years ago. There is a great sense of that expression: “The more things change the more things remain the same.”
Puts letters down: Christopher Isherwood—he is the fellow that wrote the stories that the musical Cabaret is based on—used to play a game with me where he would name a topic and I would think of an appropriate quotation from something I had read. His game was wonderfully stimulating. I haven’t played it since I was here the first time and I was wondering if I might try it again except that this time I wish to see if I can remember something from my own writings that is still relevant now. Are you in? I will call on you and then repeat so everyone can hear it. Let’s see how many I can do in—let’s say—ten minutes. Who has a watch? Can you be the timekeeper? Good!

Go!

Stands right at edge of stage center closest to audience and begins to stalk the stage from left to right and back again, “listening” to “prompts” from the audience, saying the prompt and responding with a great deal of energy and increasing urgency to do as many as he can:

MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

In 1962 I visited what was then called Cape Canaveral where they built space capsules and missiles:

How fabulously well-organized the insanity was borne in on me at the local Aviation plant where I saw the latest plane to ground missiles, which can turn right angles, skim along the ground, shoot perpendicularly up into the air to avoid interception and finally be guided, warhead and all, to whatever orphanage or old age home may have been selected as the target. All this concentrated knowledge, genius, hard work and devotion, not to mention all those incalculable billions of dollars, are poured forth in the service of vast collective paranoia and is threatening to destroy the planet—and meanwhile billions of people starve.

Next:

TERRORISM

This is about visiting the Middle East in the 1950s: I had never had such a sense of the tragic nature of the human situation, the horror of a history in which the great works of art, the philosophies and religions, are no more than islands in an endless stream of war, poverty, frustration, squalor and disease. One sees the misery of the Egyptians huddled about the pyramids, the hopelessness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem for whom the holiest of cities is a prison of chronic despair punctuated by occasional panic when the hand grenades start flying. The near east is one huge illustration of endless sorrow. The trouble is that so few people have ever been interested enough in the ending of sorrow to take the necessary trouble. They have preferred to go on wallowing in old misery and creating new miseries.

Today it is even worse.
Next:

SLEEP
That we are not much sicker and much madder than we are, is due exclusively to that most blessed of all natural graces, sleep.

Sleep – the more one thinks about sleep the more extraordinary it is to realize that for approximately 8 hours each day, even the most fanatic, the most vile individual ceases to be himself and asleep becomes this completely innocent and harmless creature, which thank heaven puts a limit on how much harm he can do. It is consoling that even a Hitler, even a Stalin, or an investment capitalist spends a third of his life sleeping.

MIND VERSUS MATTER

There was a writer who once said that the ideal manner of living life was to pick one’s nose – strokes nose—while looking at the sunset— and one does understand that this is a wonderful definition, for certainly private life is the enjoyment of physiological processes on one hand and intellectual and aesthetic processes on the other.

Next, yes the man in the red shirt:

INTELLIGENCE AND STUPIDITY

Scientists tell us that we only use 10 percent of our brain’s capacity, so one wonders what Einstein might have done if he could activated up to 50 percent; of course there are many people that we wish didn’t have as much as their 10 percent for all the harm they do.

At least two-thirds of our miseries spring from human stupidity, human malice and those great motivators and justifiers of malice and stupidity: idealism, dogmatism and proselytizing zeal on behalf of religious or political ideas.

THE MEDIA

Thanks to words, we have been able to rise above the brutes with art and philosophy; and thanks to words, we have often sunk to the level of the demons with propaganda.

Compare press in dictatorships with press in a democracy where, but for a few honorable exceptions, most of the press in democratic countries is devoted to the most sordid side of private life such as murders, sex, sport and so on, while dictatorships run the press and the public hears only what the dictator wants them to hear.
Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored. And the media today would rather spend a half hour on celebrity news than one minute on people starving in Africa.

CONSERVATISM
Consistency is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are dead.

Single-mindedness is all very well in cows or baboons; in an animal claiming to belong to the same species as Shakespeare, it is simply disgraceful.

GENIUS
The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm for learning. A child-like man is not a man whose development has been arrested; on the contrary, he is a man who has given himself a chance of continuing to develop long after most adults have muffled themselves in the cocoon of middle-aged habit and convention.

EXPERIENCE
Experience is a matter of sensibility and intuition, of seeing and hearing the significant things, of paying attention at the right moments…. Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him. A man might spend his life in trains and restaurants and know nothing of humanity at the end. To know, one must be an actor as well as a spectator.

DICTATORS
To his dog, every man is Napoleon; hence the constant popularity of dogs.

So long as men worship the Caesars and Napoleons, Caesars and Napoleons will duly arise and make men miserable.

Idealism is the noble toga that political gentlemen drape over their will to power.

PATRIOTISM
One of the great attractions of patriotism is that it fulfills our worst wishes. In the person of our nation we are able, vicariously, to bully and cheat…. what's more, with a feeling that we are profoundly virtuous.

HISTORY
That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons of history. Evidently we have to have a tremendous number of kicks in the pants before we learn anything.

GOODNESS
Good is a product of the ethical and spiritual artistry of individuals; it cannot be mass-produced.

If only people would realize that goodness and moral principles are like measles.... They have to be caught. And only the people who've got them can pass on the contagion.

TEMPTATION

In the Lord’s Prayer, we are taught to ask for the blessing which consists in not being led into temptation. The reason is only too obvious. When temptations are very great or unduly prolonged, most persons succumb to them.

Temptations are everywhere and literally shout at us. We live in the Age of Noise—physical noise, mental noise and the noise of desire. All the resources of our almost miraculous technology have been thrown into the current assault against silence. And this din goes far deeper, of course, than the eardrums. It penetrates the mind, filling it with a babble of distractions, blasts of loud music, continually repeated, doses of soap operas that bring no enlightenment, but usually create a craving for daily or even hourly emotional enemas.

And these programs support themselves by selling time to advertisers, and the noise is carried from the ear to the ego's core of wish and desire. Spoken or printed, all advertising copy has but one purpose -- to prevent the will from ever achieving silence. Desirelessness is the condition of deliverance and illumination. The noise of advertising is the system of mass production that causes universal craving, which (as all the saints and teachers of all the higher religions have always taught) is the principal cause of suffering and wrongdoing and the greatest obstacle between the human soul and its Divine Ground.

TIME

Not fair! That requires a long answer. Can we go off the clock?

Sloows down, stands still, puts cupped hands under chin with head down a little in a thinking pose, lowers hands, and raises head:

We imagine that everything is separated and unrelated. Not so! Everything is unified and interrelated as summed up in this idea:

Back Wall:
Any given event in any part of the universe has as its determining conditions all previous and contemporary events in all parts of the universe.

I repeat because it is very important:

Any given event in any part of the universe has as its determining conditions all previous and contemporary events in all parts of the universe.

With our every action we are responsible for the future.
In 1945 I published a novel titled *Time Must Have a Stop*, which is a line from Shakespeare that always affected me greatly. The concept of time holds humanity hostage.

Time is man’s artificial construct, which he created in order to meet external demands that require his attention. He invented arbitrary terms—seconds, minutes, hours—as a way to be able to respond to obligations placed upon him such as planting or harvesting, going to school and later to a job.

We are slaves to clockwatching. One result of this clock-bound slavery is that the individual is perpetually comparing the present with the past or with the future. We feel guilty about the past and we suffer anxiety, even fear about the future. And in the name of this fear about the future, many individual and collective traumas, including wars, have taken place.

We hate time.

*Photo of Giant clock and sound of ticking; Huxley looks back at clock and puts his hands over his ears*  
And we love weekends and vacations because we can turn the damned alarm clock off.

*Lowers hands*  
For the mystic or an artist, “past,” “future” and “present” are a single entity, an eternal *now*.

If one throws a rock into a pond, one can watch the process from the initial splash to the expanding circular ripples.

*With hands and arms makes expanding concentric circles.*

If one could stand back far enough, *three exaggerated steps backward*, and see the “big bang,” one could see the first cause of the universe and follow the oval expansion of the universe moment-to-moment. *Three steps forward*— From the expanding ripples in the pond to an expanding universe, these images helps one’s actual eyes to— *hands make quotation marks*— “see” an idea like atoms, that the mind’s eye can understand only by a leap of the imagination, even though atoms are real, not imagined. To imagine implies “seeing” what isn’t there; but atoms are there, spinning in a circle that is the smallest representation of the pond effect, and both the atom and the pond are within the ultimate macrocosm of the expanding universe. Time is not a river where if one is standing here, one cannot see back— *points behind himself*— to all of the past or— *pointing to the front*— one cannot see the future. If one sees as the mystic sees, then Ultimate Reality is “a vast landscape.” From the eye of the imaginative beholder who sees the vast landscape, *Time Stops* and one can see everything all at once as if with the eye of God from the beginning of the universe:

*Series of back wall photos:*  
*Big Bang*  
*Skyline of New York City or anywhere*  
*Map of NY State*  
*Map of U.S*  
*Photo of earth from space*
Solar System
Galaxy and Stars

But imagination is not just about seeing what isn’t real; it is equally about seeing what is real—like atoms. Since we take the knowledge of atoms on faith—after all can anyone show you an atom—is it not possible that there is some kind of spiritual essence that we also can’t see?

Pauses: Does that suffice in explaining time? Good then! Looks out into audience. Let’s do one more! Yes, you sir.

MEDITATION AND MYSTICISM

Meditation is a way to make time stop.

When man meditates, he is trying to remove his ego and let in feelings of allness instead of egoistic individuality.

The ego is a terrible thing—it arouses passions and desires that get in the way of serenity.

The ego’s power of interfering by means of craving, fear, and hatred interferes with the flow of spiritual grace.

In the depths of our being there is an inner light, but an inner light which our egotism keeps, for most of the time, in a state of more or less complete eclipse. If, however, it so desires, the ego can get out of the way and become identified with its divine source.

There’s only one effectively redemptive sacrifice that can help us, the sacrifice of the ego’s self-will to make room for the knowledge of God. Not the God of dogmatic religion. That God came long after early human beings felt the mystical God in the natural world.

If a man would travel far along the mystic road, he must learn to desire God intensely but in stillness, passively and yet with all his heart and mind and strength.

I do realize that not everyone believes in mysticism so that some of you might be thinking: what does this all this spiritual stuff have to do with me? You may be an atheist. You might not think in terms of eternity. Fair enough! But even if we disagree, imagining the future still has everything to do with you. Many of you have children or know people that have children. They are the future; should we abandon their future by not planning for it now.

The improvement of the world cannot be achieved by sacrifices only in moments of crisis; it depends on the efforts made and constantly repeated during the calm periods, which separate one crisis from another, and of which normal lives mainly consist.

You must close your eyes and imagine what your actions—or lack of action—will mean to the future.

If your parents had imagined the future that is now your present, they would have
protected our environment and ended our dependence on oil, which is a major factor in mid-east violence and terrorism. The present state of things became inevitable because no one other than Jimmy Carter had the political courage to tell the truth and ask Americans to conserve. He did so thirty years ago and his reward was to not be re-elected.

*Picks up novel Island:* 

In 1962 I published my last novel, *Island*, in which I hoped to take the knowledge of a lifetime about the ways that humanity might use science rather than abuse science and forsake a rabid capitalism for more of a peacefully motivated society. In it are lessons on raising children, education, spirituality, meditation, and good drugs that help and do not hold back our potential for good. Western science works with the arts and education for a balanced equation of body and mind. There is an Agricultural Experimental Station to breed better crops so that no one should go hungry. The educational and health care systems include the best of the east and west. Organized religion is not dogmatic but is based in mystical intuitive logic and self-experience. God is not an angry God used for propaganda as in the outside world, but a loving God that wishes all of his creation to love and be loved.... Or one need not have any god at all and still think of the future and how we can prepare for it and teach children to prepare for it.

In this passage one man on the island is answering questions about how the place works in terms of educating children.

*Reads from Island*

"How early do you start your science teaching?"
"We start it at the same time we start multiplication and division.

"First lessons?"

"In ecology."

"Ecology? Isn't that a bit complicated?"

"That's precisely the reason why we begin with it. Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very first that all living is relationship. Show them relationships in the woods, in the fields, in the ponds and streams, in the village and the country around it."

We always teach the science of relationship in conjunction with the ethics of relationship. Balance, give and take, no excesses---it's the rule of nature and, translated out of fact into morality, it ought to be the rule among people. An enlightened person knows it, lives it, and accepts it completely.

*Closes book, puts it down*
Island in 1962, did not quite catch on with readers, but by 1968, when New Age thinking was “in” Island was reprinted and sold over a million copies. The 1960s was the decade of love, much of which has now been made fun of. Yet, people were on the right track. Love is the answer.

There isn't any formula or method to loving. You learn to love by loving -- by paying attention and doing what one thereby discovers has to be done.

In the 1930s I reacted to the depression and fascism by writing a pamphlet titled” What Are We Going to Do About It? I didn’t know all the answers but I was willing to ask the question. Are you willing to ask the question?

Someday, our children will inherit the world we give them and if it is not a good world, they will blame us. So what are you going to do about it?

Animated, impassioned, exhortation:

What are you going to do about global warming before it endangers the health and safety of the future?

What are you going to do about pollution poisoning our air and water?

What are you going to do about massive federal deficits that will need to be paid? The tax cuts that are in place now will end and tax increases will be forced on our children.

What are you going to do about a government that has tilted the scales in favor of the rich and corporations while the middle class is vanishing, more people are in poverty, and nearly 50 million have no health care?

What are you going to do about CEOs that receive hundreds of millions of dollars even when they fail?

What are you going to do about gas prices while big oil makes excessive profits? Think about it! Your tax dollars pay for the military in the mid-east, which is there to make sure that the oil companies get their supplies. The oil companies should give some of their ridiculous profits back to you. Energy companies like Exxon are not interested in supporting fuel efficiency because then they would sell much less product and make much less profit.

What are you going to do about the dependence on foreign oil while at the same time making virtually no effort to end that dependence? The money that goes to Arab nations for oil also pays for terrorism. After World War Two there was a massive Marshall plan to rebuild Europe. Let’s have a Marshall plan here to find alternative energy sources. If the 400 billion dollars spent in Iraq had gone to such a plan, the auto industry could have been given a mandate to convert all of their vehicles to be
more efficient and cleaner.

What are you going to do about a government official who pushes for a disastrous war and then sends his own company there to steal a fortune that could go to much better use elsewhere.

What are you going to do about religious fanaticism? And I don’t just mean in the Middle East. We have it right here with a polarizing chill. Evolution did happen!

Huxley’s animation lessens; he is tiring from his exhortations. He goes to the front center edge of the stage and sits there with his legs dangling over the edge for maximum intimacy with the audience:

Didn’t meant to get so excited but I do feel strongly about certain things. I was once asked what one thing I had learned that was most important.

I answered: “It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one’s life—and after one’s life—and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than ‘try to be a little kinder.’”

Someone once said, “If everyone cleaned his own doorstep the whole world would be clean.”

I say: If everyone would be kinder to each other, the whole world would be in peace and harmony.

**Meanwhile, we must be content to go on piping up for reason and realism and a certain decency.** And when I say “we” I do not mean the person next to you; it won’t work unless every single one of you becomes the collective, grand, one-voiced guardian of the future. I have always imagined and dreamed of that collective voice becoming one voice and I always will. It would make an old ghost very happy. And remember…

I’ll be watching.

*Darkness long enough for Huxley to get off stage; Bach music again.*

BACK WALL: HEADSHOT OF THE REAL ALDOUS HUXLEY.

*Darkness – the end*
Taboo Against Beauty

Kelli Russell Agodon

Once in a museum, the crystal
from your father’s watch disappeared—
we had been reading poems
when the clear face of time broke away.

Beside us—ghosts of artists shattering,
an exhibit titled: Séance: The Only Way to Live.

If life is loss and future is what we hold onto,
then let’s hang our favorite memories

on the laundry line, outside our childhood
yard where time’s a sundial and we are lost

in the overwhelming scent of lavender,
in the rosemary bush that won’t stop
growing. We have starlight and cliff swallows,
we have house of sea and house of sky.

How many times will we write
about loss, about then and when and the songs

of tick tick ticking? Poems leave
our fingertips, the planchette calls back

the ones we love. Little plank, little heart,
little to remember as time moves on, still

we are a tribe of women who hold their fathers’
watches, who watch them

break and fall and sometimes, we misplace
time. Poems shift through the day,

our talking board, our mystic hands.
Sometimes I consider how we can disappear
in the numbers of a pocketwatch.
We light two candles and what we hold—

the names, our fathers’ watches
—two dazzling flames we refuse to let burn out.
La Magie Noire

Kelli Russell Agodon

I.
Sometimes darkness
is the beauty I am made of—

it’s January and I’ve locked the doors,
I’m refusing to answer the phone.

Sometimes when I’m absent
of Vitamin D, the staircase murmurs:
Jump.

Sorry, the life you ordered
is temporarily out of stock.

Most winters it’s easier to stay inside,
clean the windows
in my mind. Imagination:

taking madness and giving it a home.

II.
I have always wanted to attend a party
where someone wears a lampshade,
where a woman slips
into a coatroom with a stranger.

But these are not my parties.

Mine have schedules, cloth napkins,
side salads. Someone mentions Son of Man.
Someone mentions thread count.

I have an uneasy relationship
with inspiration. I wear black boots,
dance the hubbub alone in the bathroom.

In a conversation about behavior,
I thought she said, You must be popcorn.
But what she said was, *You must be proper.*

Another side salad, please. Another glass of wine.

III.
In the closet, my skeleton reconnects itself.

How long has it been since my aunt woke up as part of the universe?

*All the French artists believe in night.*

She once told me there are many definitions of crazy,

then passed me a voodoo doll of myself, a bullseye in the shape of a human heart.

My aunt would have said, *Be more popcorn.*

My aunt would have said, *All the best artists believe in night.*

Understand we are all trying to create something.

Did I mention the light was touching everything? Did I mention her voice was in the clouds?
bir defterden mühlém seni kendime kök edindim
dokunuymorum toprağa ve oradan sana kendimi salıyorum
kavrayamıyorum hiçbir an olup biteni
neydi beni bir köke, bir kaynağı ve suya bırakan

âh onca ağırlığı kalbime şimdi sen mi bıraktın
biliyorsun, sonu gelmez bir soru
ve üç beş kelimedenden ibaretim ben!

içinden çıkılamaz bir dilin bataklığına saplanıp kaldı

ben şimdi sanki kendime birkaç kelime daha birkaç şiir daha
ve birkaç ölüm daha yazıyorum
Bu kök, beni iki kelime arasından gördüğüm göğün altında
tutuyor, dilimi döndüremiyorum
vakit hep erken seni anmak için,

seni andıkça telaşım gözlərimi örtiyor ve görebilir miyim
neyin üzerinde yaşadım ve ne tuttu beni böyle senden uzaktaşıymışım


tanrıım sen benim köküm ol ve toprağım ve beni sen öldür
başkasına bırakma, gövdemi ve ruhumu sen ayrı kendi keskin bıçağınla

dişinle tırnağımla

çünkü tanrıım ben hiç de kolay ölemiyorum, hiç kolay değil ölümüm
beni sen öldür, başkasına bırakma!
biz buna ölüm diyoruz

Servet Gündoğdu

biz buna ölüm diyoruz
umulmayan bir yabancı şiirin
çekip çevirmesi solgun dilimizi
benden bir parça bırakarak
dağılmasına mı diyoruz yoksa ölüm

âh kemiklerimiz öyle yalın bir bedeni yüzüyor ki
diken gibi dalga duruyor Zaman,
gülün dibinde dünyaya hazırlanıyor gölgeler
ışık soluyor, gözümde büyüyor çiçekler
aceleye getir geceyi, biz buna ölüm diyelim

gelmek ne kadar da basit kaçıyor nerden diye sorunca
nerden geliyorum, diyorum
bir şehir mi, mağara mı yoksa gökten mi
bir yabancı şiirden mi geliyorum umulmayan
kavrıyorum kelimenin kaderini, kalbimden biliyorum

aceleye getir beni, biz buna Zaman diyelim
sana sen demekten ne denir ki başka
büyük Şair, sen kendini hangi kelimelerle yazdın
ve hangi kelimeleri kendin için yarattın
bizeyse o beğenmediğin aşamları bıraktın

biz! yeryüzü şairleri!
gökten indirilmemişler, göğe çekilmemişler...
ağzımızda birkaç ıslak kelime
dünyayı yutkunuyoruz
biz buna ölüm diyoruz
Where We Live

Hilary Sallick

There are places in the world
that aren’t in the world,
where we hold what’s missing
or never understood,

where a meaning
lies hidden
in the seam of things,

in a handful of stones
from a distant stone beach,
colorless and dry
in the basket by the window

where the edges of the pink
flowers slowly beginning
to darken turn
inward

whole other lives
submerged inside this one,
ghost-prints the artist presses
after the original

each successive version
fainter than the last

as walking through this house
before giving birth
I must have crossed
another’s path

looking out this same window
the still street at dawn
our pain flooding over us

where what I mean
is more than literal,
where the mind reaches back
in a lifetime of circles

toward the window
full of honeysuckle, the path
in the woods, the curtain
of snow between us

where tall strong reeds
stand up, golden markers
at the edge of the disappeared
pond, snow-covered

where the mind of the deer
resigns itself, her body falling
slowly

where the stillness answers,
where goodness has a shape,
where beauty keeps
re-making itself

where I live crouched in light
on the gritty floor way past
midnight, deciphering
the shadowy words

where matter disappearing
rises into becoming

the root of a question
the body aching with milk
the paint layered
fresh and wet on the page

the mind, washing over
a rocky shore,
crossing and re-crossing
the impossible point

where one thing ends
and another begins,
where what separates
connects
as in the glue between the broken
pieces of an ancient pot,
made whole again

as in these children
breathing between us
in sleep

where longing lives
poised
to wrap itself around us,
where the last breath waits

for the survivor
at the kitchen table
newsprint marking his hands

for the great-grandfather
pressing urgent words
into the keys
of the computer

for the old woman
watering the red
azalea

for the red azalea
after days of no rain
its roots receiving
the water

for myself
in the middle of the kitchen
my children running past me

here in this world
where we stand alone
touching each other
Nasturtium and Geranium Blossoms

Hilary Sallick

On the table, the most beautiful thing—
from dry untended pots between these walls
all winter—glows briefly before me:

cut, paired, unbelievable color, for me,
unintentioned. All day I meet it, thing
of lights, dropping petals, leaning on walls

of glass, two become one, against the wall
of not-seeing. It’s blazing, calling me
and I look, into the face of the thing;

something beyond walls waits for me.
I used to ask why the moon

Jennifer Markell

followed the car wherever
it traveled. I used to ask
about infinity plus one
and why clocks were alarmed;
worried what kept apartments
apart. I refused to believe
all snowflakes were unmatched. Surely
somewhere an identical pair—
parted by argument,
falling frozen from sky,
merging at the mouth of a river.
Before I was told say no
to the bedraggled man
holding his cup, I asked
why pennies sank
in the fountain of wishes.
Before I was told that’s life
I pondered how the one was also
the many, every question
opening into another,
like the Russian dolls nesting
on the window sill;
each containing the world.
Incurable

Jennifer Markell

Nights, blinking—sockets and switches—
my neighbor senses a fault in the ether,
tries to decode a cipher of wires.
He follows a trace, unwinds
a river, back to King’s Peak
that summer he staked
a tent in the dark,
woke in a bed of purple lupine.

Days stationed with a walker,
he busies his hands
with objects in need of repair:
electric shaver, fountain pen,
rubber roller with a little tread.
From the balcony he watches
kite surfers lift and fall,
turn their bodies into wind.
Expedition and Terrain

Lauren Camp

Her grandmother lost the last of her mind on a slow bus
picking over soggy roads. The girl saw her half-closed eyes,
how she was all the time repeated by Alzheimer’s. A single word,
the gauzy trip of description, each forgotten thread of herself stitched
into a chorus of childhood liturgy, a banner of Arabic—

and the small hnnhh, hnnhh of her breathing on the blank bank
around recall, facts falling from the old page of her face,
her language and courage, detail by detail, decaying.

If the drape of a mind becomes pleats, one thought covers another
until the sum of memory is folded inside. Ma’a e-salamah. Goodbye.
Before the *Farhud* (Baghdad, Iraq)

Lauren Camp

He lived in an epoch of illusion strewn with the good-mannered state of the sun.

His parents gave him the destination of safety and he kicked dust down its path most of the days.

As if everything was known. The daily distance. Slivers and reflections.

The sky stayed blue, staring upward.

But on the river, men in round boats rowed forward with long oars of anger. A shadow of fear moved over the country like phyllo, layering, leavening into the city.

When two Muslim men asked the time the boy looked up through brown eyes and lashes.

Though the boy saw the iron rod in their hands, he answered the question. His watch read half past 11. The sun stood overhead, heavy in its ceremonial dress. It wouldn’t always look like this.

When they struck him, time became not long after. Time became a corner and the boy leaned against it. Time became the river and he settled into the ripples. Time became a construction, a slight body of falling.

Bruised clouds followed him home with a wince. A dark star was out and he hung from it, swinging slowly.
Contributors
(in alphabetical order)

Andrea Lloyd

Andrea Lloyd received her MA in French Studies from Tulane University in 2013, and graduated summa cum laude with honors in French from the same institution in 2012, with a BA in International Development, French and Italian. Her primary research interests concern tensions between North African immigrants and European nations, and the interplay between law, human rights and questions or perceptions of cultural difference.

Bryce Christensen

Bryce Christensen, who is an associate professor of English at Southern Utah University, received his Ph. D. in English literature from Marquette University. Author of Utopia Against the Family (Ignatius), Divided We Fall (Transaction), Winning (Whiskey Creek Press), and ‘The Portals of Sheol’ and Other Poems (White Violet Press), Dr. Christensen has published articles on cultural and literary issues in Philosophy and Literature, The International Journal of the Arts in Society, JGE: The Journal of General Education, Christianity and Literature, Renascence, Society, Changing English, Modern Age, and various other scholarly journals. He and his wife Mary are the parents of three sons and the grandparents of four grandchildren.

David Garrett Izzo

David Garrett Izzo is an English Professor who has published 17 books and 60 essays of literary scholarship, as well as three novels, two plays, a short story, and poems. David has published extensively on the Perennial Spiritual Philosophy of Mysticism (Vedanta) as applied to literature. He is inspired by the work of Aldous Huxley, Bruce Springsteen, his wife Carol and their five cats: Huxley, Max, Princess, Phoebe, and Luca. Two of his novels are fantasies with cats as characters: Maximus in Catland and Purring Heights.

Hilary Sallick

Hilary Sallick is a poet and teacher who lives in Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including Salamander, Atlanta Review, Northeast, and the Aurorean. Hilary teaches reading and writing in an adult literacy program and loves studying stories and poems with her students, many of whom are immigrants to the U.S. While Hilary has not
traveled in many years, her students (from El Salvador, Kenya, Barbados, China, Haiti, Ecuador, and Boston, among other places) enrich her life by sharing their cultures, themselves, and their unique examples of love and strength.

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė is a professor and Head of the Department of English Philology, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania. She holds a doctorate in Social Sciences and an MA in British and American Literature, and teaches contemporary British and American Literature, Theory of Drama, and other courses. Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė has published more than fifty articles on British and American literature, comparative literary studies, American Studies, and has participated in conferences in Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, France, Great Britain, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Turkey, Tunisia and other countries. With lectures on contemporary British and American literature she has visited universities in Estonia, Finland, Italy, Romania, Sweden and Turkey. Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė is the co-author of the following books: English at a Glance (2002), Modern North American Women Writers (2005), Aiming for Pre-intermediate (2006), Descriptive Bilingual Glossary of Educational Terms (2006), Writing for EFL (2009). She is currently working on two projects: a study on postmodern American authors and research into literary representation of collective trauma. Her research interests include comparative literary studies, literary theory, cultural studies and ELT methodology.

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Jennifer Markell

Jennifer Markell's first book of poetry, Samsara, has been accepted for publication by the Turning Point imprint of Word Tech Communications for 2014. Her publications include The Aurorean (Featured Poet), Hawaii Pacific Review (forthcoming) and Rhino. A chapbook, Leaving the Green Elm Market, was published by Sheltering Pines Press in 2005 as a finalist in their chapbook competition. As a psychotherapist and writer, she is continually amazed by the power of words to touch and transform lives.

Kai Kang

Kai Kang, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages at University of California, Riverside. Her research interests include film studies, women’s literature, transnational feminism, gender studies, race and ethnicity studies and postcolonial studies. Previously, she presented papers on Chinese cinema in Space and Time
Kelli Russell Agodon

Kelli Russell Agodon’s fourth book of poems, Hourglass Museum, will be published by White Pine Press in 2014. She also co-edited the first eBook anthology of contemporary women’s poetry with Annette Spaulding-Convy entitled, Fire On Her Tongue. She is the editor of the literary journal, Crab Creek Review and the co-founder of Two Sylvias Press. Her recent travels have taken her in the nooks and crannies of Notre Dame, Westminster Abbey, and to William Shakespeare’s birthplace in Stratford-Upon-Avon. She believes passionately in the kindness of strangers. You can learn more about Kelli and her projects at: www.about.me/agodon

Kinga Földváry

Dr. Kinga Földváry is a senior lecturer in the Institute of English and American Studies at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Piliscsaba, Hungary. Her main research interests, besides a close reading of William Harrison’s Description of Britain include Shakespearean tragedy, problems of genre in film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, together with twentieth and twenty-first century British literature.

Lauren Camp

Lauren Camp is the author of This Business of Wisdom (West End Press) and editor of the poetry blog, Which Silk Shirt. Co-Winner of The Anna Davidson Rosenberg Poetry Awards 2012, her poems have recently appeared in J Journal, Beloit Poetry Journal, Linebreak and World Literature Today. “Expedition and Terrain” and “Before the Farhud (Baghdad, Iraq),” Lauren’s two poems in this issue of The Human, are drawn from her manuscript One Hundred Hungers. This collection of poems imagines and chronicles her father’s life as an Arab Jew in Baghdad, Iraq in the 1940s before his family fled the country. <www.laurencamp.com>

Laurence Raw

Laurence Raw teaches in the Department of English at Baskent University, Faculty of Education, Ankara, Turkey. A former member of the British Council, he now devotes his
time to teaching and writing. Recent books include *TRANSLATION, ADAPTATION AND TRANSFORMATION* (2012), and *ADAPTATION AND LEARNING* (with Tony Gurr) (2013). He is currently preparing an anthology *GLOBAL JANE AUSTEN* (with Robert G. Dryden) for Palgrave, and *THE INTELLECTUAL SILK ROAD* (forthcoming, 2013).

**Servet Gündoğdu**

A PhD candidate in Turkish Language and Literature, Servet Gündoğdu is a poet whose early poems appeared in *Varlık, Türk Edebiyatı*, and *Temrin*. His poetry collection, *Sürgündeki Şiir/Poetry in Exile* (Granada Yayınları), won the 2012 Homeros Jury Special Award. Gündoğdu also edited “Çağdaş Türkiye’de Muhafazakâr Sanat Sorunu: Perspektifler ve Diyaloglar” that was published by Granada Yayınları in January, 2013. His poems, articles, book reviews, and interviews regularly appear in Granada *Edebiyat Dergisi*, *Varlık*, *Türk Edebiyatı*, *Hece*, *Hece Öykü*, and *Ayraç*. Servet Gündoğdu is also the co-editor of Granada *Edebiyat Dergisi*. 