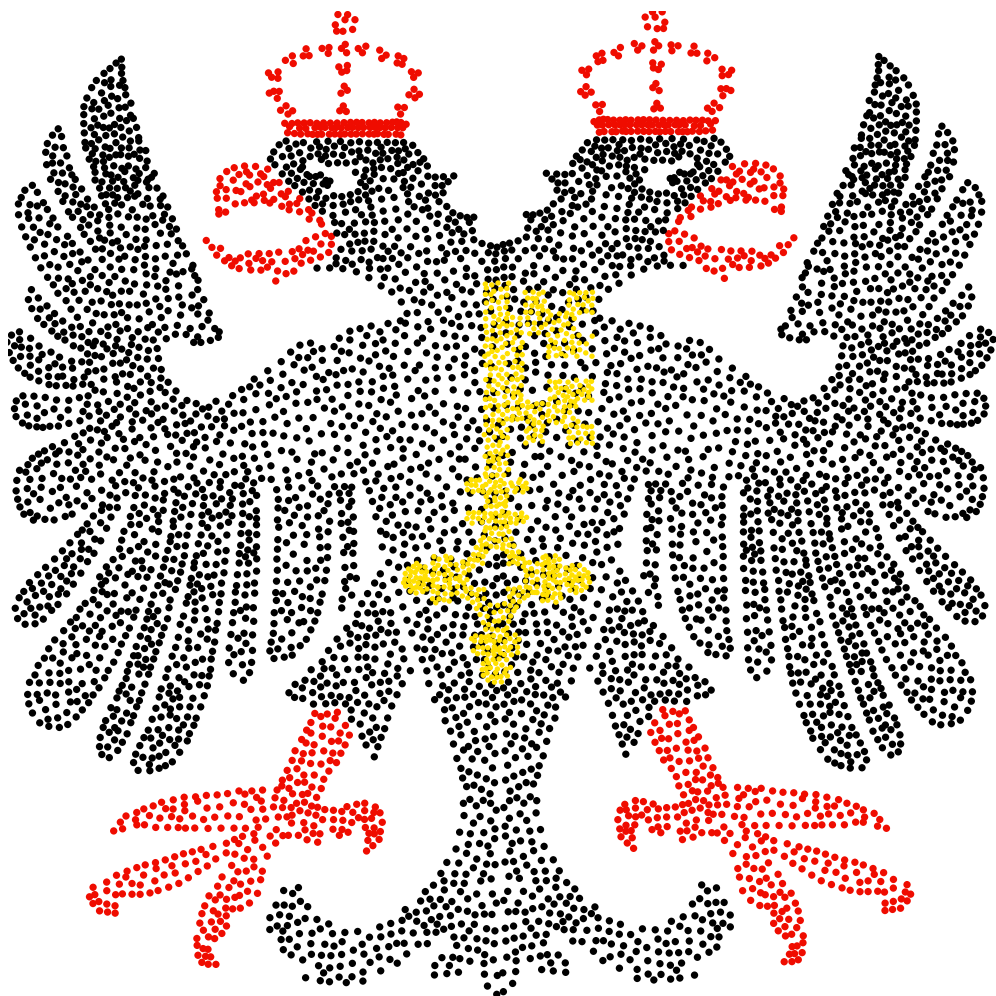


NOTED

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DE GENÈVE**

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Letter from the Editor

BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

Rather than “The Endless Summer,” it seems to have been “The Postmodern Summer”! In making the final touches on this semester’s edition of *Noted*, I can’t help but wonder if our contributors had copies of *L’écriture et la différence* or *Simulation and Simulacra* tucked away in their luggage, next to the suntan lotion, the ubiquitous mobile, and the sand you can never, *ever* get out of your bag. Truly, I think if this edition of *Noted* was any more “deconstructed,” it would fall apart in your hands! Beginning with the cover, the pointillist eagle and key are, in the words of the artist, “at the finite level...pretty meaningless,” being simply a bunch of dots. “But when the dots are grouped in a certain way they take on meaning: a bird or a key for instance. But individually a bird and a key don’t necessarily connect a viewer to something specific. However, when grouped together (a bird *with* a key) they might evoke something very specific in someone local to Geneva: a bird and a key symbolize home, or school, and all that goes along with that. When all you’re really looking at are some colored dots.”

Moving beyond the cover into *Noted*, readers will soon find that this trend of making meaning through small, interacting and related parts continues, within both the content of the pieces and the layering of each piece onto the next. For example, **Sam MacDuff**’s report on the Joyce reading group invites students to work together to interpret the seemingly endless chain of signification found within a short excerpt from *Finnegans Wake* while in a more physical sense, our department director, **Deborah Madsen**, enlightens us as to the viral effects of “information stream contamination” and how our actions can lead to “passive distraction” among others in the classroom. **Emma Barthes** takes us away from the classroom on an auditory, visual, and sensorial journey through Northern Ireland to the Giant’s Causeway; the stones there not only form a rocky “chain” that bridges the aquatic gap between Northern Ireland and Scotland (if you’re big enough, that is), but also metaphorically represent the many hops, skips, and jumps one must take to travel anywhere (physically, mentally, or academically). On this note, **Olivia Lindem**’s review of *The Secret History* discusses the enjoyment gained in reading about a collegial environment comprised of eccentric and possibly murderous individuals while **Saskia McCracken** puts these very theories of deconstruction and post-modernism through their paces in her insightful reading of Jonathan Nolan’s “Memento Mori.” Baudrillard, Derrida, and Barthes are rarely made so straight-forward! Finally, to round out the “Features” section, **Olivia Lindem** and **Roberta Marangi** deconstruct the seeming “normality” behind contemporary sexist depictions of historical female figures

and discuss the benefits of “fan fiction” in decentering patriarchal mainstream media.

From books and TV we move to film and theatre where the **Film Club Crew**’s new theme for the autumn semester looks to deconstruct exactly what it is that makes funny films funny and scary films pleurably *terrifying* and why we watch them again and again, leaving the question hanging that perhaps these films get their crowd-pleasing power from the very pleasure of watching them *in crowds*. Indeed, one is a viewer but two (or twenty) make a Film Club. Likewise, **Nick Weeks** and **Marlon Ariyasinghe** look at past and future productions of Emmet, in which meaning is created not simply from watching the production taking place before you, but watching it from within an a signifying environment, specifically the flora and fauna of Geneva’s parks.

Finally, and here I must wipe a tear of editorial pride away, the Creative Writing section has outdone itself this semester! The breadth of subject matter, form, and voices swirls together to create a beautiful cacophony of creativity in this final section as student-zombies and a niece metamorphose in **Marlon Ariyasinghe**’s and **H. M. Ji**’s respective entries for the writing contest while **Paloma Lukumbi** stretches the poetic form and voice to their pleasurable limits. Likewise, **Kate McLoughlin**, our first of hopefully many more external English literature contributors, takes us “inside” the workings of language while **Misha Meihsl**’s elegiac poem and subject matter slowly disintegrate through the act of reading. **Saskia McCracken** offers a fictional counter-vision to her previous analysis of Baudrillard, this time as she recounts his rather eventful visit to Disneyland while **Cristina Simoni** poetically investigates the aporetic vision of “The Unknown.” Finally, **Andréas-Benjamin Seyfert**, **Manon Guignot**, and **Marlon Ariyasinghe** all investigate the vastly different, but nonetheless equally dramatic and profound reactions stemming from personal interactions; indeed, the man on the bus *does* know us in ways we can never know “ourselves.”

From the pointillist eagle and key on the front cover to the empty frame on the back, which signifies through absence, the contents of this latest version of *Noted* can be viewed as a system of signs, symbols, and texts coming together to form a cohesive image. And that cohesive image is none other than of our beloved English department, made up of so many individuals with their unique voices which we are so lucky to “listen” to in this journal. On that note, I thank every contributor and hope that you, you lucky reader, enjoy this edition of *Noted* as much as I have.

Happy reading,
Bryn

Note from the Director

DEBORAH MADSEN

As we begin the new academic year, I am reminded that, some time ago at a meeting of *Conseil decanal*, the Dean drew the attention of departmental directors to a recent report concerning the impact of digital multitasking in the classroom on student academic performance. It occurred to me at the time that fundamentally things do not really change; I remember that back in the days before mobile electronic devices students reading printed newspapers in lectures was an issue. But while the problem of intellectual distraction remains – listening to the ideas presented in class while also thinking about the ideas presented from the “outside” – it is the *degree* of distraction represented by a huge array of kinds of information that has intensified along with the sheer number of digital applications that can divide people's attention. We are often told that “multitasking” is a very good, efficient way to organize our time but researchers, primarily in the field of educational psychology, have been investigating whether this claim is true, especially in the context of learning environments. What they have discovered is quite disturbing and so I would like to share some of this with you – in time, perhaps, for an academic “new year's resolution.”

In 2013 a group of researchers from the Psychology Department at California State University–Dominguez Hills conducted a project that was documented in the scholarly journal, *Computers in Human Behavior*. The project involved observing a student (263 students in total from different levels of education: middle school or *cycle d'orientation*, high school or *collège*, and university) who was engaged in an important study task, and noting the range of activities in which that student engaged while performing the task. As well as reading, writing, or typing, the activities also included email, texting, chatting (online and on the telephone), using social media, websurfing, watching TV, listening to music, and so on. The results of these observations were perhaps not very surprising but they are quite disturbing. Researchers found that on average it was within only 2 minutes that students' concentration was disrupted by texting, Facebook notifications, and the like; within 15 minutes only 65% of time was devoted to the study task on which the student believed he or she was focused.

This research was reported by the magazine *Slate* in an article entitled “You'll Never Learn! Students can't resist multitasking, and it's impairing their memory.” The reporter, Annie Murphy Paul, concluded that “... evidence from psychology, cognitive science,

and neuroscience suggests that when students multitask while doing schoolwork, their learning is far spottier and shallower than if the work had their full attention. They understand and remember less, and they have greater difficulty transferring their learning to new contexts.” (3 May 2013, http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/05/multitasking_while_studying_divided_attention_and_technological_gadgets.html)

While this is potentially a problem for studying at home or in the library, when finishing a study task may simply take longer due to the lack of concentration, it intensifies when this kind of multitasking takes place in the classroom. The use of laptops for note-taking has increased enormously in recent years and is a perfectly valid way of recording notes from a lecture or seminar. But researchers at several US universities have found that non-course-related software is being used by a significant number of students for a significant proportion of their time in class. For these students, what should be the primary “information stream” – the information being presented by the instructor – is “contaminated” by multiple flows of information coming from Facebook and other social media sites, texts, and emails, to name the most popular forms of digital distraction in the classroom. This “contamination” of the information stream, as I'm calling it, is inescapable because, as the lead researcher on the California State University–Dominguez Hills project noted, listening to and processing the information presented in a lecture and attending to a complex task like dealing with social correspondence both use the same area of the brain and so compete with each other for cognitive resources.

Annie Murphy Paul, in her article, lists the negative consequences of multitasking in the classroom, which include the extra time required to complete assignments that I mentioned above; the greater frequency of mistakes caused by the cognitive load of constant switching between tasks; greater difficulty remembering an item of information when concentration was divided at the moment that information was first memorized (as Paul comments, “we can't remember something that never really entered our consciousness in the first place”); and ultimately, lower grades. In view of these consequences, you might decide that a Luddite response is in order and restrict your note-taking media to paper and pens. Unfortunately, this will not be enough to avoid the impact of what I'm going to call “passive distraction.” Just sitting in a classroom within sight of someone using a laptop for “distractive” purposes will have the same negative consequences. In the article “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers,” published in *Computers & Education* (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254>), investigators Faria Sana, Tina Weston, and Nicholas J. Cepeda discovered that “Laptop distractions due to movement of images and laptop screen light-

ing and multitasking activities may cause involuntary shifts of attention among students in close proximity to laptop users,” accounting for the lower test scores shared by students who multitasked and those students near them who could see and be distracted by the screens.

Other articles that address this issue of multitasking in the classroom include “Freedom, digital distraction and control” at http://digital.hechingerreport.org/content/freedom-digital-distraction-and-control_592/; Holly Korbey, “With Tech Tools, How Should Teachers Tackle Multitasking In Class?” at <http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/2013/05/with-tech-tools-how-should-teachers-tackle-multitasking-in-class/>; and David Glenn, “Divided Attention,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* at <http://chronicle.com/article/Scholars-Turn-Their-Attention/63746/>. In none of these reports, or others I have read (nor at that meeting of *Conseil decanal*), is the suggestion taken seriously that digital devices should be banned from the classroom. There is wide consensus that the very same devices that cause the problems are also valuable learning tools that have a place in learning environments. So what should we do? I encourage you, now at the beginning of a new academic year when we can all take the opportunity to make a “new year's resolution,” to read some of the articles I have cited and reflect upon your own learning practices – not only for your own good but for the sake of those who may sit next to you in your next class!

Bonne rentrée,

Deborah Madsen

Staff News

Dr Emma Depledge has taken up a new post as maître assistante at the University of Fribourg. Although we are very sad to see her depart, we congratulate Emma on her new job and thank her for all the many contributions she has made to the Department. You can reach her via email at: emma.depledge@unifr.ch.

Anna Iatsenko is now Dr Iatsenko, having successfully defended her PhD thesis. She is teaching as a chargée de cours suppléante this year.

Ji Young Shim, who is a post-doctoral researcher working on Tabea Ihsane's FNS project, will teach a seminar in the Autumn semester as a chargée de cours suppléante.

Mary Flannery, currently a maître assistante at the University of Lausanne, will join us as chargée de cours suppléante in the Autumn semester to teach an MA seminar on "Gossip, Slander, and Dangerous Speech in Medieval Literature and Culture."

We welcome Arnaud Barras back from his year-long FNS-funded research visit to the Australian National University in Canberra. We also welcome Kimberly Frohreich on her return from a semester-long FNS-funded visit to the libraries of London and Paris.

The new assistant in Early Modern English Literature is Aleida Demartin, whose experience working in the Writing Lab last year was greatly appreciated. Aleida is replaced in the Writing Lab by Anna Treiman, a current MA student.

Reading Finnegans Wake

SAM MACDUFF

After the success of *Ulysses* last year, the English department is delighted to welcome back David Spurr who will lead an informal ***Finnegans Wake* reading group**. We will read and discuss James Joyce's great work (amongst other things) on **Monday** lunchtimes, from **12.15 to 13.30 in room B 110**, beginning on September 22.

If you've never read the *Wake*, or you're not sure what reading it in a group is like, here's a little taster:

There is no need to begin *Finnegans Wake* at the beginning; let us imagine that our group of readers decides to start with a passage which seems less crammed with multiple meanings than most ..., and that one member volunteers to read it aloud:

We are now diffusing among our lovers of this sequence (to you! to you!) the dewfolded song of the naughtingels (Alys! Alysaloel!) from their sheltered positions, in rosesceery hayding, on the heather side of waldalure, Mount Saint John's, Jinyland, whither our allies winged by duskfoil from Mooreparque, swift sanctuary seeking, after Sunsink gang (Oiboe! Hitherzither! Almost dotty! I must dash!) to pour their peace in partial (floflo floreflorence), sweetishsad lightandgayle, twit-twin twosingwoolow. Let everie sound of a pitch keep still in resonance, jencrow, jackdaw, prime and secund with their terce that whoe betwides them, now full theorbe, now dulcifair, and when we press of pedal (sof!) pick out and vowelise your name. (*Finnegans Wake* 359)

The response is a mixture of frowns at the stretches of apparent nonsense and chuckles as gleams of sense – however absurd – shine through. Some sort of purchase on the passage is obtained when the group quickly agrees that there is a syntactic scaffolding which, though interrupted by parentheses and elaborations, is quite firm, presenting a speaker who uses the first person plural to make a statement and issue a command to a hearer or hearers addressed in the second person: “We are now diffusing... the... song of the naughtingels...from their sheltered positions...whither our allies winged... to pour their peace... Let everie sound of a pitch keep still ... and when we press of pedal (sof!) pick out and vowelise

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your name.” Syntactic stability is characteristic of the *Wake*, and it often helps in the unpacking of a passage to trace the bare trellis on which the luxuriant verbiage is hung.

The second aspect of the passage on which members of the group quickly begin commenting is the clustering of related terms, some of which are half-concealed in puns and portmanteau words. The most obvious of these clusters concerns birds: everybody hears “naughtingels” as “nightingales,” and one person who has listened without looking at the text finds the same word in “lightandgayle.” (When someone else is reading from the *Wake*, it is often helpful to put the book down, as the visual configurations can mask aural echoes.) With this lead to follow, one member of the group who speaks some Italian realises that the strange word “twosingwoolow” sounds rather like a badly pronounced “*usignolo*,” which translates into yet another nightingale. No decoding is necessary to add to the cluster the terms “winged,” “swift,” “sanctuary” (as in “bird sanctuary”), “crow,” and “jackdaw”; and someone suggests that “Hitherzither” could be a description of the hither-and-thither movement of bird flight, perhaps that of the swift. But the group agrees that the main emphasis is on the sounds which birds make, and that a number of the repetitive phrases are reminiscent of conventional representations of birdcalls: “to you! to you! echoes “to whit! to whoo” ... and “twittwin” suggests a twittering call. Other phrases seem built on similar models: “Alys! Alysaloel,” “floflo floreflorence.” Someone points out that the passage contains both “song” and, buried in “twosingwoolow,” “sing,” while nightingales’ song is often said to “pour.” The syntactic framework is now taking on a body of sense, though that sense is beginning to overflow the rather limited possibilities provided by sequential English grammar. And each time a member of the group finds incomprehensibility suddenly revealing a pattern, the discovery seems at once illuminating and ridiculous, satisfying and hilarious. (Attridge 11-13)

As Attridge shows, attentive Wakeans might also detect references to Florence Nightingale and Jinny Lind (“Jinnyland”), a famous nineteenth-century soprano known as “the Swedish nightingale”; from here “rosescenery hayding” suggests Rossini and Haydn, and “twosingwoolow” contains a version of “sing willow,” as in Desdemona’s “Willow Song” (*Othello* 4.3). Similarly, “prime” and “terce” are the first two Church offices sung each day, while “vowelise” recalls “vocalise,” one of whose meanings is “to sing” (compare the French noun), a thread which is picked up in “pitch,” “resonance,” “sequence” and “partials.” The passage even seems to contain a strange assortment of instruments: “a gong in ‘gang,’ an oboe in “Oiboel,” a zither in ‘Hitherzither,’ a theorbo (a kind of lute)

in ‘theorbe,’ a dulcimer in ‘dulcifair,’ and, by implication, a piano in ‘pedal (soft).’ And a different kind of organized sound produced by humans emerges from ‘Almost dotty! I must dash!': Morse Code” (14).

In the same way, the reading group proceeds to trace the topics of sexuality, seclusion, darkness, battles and geography through the passage, noting in doing so both a pattern of doubling (“twittwin two,” etc.) and a triune principle at work (“prime and second with their terce”; see 14-18). Through this multi-layered close reading, enriched by the different perspectives of each member (who, collectively, can draw on French, German and Italian), the group arrives at a far richer, denser reading of the passage than any single reader is likely to attain. In doing so, they detect not only nightingales, but a menagerie of nightbirds in the darkness, as well as figures of sexual temptation, a medley of languages and geographical references which expand into an international arena in which the sounds of battle are heard behind the music. Transforming the opaque passage we started with into “an almost-too-meaningful complex of ideas and associations” (18) is an immensely rewarding experience, and one which happens not just with multilingual puns or portmanteau words, but throughout the *Wake*, as Joyce encourages us to scrutinise each word for new meanings.

If you want to know more about this passage or reading *Finnegans Wake*, try Attridge’s essay “Reading Joyce,” which this article is based on – or why not come along to the reading group and try it out for yourself? All are welcome! We hope to see you there.

NB: This is not a seminar! There are no exams, no attestations, no pressure – just the pleasure of reading the most remarkable work ever written in Wakes!

NBB: Please come with your own copy. If you are purchasing a new copy, for ease of reference we recommend the Penguin, Vintage or Random House editions, all of which have the same pagination, with the text beginning on page 3 and ending on page 628.

Attridge, Derek, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

The Secret History – *Book Review*

OLIVIA LINDEM

After writing one of the biggest bestsellers of the year and winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *The Goldfinch*, Donna Tartt is all over the mainstream literary scene at the moment. And with reason. Despite its hefty appearance, *The Goldfinch* is an engaging, intricate, and overall excellent saga. It has repeatedly been called a modern-day Dickensian accomplishment and it is, in its way.

It is, however, Tartt's earliest work, *The Secret History*, that seems to strike the deepest chord. Though the novel was released over twenty years ago, it continues to be widely read today, circulating amongst university students as a contemporary classic that joins the ranks of other collegiate-era novels such as *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Bell Jar*, and *A Separate Peace*.

Set on the campus of a fictional East Coast liberal arts college, *The Secret History* tells the story of Richard Papen, a young Californian who decides to step away from a life that doesn't seem to be going anywhere and to move to Vermont, on a scholarship, to study classics. Once there, he learns that the only way to do so is to charm the eccentric professor in charge of the Greek program. Adopting a picturesque backstory that couldn't be farther from the truth, he makes an impression and is cautiously initiated into the exclusive group.

Though technically a murder mystery in reverse, the opening pages of the novel detail a crime that takes place late in the timeline of the story, the novel ultimately proves to be an exposition of the intricacies of human nature. Each member of the elite classics group is more complex and more eccentric than the next. Not one of them is easily likeable, as sinister elements seem to lurk constantly beneath the surface of their characters, but the complexity of their actions and attitudes makes it difficult not to regard them with fascination. Observing the group early on in the novel, Papen says:

His students – if they were any mark of his tutelage – were imposing enough, and different as they all were they shared a certain coolness, a cruel, mannered charm which was not modern in the least but had a strange cold breath of the ancient world: they were magnificent creatures, such eyes, such hands, such looks – *sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat*. I envied them, and found them attractive.

(*The Secret History* 32)

Indeed, it is the group's intrigue that drives Papen's actions throughout the novel, combined with his self-proclaimed "fatal flaw" – his "morbid longing for the picturesque" – that reveals itself in his collaboration with his classmates and ultimately leads to his downfall (5).

In the end, *The Secret History* embodies the spirit of its characters in book form. It's a vividly described, intricate mix of mystery, delicacy, and intellectual eccentricity, infused with occasional bouts of terror. It is also autumnal to the core, in setting and spirit, and is as haunting as it is enjoyable to read.

Tartt, Donna. *The Secret History*. London: Penguin Books, 1992.

Traveling to the Giant's Causeway

EMMA BARTHES

Sometimes, I can get this very strong feeling of wanderlust, wanting to see the world. An uncontrollable yearning takes possession of my thoughts, filling me with a sensation of haste, a need to discover. Why? There seems to be no clear answer to that question. When travelling, I know what sensation I'm looking for; I just don't know why I'm looking for it. Searching for new emotions, that's for sure, and isn't that a good part of your life?

Taking whatever transport you like, feeling adventurous going to some unknown place, that's the beauty of traveling for me. Although the departure is always a bit hard. Leaving the people you love, the home you love. Airports, train stations... these are such ambivalent places; take a seat there and you'll see people leaving each other and people being reunited, people arriving at their destination, and people leaving their cherished homeland. Extremes meet in these particular places.

Having passed this ambiguous moment in which you can feel sad, afraid, excited, and happy at the same time, you start to realize what you have undertaken, your travel becomes more and more real as you're getting closer to arriving, letting your imagination wander. Depending on your destination, you can either meet the locals and their culture, or, sometimes just be struck by the beauty and remoteness of some places. That's what happened to me. With an unconfined excitement, I arrived in Northern Ireland.

This fascinating region has many breathtaking landscapes. In Ireland, landscapes are extraordinary but one in particular captured my attention: The Giant's Causeway. Let me start by situating this fabulous place. Greenery is nearly inexistent, the mountains seem to touch the clouds and the deep blue sea; when looking at the horizon it gives an impression of endless space. This picturesque place is not the common sandy beach but rather possesses cubic stones that are flat on their tops; gigantic slabs which go straight into the sea. To give you an idea of their height, I can tell you that you need to climb them one by one to arrive on the top of the highest. They're like stairs only these, as the name of the place indicates, are made for giants!

The fact that makes this site so exceptional is that these "stairs" or stones are a natural geological phenomenon. The stones are placed like a bridge that you could walk upon

to cross the sea from Northern Ireland to Scotland. It's mainly because of this that the legend was born. It is also said that, if there is a cloudless blue sky, you are able to see the Scottish coast.

When it's windy, the waves break and wipe the stones with so much vigour that you had better keep your distance! Lather is created by the violence of the waves' impact on the rocks. The drops of water look like they want to fly and take off at the precise moment that the waves break on the rocks. It gives you a feeling of lightness, of freedom.

Try and capture the quick moment of their creation, the impact and the moment they're finished: the second impact when they splash on the ground and are again mixed up with all the other ones ready to make a new wave and begins again this never-ending circle. It seems quite repetitive but it also reminds you of the circle of life; it's beautiful. It unwinds you to look at it.

The beauty of nature's power is revealed here, in front of your eyes. It feels like the elements are fighting with each other: the water wants to destroy the rocks but they are impassive and stand firm, resisting the sea and protecting the coast. The sky is like a spectator, watching the scene.

This place has real power; it makes you realise the beauty of the world we live in – something that we are not aware of most of the time because we don't pay enough attention to what is around us – and you remember how amazing nature can be. If you have the chance to go and see this place, you can be sure that each season is even more beautiful than the last, each season has a unique landscape.

The Giant's Causeway is a stunning and an awe-inspiring location. Stand on those enormous rocks and contemplate the sea, feeling alive with the wind whipping your face and so freshly entering your lungs. Let the magic of the place take you away from all your problems and let it slowly reach your soul.

'Memento Mori' and Postmodernism

SASKIA McCracken

Editor's note: The following essay was written for an in-class exam (the essay question is below) for the autumn 2013 BA6 lecture course, "Modern Intellectual History." It has since been edited for publication and we thank Ms McCracken for allowing us to print her work in Noted as an example of an outstanding in-class essay due to her extremely insightful readings into the theoretical and narratological significance of Jonathan Nolan's short story "Memento Mori." The story can be found in its entirety at the following website:

http://www.impulsenine.com/homepage/pages/shortstories/memento_mori.htm

Essay question: Write an essay in which you situate the text in its historical period (Enlightenment, Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism) by considering its relations with the aesthetic and philosophical movements of the period. Through a close analysis of the excerpt, explain the formal and thematic characteristics of the text that justify your dating of it.

In this essay I will argue that the text (Nolan's 'Memento Mori') was written during the period of Postmodernism (1945 onwards), and uses poststructuralist methods because it explores and deconstructs sign systems, Earl's body in particular, using a decentred approach. Postmodernism is characterised by the philosophical approach of poststructuralism which creates an aesthetic in which structures are deconstructed and decentred. The historical period has been influenced, as Nolan's text has been, by Baudrillard's theory of the simulacra – a copy without an original – Derrida's theory of *différance* – the constant deferral of time and space – and Barthes' 'Rhetoric of the Image', the latter of which will be analysed first.

Barthes deconstructs the image as a system of signs made up of symbols which *connote* meaning and symbols and text which *denote* meaning. He discusses the function of the 'anchor' to direct meaning or interpretation through the repression of undesirable multiple meanings. In Nolan's excerpt, the arrows tattooed on Earl's body direct meaning and interpretation by pointing towards each piece of text so as to create a chronological order of reading. Earl follows each arrow, three in this excerpt, to arrive at a symbol with connotative meaning via text which denotes meaning. Although the sentences are not described in this excerpt, they denote elsewhere in the text that the symbol of the

'particular face' is the man who raped and murdered Earl's wife. However, the meaning of the sign system on Earl's body, the text, arrows and image does not lie in the system itself, but has to be read 'once, maybe twice' and Earl 'cannot bring' all these signifiers 'into focus' without external aid: the mirror. Nolan's text is poststructuralist because it analyses not what Earl's sign system means, but *how* it means.

The face tattooed on Earl's chest can also be read as a simulation, because it gestures towards a presence which is absent. Baudrillard claimed the world, shaped by commodity capitalism, was hyperreal, made up of simulacra which pretend not to be what they are, disrupting binary oppositions of, for example, the real and the imaginary. The face on Earl's chest has 'a certain unreal quality', disturbing that binary. The image on Earl's body pretends not to be a murderer by depicting one, yet Earl becomes a murderer himself and is defined by the sign system as much as he defines it by creating it (having tattooed it on his body, and possibly, as shall be demonstrated later, by writing other texts which define his existence). By engaging with Baudrillard's Postmodern concept of simulacra and destabilised binaries, 'Memento Mori' is further embedded in the category of Postmodernism.

The irreconcilable tension between absence and presence, or the aporia of '*différance*' (Derrida) is also exercised through the use of narrative voice and the use of tense. The excerpt is divided into two parts. The first of these uses a heterodiegetic narrator speaking in the present tense while the second part uses a homodiegetic narrator who gestures towards the future and the past, deferring the present. The separation of these two voices is complicated when the first notes that Earl 'sits, and begins to write' and the second narrator speaks as from a piece of writing, saying 'I don't know where you'll be when you *read this*' (emphasis added). This suggests the two narrators are both Earl, an implication reinforced by the homodiegetic narrator's use of the word 'we'. The homodiegetic narrator constantly refers to the past – 'what we've done' – and the future – 'you'll be', 'I'll be', – deferring the present which is also alienated by the heterodiegetic Earl narrating his own actions as though they are not his, as though he is not present in his own body. The two narrating Earls are further alienated and in a state of aporia by the statements 'you and I will never meet' and 'by the time you read this note I'll be gone'. By exploring Derrida's Postmodern theory of *différance*, Nolan fractures the text and deconstructs the subjectivity of Earl using Postmodern theory to create a deconstructing and deconstructed aesthetic.

The decentering of subjectivity and history is also a Postmodern philosophy and aesthetic. Earl is alienated from his history because he is a 'ten minute man' with anterograde

amnesia, and from unified subjectivity because the ten minutes divide him into irreconcilable heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrative voices. He is in a permanent state of synchronicity, reinforced by the formal elements of the text such as the use of tense, narrative voice and even the different uses of italicised and non-italicised episodes. Earl is also decentred by being the centre on which his sign system is imprinted. He cannot understand the system from inside it and requires the use of mirrors for interpretation. Elsewhere in 'Memento Mori' this decentred centre of Earl's experience is illustrated when he describes himself as the centre of the clock: because he is in the middle of time, he is outside of it. He is a decentred character spatially on the page, temporally and as a subject, all of which reinforces his position in the historical period of the Postmodern.

Overall it has been demonstrated that the excerpt belongs in the Postmodernist historical period because it engages with poststructuralism, simulacra, *différance*, aporia and decentred subjectivity. The formal use of tense, italics and narrative voice enacts the thematics of Earl's decentred and deconstructed experience and situates the text firmly in the historical period of Postmodernism.

What We Learned Online: A Casual Look at the Use of New Medias in Defense of Female Characters

OLIVIA LINDEM & ROBERTA MARANGI

Halfway through Marilyn French's landmark feminist novel, *The Women's Room*, the group of women at the center of the text turn their observation of society towards popular media and casually discuss its misrepresentation of female characters:

“But what do you find in the movies, in TV? The same old figures, the sex bomb and the housewife – that is, when they even bother to have female characters...”

“They come in three types: the heroine, the villainess, and the crossbreed. The heroine has blonde hair, is utterly moral, and has as much personality as a soft roll; the villainess has dark hair and gets killed in the end. Her crime is sex. The crossbreed is a good woman who goes bad or a bad woman who goes good. She always gets killed too, one way or another,” Iso laughed.

[...]

“And why is that, do you suppose?” Mira asked them.

“Maybe because real women have to be either angels or devils. And real men have to be macho, can't be sweet. Maybe the inbetween figures, the asexuals and androgynes are freed from the moral imperative,” Iso suggested. (*The Women's Room* 276-77)

Though this discussion constitutes but a short scene in the book, it evokes key concepts that are still relevant today, almost forty years later.

Indeed, the stereotyping that so frustrated French's characters continues to appear in mainstream media, plaguing the television and film industries, and spawning countless debates. Though society has come a long way since the 1970s, the representation of women in popular media is lacking as, more often than not, female characters in films and television series continue to conform to variations of the same stereotypes.

Mainstream films continue to do exactly what French's characters criticize by frequently presenting female characters who either serve as accessories to their male counterparts,

or, as actress Evangeline Lily recently pointed out at a Comic Con panel on “Kickass Women,” swing to the opposite side of the pendulum by going from “being the helpless heroine to trying to pretend to be men” in the wave of “kickass” female characters who are presented as part of the “girl power” movement but aren’t allowed to have female characteristics.

Pop culture has thus managed to create a new type of “inbetween figure” like those alluded to in *The Women’s Room*. These characters that the media makes sure to refer to as “strong” or “kickass” female characters are indeed little more than men in disguise. They adopt “male” characteristics. They act tough. They carry guns. They’re made to behave exactly like the male characters that surround them and they’re either “punished” as a result by being depicted as cold or even outright wicked characters who aren’t allowed to have personal lives or “happy endings,” or transformed into dominatrix-like sex objects who are dressed in risqué clothing and ultimately serve to please the intradiegetic male characters and the extradiegetic male audiences.

What these characters aren’t allowed to do is to appear as human. They’re forced to repress any characteristics that may make them fit into any stereotypical “female” roles. Their empathy is limited. Their sentimentality squashed. Their right to happiness erased. They aren’t always destined to die, as French’s characters argued, but their “inbetween” nature doesn’t save them from “the moral imperative” as they’d hope. They face endings that don’t meet the same standards as their male counterparts and are punished in their own ways.

Thus, the mainstream media as a whole has inadvertently created a trope that, rather than doing what it claims and “liberating” female characters, presents them with yet another stereotype to break down. The angel. The whore. The man-in-disguise.

While this is the case in many films, it is true on a more subtle and arguably more dangerous level on the small screen. Television is a more accessible medium, the medium of the everyday, available not only in the average household but on any device with a screen and an internet connection. People watch it *en masse*, and so its messages reach a widespread audience.

Television has, thankfully, proven to be a platform for an increasing number of shows that empower female characters by depicting them as women and, more importantly, as believable people with interests and flaws that pull them away from the existing tropes. Abi Morgan’s *The Hour*, for instance, was a show and period drama set in the world of

1950s broadcast journalism and was filled with strong yet flawed female characters who made sure to make their voices heard through whatever media were accessible to them, be it by facing the challenges of being the only female television producer in a male-dominated world, or by refusing to let marriage serve as an obstacle to independence. The characters were allowed to be selfish, passionate, ambitious, and were allowed to dress however they liked, be it in trousers or pouffy 50s-styled dresses. They were human, flawed, and some of the most realistic television characters to date.

The problem, however, is that shows like *The Hour* are in the minority and are given little media attention – indeed, despite critical acclaim, *The Hour* was prematurely canceled due to a lack of viewership, while hugely popular shows like *Sherlock*, *The Tudors*, and *Doctor Who* are or were in the hands of writers who present problematic, over-sexualized, and ultimately flat portrayals of women.

The danger with this is of course that they present internalized, misogynistic views of society and reinforce the mainstream promulgation of these attitudes, but also that all three of these shows not only create original, stereotyped female characters, but take pre-existing female characters and historical figures who were known for their strength and independence in time-periods where women were oppressed and then proceed to pull them apart and destroy their independence in the 21st century. Indeed, it is often these pre-existing characters that prove to be the most problematic.

Starting with *Sherlock*, a 21st-century retelling of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, we find an intriguing and alluring female character that seems to be powerful, ruthless, and sexually free at the beginning of the second season. Yet, this presentation proves to be superficial as Irene Adler, “The Woman,” is written by creator Steven Moffat in a way that not only destroys Doyle’s original character but also conveys an entire set of misogynistic beliefs.

In Doyle’s *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Irene Adler earns the epithet of “The Woman” by successfully eluding Sherlock Holmes’ best plans for recovering a photograph that portrayed the King of Bohemia with Miss Adler, as she had once been the King’s mistress. Adler shows herself to be a smart woman who has learnt to navigate the intricacies of 19th-century society. Adler is eventually cleared of her depiction as a blackmailer when it is revealed that she wished to keep the photo in order to protect herself from the King. She marries a lawyer and flees to the Continent, leaving a surprised and empty-handed Holmes in her wake. The King of Bohemia appears to be satisfied anyway by the outcome, although he seems slightly perplexed at the notion that Adler does not wish to ruin his

upcoming betrothal because she loves someone who is not him:

“What a woman- oh, what a woman!” cried the King of Bohemia [...] “Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?”

“From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty,” said Holmes coldly. (Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* 25)

In Doyle’s words, Irene Adler is not only “The Woman,” but a mistress, an opera singer, a spinster, a lady. These contrasting ways of addressing the same character might seem paradoxical but they ultimately show Adler’s distance from the stereotypical characters of her epoch.

In contrast to this excellent 19th-century portrayal of unfamiliar feminine victory over the male lead, Steven Moffat takes the same name and some irrelevant details of Adler’s story and recreates an entirely different character. In the TV series, notably set in current-day London, “The Woman” is not an “honourable title” (ibid) given to her by Sherlock Holmes, but the name by which she is commonly known, mostly through her work as a dominatrix. She is introduced to the story as a sex worker, and yet, this is somehow the least problematic aspect of this character – even though this interpretation might come from a misreading of the role of royal mistresses in the late 1800s.

The most curious difference is that while Doyle’s Adler is a woman trying to live a happy and satisfying life, Moffat’s Adler is a conniving blackmailer at the disposal of Sherlock’s nemesis, Moriarty. The writer/producer/creator of the show also removes Adler’s personal power: in fact, it seems like Adler needs to drug Sherlock in order to get away with her precious pictures, thereby implying that the great Sherlock could only be bested if his capacities are impeded and not because someone – least of all, a woman – could actually outsmart him.

In fact, what makes Irene Adler a powerful fictional character is the winning mix of emotion and reasoning that seem to lead her towards a happy ending – a happy ending she is allowed long before the time-period criticized by French’s characters, while Sherlock’s cold intellect seems to fail in providing him with a successful strategy. In the BBC adaptation, Sherlock’s bloodless approach leads him to victory while a very emotive Adler is made to feel ashamed for her feelings for Sherlock.

Apart from the considerable divergence from the main plot and from the original spirit of the story, there is also the very important point that Adler’s besting of Sherlock is the proof that his deductive method is not infallible. At times, Sherlock’s deductions rely heavily on information that has been inferred through observation of human behaviour; however, this would imply that men and women follow a precise and foreseeable pattern of action which is often not the case. In the book, Adler at first reacts according to Sherlock’s experience: “When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. [...] The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. [...] She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half drew it out” (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* 21). Yet, she recognises her mistake, promptly figures out that the man in her drawing room is none other than the great detective Sherlock Holmes, and she efficiently escapes with her loving husband and the precious photograph.

Holmes’ beloved conviction that Adler and the picture would still be in London the next morning is proved wrong by Adler not reacting in the way his method had led him to believe. This is probably the reason why Adler is an essential character to the Sherlock Holmes’ universe. It demonstrates that neither the man nor his system are infallible and, consequently, that expecting people to constantly follow stereotyped courses of action can be foolish beyond measure.

In the end, what Steven Moffat does to Irene Adler’s character is nothing more than what a high school bully would do: he demeans her to make himself (or in this case, his male protagonist) look better.

Another show that proves to be problematic in dealing with female characters is *The Tudors*. Queens mistreated by despotic kings in the 16th century are handled in a rather simplistic manner in the 21st century, and the most evidently mistreated Queen consort to Henry VIII (historically as well as mediatically) is Anne Boleyn.

Natalie Dormer’s performance was an extraordinary one, considering the way the character is written. However, the inherent problems of a flattened character remain. In the first place, the portrayal of Anne Boleyn as an incredibly beautiful young woman is historically inaccurate. More important than her appearance, this need to beautify non-conventional women perpetrates the idea that in order to be noticed, to be loved you need to be beautiful. And nothing can be farther from the “love story” of Anne Boleyn and Henry Tudor.

Mademoiselle de Boullan, as she was known at the Flemish and French Courts, was said to have a sullen complexion, dark and straight hair, an important nose and, even in favourable accounts, she was never called more than handsome. In the words of George Wyatt, son of Sir Thomas Wyatt who was a known admirer of Henry VIII's second wife:

This gentlewoman in proportion of body might compare with the rest of the ladies and gentlewomen of the court, albeit in beauty she was to many inferior, but for behaviour, manners, attire and tongue she excelled them all. [...] But howsoever she outwardly appeared, she was indeed a very wilful woman which perhaps might seem no fault because seldom women do lack it, but yet that and other things cost her after dear. (George Wyatt, *Papers* 141, 143)

It stands to reason that a description so favourable, written by someone who had clearly heard positive accounts of the Boleyn Queen, could have easily portrayed her as a beautiful woman. The power of Boleyn's image lies in her being a rather common-looking woman with an uncommonly beguiling temperament.

What pains people who are familiar with this historical figure is that many aspects of Boleyn's character are completely ignored. The shifting of responsibilities that Michael Hirst engineers in writing a completely off-balance character is particularly enraging. In making her look more flirty than she probably was, he seems to almost justify the unfair accusation of adultery. Boleyn was raised at the court of Margaret of Austria, a woman whose stature commanded attention and whose words formed young ladies from the richest families of Europe:

Trust in those who offer you service,
And in the end, my maidens,
You will find yourselves in the ranks of those
Who have been deceived.
They for their sweet speeches, choose
Words softer than the softest virgins;
Trust in them?
In their hearts they nurture
Much cunning in order to deceive,
And once they have their way thus,
Everything is forgotten.
Trust in them?
(De Boom, *Marguerite d'Autriche* 123)

Boleyn was not yet thirteen when she first arrived at the Court of Burgundy and started to learn how a "court" really worked. At this point, it seems unreasonable to believe that these words would not leave a mark and influence the future queen's decisions. Therefore, her subsequent and well-organised fall had everything to do with politics and with an increasingly paranoid monarch but very little to do with honesty and fairness.

The anti-Boleyn propaganda that followed Boleyn's decline from power was merciless, but many acknowledged facts of her life are completely disregarded within her depiction in *The Tudors* in favour of more sensual scenes that could attract the passing viewer. Her piousness, of course, is almost completely disregarded in order to manipulate her appearance: apart from a few scenes in which Boleyn is seen praying, her charitable spirit is erased and her support of the Protestant faith is seen just as a way to free the king from his Catholic wife, Catherine of Aragon. Furthermore, Boleyn was a patron of the Arts: Hans Holbein's successful stay at the Tudor court was, for instance, her doing. Anne Boleyn's role as a fashion icon is similarly neglected: like her daughter, Elizabeth I, she understood the "politics of ostentation" and that "in order to play a part one must dress the part" (Eric Ives, *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* 218). Add, at the end of all this, a capricious nature and voilà: a beautiful and deliciously conventional shrew replaces one of the most controversial women of the 16th century!

Perhaps this is not very surprising, after all. The same author completely ignored the existence of one of the king's sisters – Margaret Tudor, Queen of Scotland – and changed the name of the other – Mary Tudor, wife to King Louis XII of France – who takes her "non-existent" sister's name, Margaret. Was Hirst afraid we would have confused the Marys?

This mistreatment of Tudor-era women continues if one is to go back to the writings of Steven Moffat. In a recent episode (2013) of the hugely popular *Doctor Who*, a BBC series about an alien who travels through all of time and space to stop horrible things from happening, Moffat uses his protagonist's time-traveling abilities to engage the Doctor in a romantic entanglement with Anne Boleyn's daughter, Queen Elizabeth I.

Queen Elizabeth is widely known for being the Virgin Queen, a monarch who chose to remain independent and reign on her own terms, disregarding society's demands that a 16th-century woman needed a husband, no matter her stature in society. Yet, Moffat destroys this image in "The Day of the Doctor," by portraying Queen Elizabeth as a lovesick woman who encounters the Doctor once and immediately insists that they get

married. The Doctor observes that “the real Elizabeth” would never accept “shar[ing] her throne with any old handsome bloke in a tight suit,” thereby acknowledging Queen Elizabeth’s known independence, yet Moffat goes on to work his way around that fact in his fictional universe. His version of Queen Elizabeth is painted as a desperate, vengeful figure who not only forces the Doctor into marriage but then goes on to live in anger for decades after he leaves. He thereby rewrites history in his show, unable to accept that Queen Elizabeth was an independent woman without a man at the center of her existence, and consequently recreates a historical figure in a light more in line with the sexist attitudes manifested through his other writings.

This therefore suggests that many of the problems that existed in the 1970s continue to surface in the post-feminist world, albeit in different and supposedly masked ways. Female characters appear to be superficially powerful but are then torn apart and, even worse, already established characters and historical figures are manipulated by contemporary writers to fit into current-day standards and are somehow presented in an even more sexist light.

What then has changed? Simply the attitudes of both the women who play the characters and of the audience.

The shows in question continue to find popular success as they provide great entertainment value and most of their viewers are not aware of the problematic elements invisible to the uncritical eye, but actresses have begun to speak out and call attention to problematic writing in the field.

Natalie Dormer, for instance, talking about her problematic portrayal of Anne Boleyn in a 2010 interview with Susan Bordo, raises awareness by claiming: “Men still have trouble recognizing that a woman can be complex, can have ambition, good looks, sexuality, erudition, and common sense. A woman can have all those facets, and yet men, in literature and in drama, seem to need to simplify women, to polarize us as either the whore or the angel. That sensibility is prevalent even to this day” (*The Creation of Anne Boleyn* 214).

Dormer and other actresses playing similar roles are not alone in calling attention to the problematic elements of these shows. Young women watching the shows are doing the same thing that French’s characters did in *The Women’s Room*, except they’re doing so not only in small groups on university campuses but through the new media that are made available to them. They’ve taken old issues and put them online, constantly re-

interpreting and re-analyzing the material that they’re given, making discussion groups that consist not of a handful of people but of thousands.

This has resulted in an interesting internet phenomenon. Blogging platforms have, over the past decade, allowed people to freely post their opinions online, but more interactive platforms have appeared in the years since then, allowing users not only to post their thoughts and ideas, but to circulate them *en masse*.

Internet websites like tumblr. and LiveJournal provide platforms for enthusiastic viewers to not only discuss their love for shows but to discuss all that is wrong with them. They create metafiction and consider where the shows went wrong, where the writers faltered and ultimately failed the females on their screens. They read and share critical essays, feminist theories, and ideas they had in discussions with others. Through all of that, they call attention to sexism and racism and then they try to fix what the writers destroyed. They defend the female characters.

And then sometimes, they go on to create. They take forms of media that are widely looked down upon and reclaim them not only to give a voice to their opinions but to fix what the writers they’re criticizing broke. They give new life to flattened female characters, analyzing and considering the motives behind their actions, giving them the background stories and personalities of which they were deprived. They take existent stories and recast the main characters as women, wondering, for instance, what it would have been like had Hamlet been a woman. It’s a form of play on the surface, a creative outlet for a dedicated audience, but it ultimately also serves as a redemption for the neglected characters. Henry Jenkins, former director of Comparative Media Studies at MIT, aptly observed that “Fan fiction is a way of the culture repairing the damage done in a system where contemporary myths are owned by corporations instead of by the folk” (Jenkins qtd. in *Quotes on Quotes*). And this is exactly what these viewers do.

Writers of fanfiction are motivated by nothing more than their passion for writing and their admiration for whatever fictional universe they’re reinterpreting. They aren’t backed by corporations and are often women. Consequently, they often choose to write from the perspective of female characters who have been under-utilized or outright abused by the writers who are subject to the pressures of society and their own internal sexism. Subsequently, the internet is filled with a wealth of texts that present more enlightened interpretations of female characters who are often far more complex than those present on mainstream screens. Critical viewers have thus managed to take the matter into their own hands, finding ways to make their voices heard and adapting an age-old problem

for a new era.

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FILM AND THEATRE

News from the Film Club

THE FILM CLUB CREW

Last semester, our ever-illuminating presenters and programmers took Film Club on a wild ride through a *Metamorphosis* of body, form, medium, and mind. Thanks to all participants – it was nothing if not transformative!

This autumn, Film Club has put together our most unabashedly action-packed program to date, and it's a doozy! Celebrity presenters, world-class nibbles, and more screenings than ever before – not to mention our Second Annual Very Scary Extra Fabulous Halloween Special Event Bonus Screening, complete with candy and costumes... Laughters and screamers, Film Club is thrilled to present to you:

Genres of Affect: Comedy & Horror.

A selection simultaneously personal and populist, the derring-do of our eclectic curation is matched only by its positively exponential crowd-pleasing potential! From political protest masquerading as pitch-perfect character caper to the spectacular histrionics of the Bollywood vehicle transporting us in spite of our- (and them-) selves; from the inter-taxonomic, star-crossed bromance musical to the oedipal nightmare that dares ask: what's worse than your dead mother? (A: Your undead mother) – our autumn semester movie line-up promises nothing less than birth, death, and all manner of convulsions, revulsions, and subversions in between.

These genres, at their most creative, harness the Trojan horsepower of transgressive expression(ism), smuggling catharsis-fueled aesthetical revolution far beyond the boundaries of any conventional comfort zones. Farting (sometimes literally) in the face of propriety, these films disgust, terrify, shock, and thoroughly entertain us into that arguably most radical of acts: being present, fully, in shared emotional experience. All you have to do is show up!

As always, Film Club takes place on select Thursday evenings (see the following program for specific dates) in room B112, with an apéro at 7:00pm and the presentation and screening at 7:15pm. Please feel free to bring your friends, food, drinks, thoughts, laughs, and *screeeeams*. If you have any questions / suggestions or would like to join the Crew, please contact bryn.skibo@unige.ch or anna.treiman@etu.unige.ch.

GENRES OF AFFECT:
COMEDY AND HORROR

25 SEPTEMBER **THE BIG LEBOWSKI**
INTRODUCED BY BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

2 OCTOBER **DEAD ALIVE**
INTRODUCED BY KIMBERLY FROHREICH

16 OCTOBER **BOMBAY**
INTRODUCED BY MARTIN LEER

30 OCTOBER **THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS**
HALLOWEEN COSTUME NIGHT!


13 NOVEMBER **THE PRINCESS BRIDE**
INTRODUCED BY AMY BROWN

27 NOVEMBER **IMPRINT**
INTRODUCED BY DEBORAH MADSEN

11 DECEMBER **BACHELORETTE**
INTRODUCED BY ANNA TREIMAN

18 DECEMBER **STUDENTS' CHOICE**

THE ENGLISH DEPT. FILM CLUB
FREE ENTRY FROM 19h00
ROOM B112, UNI-BASTIONS



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

Emmet Performs Emerson in the Wild: Nature, Cities, Gardens & Slavery

NICHOLAS WEEKS

Last spring, the English Department theatre group Emmet gave four productions of their latest creation *Emerson in the Wild*. Composed of a cast of nine, the play was devised during the workshops of the spring semester, between February and May 2014, and was based on the writings of the two key American transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). A peculiarity of these productions was that they were performed outdoors, in parks, so as to allow the writers' words to resonate with natural environments, thus emphasizing some of the play's central concerns: What is the relation of increasingly urban populations with nature? Is the kind of radical "civil disobedience" advocated by Thoreau still imaginable today? Or have such emancipatory visionary projects been subsumed under the normative imperatives of consensus during times of economic duress?

Open to students but also to alumni and external participants, Emmet has launched a series of dislocated productions over the last few years. *Blake's Revolution* (April 2013) was performed in La Cité Bleue, *A Winter's Tale* (December 2013) in the hall of Uni Bastions, and *Emerson in the Wild* (May 2014) in the campus park at the University of Lausanne, as well as in the garden of the art foundation Utopiana, on the grounds of the Château de Penthes, and in the Botanical Gardens of Geneva. The last-mentioned production was particularly meaningful as the fauna, plants, and trees not only formed the backdrop and immediate referent to which the play alluded but also featured as an integral part of the production through our collaboration with the Geneva Slackline Association.¹

In each new location, the actors – cast as a collective, alternatively or simultaneously exploring multiple facets of the personalities of our two authors – would lead audiences on a preliminary walk through the meanderings of Thoreau's life. When seated on the straw mats set out as a semi-circular auditorium for the production, the play then narrated Thoreau's premature departure from academia and business, his autodidactic study of nature and stern rejections of easy social conveniences, as well as how his knowledge

¹ Slackline is a recent urban sport where practitioners stretch a set of horizontal cables between two or more tree trunks and perform acrobatic feats about a meter off of the ground.

of the environment brought about a philosophy of life and poetic insight incompatible with the slack morality which, to him, pervaded and corrupted city life. Described as a character of wit, passion, and ruthless sternness bordering on egotism, Emerson's moving eulogy to his departed friend was thus animated by the proteiform chorus of actors through impersonations, anecdotes, and the silent movements of the observer discerning the deeper dynamics of nature in the breeding patterns of fish, the reproductive cycles of plants, or the migratory habits of birds.

About half-way through the action, the play came to a standstill as the chorus-turned-congregation mourned the departed Thoreau through Emerson's elegiac stanza:

It seemed as if the breezes brought him,
It seemed as if the sparrows taught him,
As if by secret sign he knew
Where in far fields the orchis grew.

Yet, at this point a sudden shift occurred as a youthful Thoreau emerged from behind the congregation speaking his own words and the audience witnessed the somewhat idealized image depicted by his more conservative friend shatter to pieces at the incandescent contact of this youth, whose radical energy was targeted at the political compliance of a people maintaining the status quo with regards to slavery in 1848.

Thoreau's rhetoric is imbued with a poetic, a poetic grounded in a way of life where experience and judgment cannot be conceded or delegated to others but have to be understood first-hand. His thirst for truth, though perhaps elitist, was never solipsistic as his ideals reached out to a collective humanity, reminding us that it is always in the present experience of a community that vigilance towards the foundations of a society (be it religious or constitutional) should be exercised.

It seemed to us that, though the stakes may have changed, Thoreau's provocative statements might still be applicable today. Facing the major climate crisis already underway, it might be time once again to question our relation to nature, the food chain, the place of consumption in the Western way of life, as well as our roles as agents in democratic systems. At his most radical, Thoreau advances the case for activism. Is this a cry to which our ears are still attuned today, facing the complexity of the challenges that lie ahead?

Thoreau's piques towards the State have always carried with them the deep ambition that humanity might rise to the existential challenge of social improvement – a humble and

difficult endeavour, both collective and deeply subjective:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go: perchance it will wear smooth; – certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. [...] For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. (Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* 234-5)²

Emmet's Autumn 2014 Production:
Anne Carson's Antigonick
 MARLON ARIYASINGHE

Throughout the course of the autumn semester, Emmet will work with Anne Carson's *Antigonick* (2012), a translation of Sophocles' prolific tragedy *Antigone*, with the production taking place at the end of the semester. Carson's *Antigonick* is more of a reinterpretation than an actual translation of Sophocles' text, with cynical, but hilarious, one-liners popping up at odd times, adding to or relieving the dramatic tension of the play. Notably, there is an ever-present "Nick" character, equipped with a measuring tape, who silently measures things that are found on-stage. The piece was reviewed and even performed (as a staged reading) by none other than Judith Butler, so if you have always wanted to portray a strong tragic female lead who openly fights against the patriarchal order, or a male tragic figure who is humbled by hubris, or a slightly neurotic sister who can't really make up her mind, or even a silent character who loves to measure things, this is the play for you.

Students, alumni, and outside participants who would like to join Emmet can register for the workshop at <http://www.a-c.ch/>.

For more details go to, <http://emmet.ch/> or contact marlon.ariyasinghe@gmail.com.

² Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden, Civil Disobedience and Other Writings*. William Rossi, ed. New York : W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

The Walking Dead

MARLON ARIYASINGHE

There was definitely something strange in the air. A kind of strangeness which made my skin prickle. The staircase leading to the entrance to the university was empty. The belligerent groups of smoking students were nowhere to be seen. An unfamiliar silence pervaded. I left my bike by the side of the building and began a slow ascent towards the door. I pushed one of the heavy archaic wooden doors and entered. No one was inside. The lack of human presence made me notice the statuettes by the sides of the columns. They stared unblinkingly into a timeless oblivion. Each step I took echoed within the hallowed hall. I stopped in the middle of the first floor. To my right I could see two staircases, one leading up and another leading down. The students' cafeteria was empty. On top of the cafeteria tables, I could see lots of paper. I suddenly felt that I was being watched. Out of the corner of my eyes I thought I saw a shadowy blur at the end of the corridor to my left. But it was nothing. Feeling more and more anxious, I walked towards the doors leading to the courtyard and the library. The door opened into a world of paper. There were millions of pages and books scattered all over the courtyard floor, on the grass, and everywhere. There were novels, works of criticism, journals, and volumes and volumes of precious literature. Books of all shapes and sizes murdered on the floor. The bindings were ripped apart with violence, and the covers were flung aside. The books were mutilated beyond recognition. I could identify, barely, some familiar volumes. There was the cover of *L'écriture et la différence* by Derrida on top of a pile, next to it, there was Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. I could also see Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* wrecked on the lawn. Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, had literally fallen apart. On another side, the *History of Sexuality* was in shreds with only three letters – F U and C – which survived. I felt a slight pain in my chest seeing the utter destruction of important works of fiction and non-fiction. The paper trail led towards the library.

The library door creaked open. A figure walked out. He moved quite lethargically. Another followed walking in a similar manner behind the first figure. When they got closer, I recognized the faces of two second-year students. Their heads were dropped to one side, eyes out of focus. They had disheveled hair and dirty clothes with red blotches.

"Hey, how is it going?" I began quite nervously.

"Urhhhhh," one of them replied with an animalistic groan.

"What's wrong with everyone? Why are all these books on the floor? What happened, guys?"

"Ehhhhhhh arrrhhhh." I only got two groans as a reply. His head leaned to the other side. His eyes were bloodshot and they had a hungry look in them. The other one just stared at me and started a low rumbling growl.

I instantly became terrified. There was another groan and a dragging step which came from behind. I turned to find another student, with a hungry gaze ogling me. I knew him. It was George, a student in his final year. His hand sluggishly moved towards my backpack. Before I could react, he tugged at it violently. I was pulled to one side and my backpack was almost yanked away from me. But I managed to cling on to one of its straps. The other two joined George. Thus, began one of the weirdest tug-of-wars I've ever witnessed, between me and three crazy hungry-looking guys who apparently craved something inside my bag. Three against one, it was a losing battle. I let go when I could not hold on any longer. George took the bag and ripped it open, its contents scattering to the floor. My books, notepad, pens, and a sandwich fell out of it. Their groans became fiercer. I had *The Spivak Reader* (not that I understood a word of Spivak) and *Empire Writes Back* among my books. *The Spivak Reader* was a very impressive, hard-cover book with its name engraved all over. I had carried this book with pride for the last two weeks.

The strangest thing followed. George and the others became highly animated and dived towards my books. One picked up *The Spivak Reader* and literally bit into its cover, another snatched it from him. They wrestled on the ground snarling at each other like a pack of hyenas over a carcass. The bindings came off and the pages scattered in all directions. One of them started to eat the pages, another was biting into the cover. I could hear scuttling footsteps from every direction. The commotion had attracted others. They moved towards my books bearing the same hungry gaze. Snarling, glaring, groaning, they fought each other for a taste of the books. Each time they took a bite out of a page the groans turned near-orgasmic. I watched in horror as my *Spivak Reader* and *Empire Writes Back* were devoured by zombie-like undergraduates.

It was quite plausible that once they were done with the books they would turn to me. I had to act. I had to get away from these murderers. I sprinted in the opposite direction hoping to find some refuge. It was completely deserted. I looked behind me to see if anyone had followed me; luckily, I was alone. I felt confused; I couldn't think straight. I had to find out what was going on. I kept pacing to and fro. I suddenly heard a small rustling noise. It came from a large, circular bush close by. I tiptoed towards the sound.

When I looked closely, I could see the back of a man seated inside the bush reading. In a swift motion the man sprang out from behind the bush.

“Don’t come any closer, I’m armed,” he warned, brandishing a book like a weapon. I could see that it was *Heart of Darkness*. I was too startled to reply. He then lunged at me with the book like a fencing swordsman, and waved it menacingly in my face. He looked afraid.

“So, you are immune to it. Ok. Let’s see... what do you say to this...” He produced Dickens’ *Bleak House* and thrust it in my face. Seeing my expression he remarked, “That’s strange...very strange indeed! I really thought it would work.” He was talking to himself. He took a long breath and went to where he had been sitting. He picked up another book and clutched it with both hands. His eyes were clenched shut and I could see his hands were trembling.

“Away ... DEMON!!” He screamed. When he gradually opened his eyes, I was still staring at him, more confused than afraid.

He observed me gravely and put the book down and said in a matter-of-fact tone, “You are not a walker, are you?”

“Eh no...What is a walker?” I asked, emphasizing the word “walker.”

“Didn’t you see them out there, devouring all the theory books, murdering them?” He came close to my face and said in a chilling tone, “*They* are the walkers.”

“Do you know what has happened to them? Tell me everything you know,” I implored.

“Yes, I know what’s wrong with them,” he replied confidently. Then he looked out into the distance. I could tell that his thoughts were taking him far away from this place.

“They are walkers... it’s... it’s... a student zombie epidemic.”

“Student zombie what?” I asked, not comprehending.

“It’s a student zombie epidemic; I never thought I would live to see one in my lifetime, yet here we are.”

“Can you please explain what a student zombie epidemic is?”

“Ok, I’ll tell you. It’s a very old story. It’s a story about a curse which began in 1786 in Burkittsville, Maryland, where a woman named Elly Kedward, who, after being accused of witchcraft, was tried, found guilty, and then banished into the Black Hills Forest where the townspeople left her, hanging from a tree, to succumb to the elements. Although her precise fate was never determined, it is assumed she died from exposure. However, in 1786, Elly’s spirit returned and manifested itself in physical form as a hairy, half-human, Bigfoot creature: the Gaya Witch.”

“What? What does this Elly or Gaya witch have to do with anything?” I queried.

He continued, “Listen carefully, you need to understand what happened in the past, otherwise we are all doomed. The Gaya Witch had a child who was taken to India in 1835 where she was adopted by the Chakravorty family. The curse of the Gaya witch remained dormant, but it was passed on to all the female children of the family.”

“I really don’t see where you are going with all of this.”

“Don’t you get it? Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak is a descendent of the Gaya Witch of Maryland.”

“So it’s Spivak who is making our undergrads devour books.”

“Exactly, this ancestral curse travels with her and all those who study literary theory are affected. It’s mainly the Spivak readers who metamorphose into mindless zombies. They survive by devouring pages of theory books. It’s a mash-up of *Resident Evil* and *Twilight* and that TV series about zombies, only here they eat books and pages, and not flesh or blood,” he explained.

“So why aren’t we affected?” I asked.

“That’s quite simple. People who can’t understand fashionable literary theory aren’t affected. I haven’t read beyond the second page of *Can the Subaltern Speak?*; by the look of it, you’ve only read the title.”

“That can’t be, I read it for a third-year course,” I said trying to defend myself. It wasn’t fair that I was excluded from the theory club. I mean, it looked like they were having fun

biting into books. Who knows, I might get a kick out of it.

“Look, you don’t have to lie to me. The only reason you are not affected by the epidemic is because you haven’t read her book.”

“Right but that doesn’t explain you trying to attack me with bad literature.”

“Well, I’ve discovered that these three books scare them away. Every time they see them, they run in the opposite direction.”

“You seem to know a lot about this epidemic. Is there anything that we can do to reverse the effect on our undergrads? I don’t want my friends to be zombies forever.”

He leaned over and whispered in my ear: “There is a way.”

I whispered back in his ear: “Why are we whispering?”

“Because we have to, they could be listening to us right now!”

“Who are ‘they’? The walkers?” I whispered back.

“No. Shhh, not so loud. The government has bugs all over the place. They want to know everything that goes on in this university.”

I thought he was a little paranoid to think that the government was listening to our conversation. Surely the government had better things to do.

“The last reported epidemic was in Colombia University in 2003 when Spivak went to teach there.”

“But why now, why after all this time?”

“A very poignant question. You see, Spivak arrived here yesterday. She is going to deliver the keynote speech at a conference at the Grand Hotel.”

“If she is here, maybe she knows how to stop this,” I said, rather hopefully.

“Listen carefully, according to the legend there is a way to stop this. You have to find

Spivak’s original copy of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* and burn it.”

“You only italicize book titles. It’s an article,” I pointed out.

“You are right, I forgot. You have to find the original of ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ and burn it. She always carries it with her. You need to draw a pentagram and place it in the middle. Then you need to chant these words: ‘From whence you came, you shall return to haunt the nether world of academia.’ If you follow these instructions you will be able to save everyone,” he instructed.

“You can count on me,” I said.

“Listen and listen well, the fate of the university undergraduates is in your hands. You must save the university from becoming a site of mindless, walking corpses.”

“I won’t let you or my friends down. I will find it and send it to the underworld,” I replied confidently.

“You have to go to the Grand Hotel and take the elevator. Press P, B, and the Alarm button together, it will take you down to a secret basement where you will find her.”

He placed *Heart of Darkness* and *Bleak House* in my hands.

“You need them more than I do. When they come at you, just show them one of the books. They’ll be scared.”

“But how are you going to survive?” He was giving up his only means of survival.

“Don’t worry about me, boy! Remember you are our only hope. Now go out there and save the world! Well not the world, *per se*, but you get it, right!”

I left him behind the bush and ran towards my bike. The walkers, seeing me, came towards me. They were closing in on me. This time I saw it in their faces. They wanted to stop me. It’s as if they knew that I was going to put a stop to their misery. I flinched when I saw that my path was blocked by a number of them. There was no way I could reach my bike. I saw the hungry looks in their eyes. I knew that this time around they would eat me alive, theory or no theory. I had to do something. I took out *Bleak House* and waved it in front of the zombies. Surprisingly, it had no effect. Was he wrong about

this? In desperation I flung the book at the them. The zombies, mistaking it for a theory book, started biting into it. I threw *Heart of Darkness* at the other zombies blocking my way. They leaped towards it and started devouring its pages.

This was certainly a strange turn of events; he had miscalculated. I reached my bike without any trouble but then I started to hear gagging sounds. When I looked back, I saw that the student zombies were all bent double clutching their stomachs. Their hungry looks were replaced by looks of pain. It was at this time that one of the zombies noticed the cover of *Bleak House*; his face turned to horror, and he started screaming aloud. I didn't know that the walkers could scream, I had only heard them groan. When the others saw the cover they too began to bawl and howl. Then it happened. One by one they began retching. This was like the aftermath of a frat party. They were throwing up pages of *Bleak House* and *Heart of Darkness*. It was clear that these books were not easily digestible nor edible to most of their readers... eh, I meant to say student zombies. They were in excruciating pain, I could see it in their faces, eating these classics was a mistake. I got on the bike and peddled towards the hotel.

When I got to the Grand Hotel, I went directly to the elevator and pressed P, B, and the Alarm button together. I felt like a secret agent in a Bond movie. The doors slowly closed and the lift started to descend. As the lift was moving down, the display indicated which floors I was passing. The elevator went to the lowest floor, which was marked with a P, probably for parking. It stopped, but then it jerked and continued downwards.

The doors opened to reveal a dark, poorly lighted corridor. I had no way of knowing where the light was coming from. I noticed that the air went from spring-fresh to stale, and then to rank with a heavy smell of damp, moldy stone. The smooth stone blocks of the walls were precisely fit; there was no space in between. This underground cellar was a dark labyrinth resonating with the presences and mysteries of the dead. Who would've thought that there would be catacombs beneath the hotel. I walked onwards looking for signs of life. The elevator, in this gothic setting, seemed quite out of place. Just then I heard a wild involuntary cry coming from deep within the catacombs. I walked towards the sound. In the distance I could see a torch. I also heard muffled snippets of what sounded like a conversation. A soft ripple of laughter floated up the hall. There was water leaking from the stone ceiling and it echoed as it splashed in a little green puddle not far away. Then the voices turned to something like a chant. As I got closer, the chanting became more and more audible. This slow melodious chanting made my skin prickle.

Near the end of the corridor I could see an opening. There was a brilliant light emanating from it. I crept slowly and peered through the opening.

At least a hundred candles were set on the ground in a ring as if to hold back intruders. Inside the ring there was a circle drawn on the stone floor. It stood out clearly in the candlelight. There were at least ten people who sat around the circle. I saw them in the dim, flickering light. It looked as if each had a hood over their heads, with holes cut out for eyes. They chanted in unison. Shadows from the figures extended inward toward a point in the centre.

I began to hear them distinctly. They were chanting three words in a slow, melodious rhythm: "DECONSTRUCTION" "THE OTHER" "SUBALTERN." The chant was repeated over and over again. When they chanted "subaltern," they dragged it out so it sounded like "saaaabooollltan." The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of how all this had happened, and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before me, took away my speech.

One figure stood and removed the hood. I immediately recognized who it was. It was the shorthaired Gayathri Spivak. She was also holding on to a trendy, pink handbag. The handbag seemed totally out of place. This must be the handbag containing the original copy of "Can the Subaltern Speak?." She cleared her throat and began:

"Capital is good; capitalism is bad; but once again, it's medicine and poison; you must know how to use it."

The circle of hooded figures answered with the chant, "Deconstruction, the other, saaabooollltan."

She continued:

"The fall into the abyss of deconstruction inspires us with as much pleasure as fear. We are intoxicated with the prospect of never hitting bottom."

"Deconstruction, the other, saaabooollltan."

She seemed a little annoyed. She sighed and spoke to the hooded figures:

"Listen everyone! Today I'm going to teach you a new word that I coined. It sounds very

confusing but it's über cool. Soon everyone will be using it.”

“The other?” the crowd questioned Gayathri.

“Strategic essentialism... this has to come before ‘subaltern’ and after ‘the other.’ Ok, now chant after me: ‘deconstruction, the other, strategic essentialism, saaabooollltaan.’”

The crowd did so.

“Very good.”

I had no time to waste. I had a mission. I could see that there was already a pentagram drawn on the floor.

“The white man calls sati barbaric and oppressive. The brown man objects that sati isn't that common and cries that similar atrocities were performed in Europe (like the burning of witches and heretics).”

“Deconstruction, the other, strategic essentialism, saaabooollltaan.”

I knew what I had to do. I would run towards Spivak and snatch her handbag. Then I would take the original article out and run towards the pentagram symbol. Then, I would burn it before anyone had time to stop me.

Taking a huge breath, I ran towards Gaya. It was like in *The Matrix*; everything happened in slow-mo. Time refused to move. I saw the bewildered expression on Gaya's face. I snatched the bag from her hands and ran towards the pentagram. I took out a bundle of handwritten papers with “Can the Subaltern Speak?” written on the first page. I placed it in the middle of the pentagram. It was my turn to chant “from whence you came you shall return to haunt the nether world of academia.” Then I set fire to it. The copy burned with a strange green flame and the lines of the pentagram were glowing red. Then all of a sudden, with a thunderous sound, the copy disappeared. Exactly at that moment I felt a great blow to the side of my head and I lost consciousness.

When I opened my eyes I was staring at the stone ceiling. I could feel that my hands and feet were bound. I was placed at the centre of the circle. The hoods were sitting around me. It was like a cult ritual you see in movies. For some reason I couldn't move a muscle. I was glued to the floor. A figure leaned over me. It was Gayathri. Her eyes were night-

marish and she wore a slight smirk.

“The white man saves the brown woman from the brown man,” she said.

“The wild woman brain man ...huh? What are you going to do to me? Isn't this kinda kinky? You got me all tied up.”

I couldn't believe how I could be flippant at a time like this. They will probably cut me up to pieces and eat my heart out. The sheer ignorance of what was going to happen made my skin crawl. I was sweating all over with fear.

“I am sorry. Please let me go,” I pleaded.

Gayathri leaned over me and said in a demonic voice, “Who the hell do you think you are? Do you have any idea who I am and what I'm capable of. I am Gayathri freaking Chakravorthi Spivak. I eat little shits like you for breakfast.”

“Deconstruction, the other, strategic essentialism, saaabooollltaan,” the crowd chanted in awe.

“So I...I...I failed then,” I stammered. “My friends are still zombies?”

“Yes... and we have a surprise for you.” She grinned. It was more like a grimace. She produced a sheet of paper and shoved it in my face.

“Read it!”

I didn't want to read it. I felt something sharp on my neck and I saw that it was a shiny dagger.

“READ IT!” she said menacingly.

“But... I don't understand,” I stuttered helplessly.

“Read it or I'll cut your throat.”

I was terrified. I was too young to die. I read. She helped me to pronounce some of the big words.

“This parasubjective matrix, cross-hatched with heterogeneity, ushers in the unnamed subject, at least for those intellectual workers influenced by the new hegemony of desire. The race for ‘the last instance’ is now between economics and desire.”

As I was reading those words, the group chanted fervently. I felt feverish and all I could think was how hungry I am.

“He is turning... chant faster... faster!” The chanting became fanatical.

Turning once again to me she said softly, “Read... it’ll all be over soon. I promise.”

“The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with ‘woman’ as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish!”

The last thing I remember was reading that last word “flourish.” Then I lost consciousness. My last thought was how hungry I am.

The Beast

H. M. JI

There was once a retired philosopher, named Walter, living at Somerset Homes, who had little to do with his time. Chamber pots, antiseptic ointments and overcooked meals bore his daily spell of despondency. *I’ll be a Faust to your Gretchen! A Werther to your Charlotte! I’m so weary. I care not for your soul, I desire only your flesh. Come to me, Margarethe!* Such were the thoughts obsessing him whilst hoping, through the long waking hours, for ‘something to happen’. Hence, his lady’s visits were like manna from heaven and even though she never touched him, flesh to flesh, the gloved hands drifting towards him on visiting days made him tremble with anticipated eagerness and delight: he awaited the moment they would gather him in and the wearer bestow her greeting with a kiss, a breath away from his forehead. On her visits, the lady touched him only with her gloved hands, as the rules dictated. Germs had to be contained and gloves worn at all times. Those were the regulations, but one with a discerning eye would guess that germs had already settled upon the place a long time ago, crawling under threadbare carpets, mouldering within the deepest creases of velvet-covered armchairs and insidiously eating away at tablecloths whose whiteness had dimmed long ago. Fifty years earlier, he had married a girl chosen by his parents, a girl he had loved but who had died too young. She had not been pretty, but for thirty years, she had taken care of him, fed him, washed his laundry and raised their three sons, whom he referred to as ‘the ungrateful gits’ because, at the first opportunity, they had migrated either to America or Canada. She had not been pretty but had been loyal and steadfast. With the loss of his limbs and an enfeebled constitution resulting from long physical illness, his world had been reduced to the walls of his resident suite, and small repetitious details typical of daily doldrum made his eyes glitter like those of a beast when he beheld those pristine gloves and their lovely wearer gliding towards him. ‘Hello, my sweet’, he would say, gazing up with longing, and she would offer her air-kiss with a gentle smile.

The parlour room, where resident guests awaited their visitors, unfolded as a stage where signs of genteel decay flitted and residents toddled under the patina of age. Somerset Homes promised peaceful slumbers through lazy sunny afternoons and a sanctuary from cold winter days when a fire roared up the stately chimney. The woods and garden were a haven under the coolness of trees where idle hours were spent chatting away, playing scrabble or whist; sometimes a victory would surprise the winner since one had not cheated. Those were beautiful grounds, but the residents at Somerset Homes were afraid

to go beyond its immediate borders; whispers went round, that there were 'things' deep in the woods that would chill one's blood, till their frail bones shivered with the primal fear of what might lurk in the night. With old age, they had become timorous of anything unfamiliar, favouring their own company in the same cosy rooms or in defined areas of the grounds, huddling elegantly in various tableaux of game-playing and meal-sharing. When one caught a whiff of the faintest scent of mildew or grease from the kitchen, one could gently frown it away or turn one's nose in the opposite direction. For visitors, such views made for obliging civilities accompanied by the occasional suppressed laughter, yet for those whose lives were slowly ebbing away on those pale velvet-covered armchairs, poised just so on threadbare carpets, it was something fierce and pitiless and hard. *Do you remember our nights of bliss when flesh to flesh we consumed our passion? I've given my soul to the devil, but yours is safe in heaven.* Oh, the futility of it!

The wearer of those ivory gloves was an attractive and finely-dressed woman in her early thirties, whose face was as fair as a lily, with the sort of loveliness that recalled fine, delicate porcelain. Her name was Gwendoline. An English rose, the caretakers and nurses whispered, a wisp of a woman, barely a woman, yet the perfection of womanhood in every line. Her golden hair was coiffed softly in a low bun and her lips dabbed with just a hint of colour. As she trod on the old wooden planks with her quiet footfall, smiling eyes followed her retreating figure. She was dressed all in creams and whites but had not noticed till the landlady, who had had a glimpse of her going out of the front door, had remarked that she rather looked like the Snow Queen. She lived by herself in a small but neatly kept flat on the ground floor of an Edwardian boarding house, which had a tiny garden, her 'bit of earth' she called it, for the herbs which she tended scrupulously. She was the adopted daughter of Walter's only sister, younger by fifteen years, whose life had been tragically cut short in a car accident ten years past. He had put Gwendoline through private schools and gave her a regular monthly allowance, although she had a part-time post working as a librarian. She was now the only member of his family who cared whether he lived or not. Her visits took place, without fault, on Sunday late afternoons and on Friday evenings. 'Hello to you', would be her reply. Their meetings afforded them the pleasure of discovering new works by the greats. She had read him several passages of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Italian, which she had learnt at boarding school, the poems of the Lake Poets ('they must have prayed for rain to fall just so they could peek through the leafy curtains round their window', she had said), and, by reading a few chapters of Henry James every week, she had finally closed the last page on *The Wings of the Dove*. The soft folds of her skirt spilt around her elegant column whilst the immortal words were read aloud, her eyelashes casting delicate dancing shadows upon her cheeks. He would devour her with his gaze rather than attend to her beautiful articulations on the

tragedies and intrigues of love gained and lost. They moved on to Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, to revive, he fancied, the exquisite perfection of a Kate Croy before her fall. *Be my Margarethe*, was his greed's silent plea.

Walter never spoke of his wealth, which was the happy though unexpected inheritance from a close family friend who had had no heirs. His three sons would not bother with transatlantic trips to see an old man whom they deemed irascible and foul-tempered because he showed them no affection, as attested by the fact he would not discuss nor hint at, any possibility of inheritance with them, though the birthday cards came dutifully every year. He never discussed his finances with his adopted niece nor did she ask any questions; she seemed to exist above such worldly matters. He asked her:

'How do you spend your days in this fair weather (*do I fill even a few minutes of your hours*)? Tell me, my dear'.

'An odd thing happened this morning', she replied, 'my neighbor, the landlady you'll remember, told me I looked like the Snow Queen'.

'An apt appellation'.

'Do you think so? She was a cold creature, the Snow Queen, I mean. I once saw a lithograph in an edition published in the late 1800s, and she looked magnificent and remote, like her namesake'. He was amused at her concern.

'Before coming to see you, I stopped at the flea market and found some old cotton voile and a rusted water can for my plants'.

'Are these little random acts part of a larger pattern?', he asked without really wanting to know.

'You're being dramatic, aren't you?'

'No. The way you fill your hours, are you waiting for something to happen?'

'Oh, no! I just know what I want. Let me read a few lines from the *Letters*', she suggested as she unfolded the book.

'What do you make of the poet's having to look into himself?', he asked, watching her

slender fingers work their way through the first pages.

‘Does a poet not have to know himself in order to create?’ she asked whilst a slight frown hovered over the ruffled pages.

‘True verses, you mean’.

‘Yes...know thyself and conquer legions with your mighty pen’, she looked up, finally, smiling.

He smiled back, ‘What a frightening thought’. They both laughed. She always wore a very light perfume, citrusy and evanescent. She displayed her femininity with such grace and ease, he mused. Then, on a cynical note, he wondered, but only for the barest instant, when his spells of despondency overcame him, what the price was behind her exquisite perfection.

Finally, there was the young caretaker, named Cavill, whose heart beat a little faster every time he saw her. He noticed she wore the most pristine white gloves whenever she entered the premises; in the dim afternoon light, her fingers seemed soft and velvety. By a stroke of fortune, both uncanny and incomprehensible, he was a virtuoso at the piano, despite the fact that he had never had any formal training as a child. He had been able to improvise most tunes on the rickety piano at school; it was only at sixteen that he had, literally, tried his hands at more demanding pieces from the classical repertoire. Then, with wages earned, he began perfecting his technique under the rigorous demands of conservatory training. He would eventually quit Somerset Homes altogether, even if his five hours a week were no burden to him; but for reasons he would not admit to himself, he had once again postponed his leave. He was one of the organisers for the bi-annual Concert Evening, he liked to remind himself. Several young musicians were invited every spring and autumn for an evening of ‘grand entertainment’; occasionally, a musician of some renown would make an appearance and the staff at Somerset Homes anticipated the musician’s arrival with trepidation and excitement. He had nothing in the world, but his music was the one gift he could offer her. He resisted the impulse to run after her, call out her name, and touch something that belonged to her – even a finger’s worth of her arm – and inhale her scent. He had dark wavy hair that was thick and lush, the kind that would last till old age, and green-grey eyes that changed colour according to his moods. The moment she stepped in, they became a misty sea green, gleaming like two small pools of light by the dark staircase. He had a most becoming way of absent-mindedly pushing his thick-framed glasses up his nose, although he was not aware of the effect

he had on the female nurses and residents. His eyes glinted from the shadows where he stood still, his hand against the wall, gazing upon her from a soundless distance. But the beast within him was tamed. When he had overheard one of the nurses mention her by name, he had softly repeated it to himself, as one would an incantation. He would play a piece by Chopin, he informed the chief housekeeper in charge of the details, the ‘Nocturne in C-sharp minor’. Yes, its sweet melancholy would suit her perfectly.

Cavill suspected the attainment of culture was not the purpose of those evenings as much as an occasion for the residents to get dressed in their best attire and show it off to one another, as children might show off their best toys. He imagined true novelty in amusements would be limited for people whose lives were lived in close proximity day in and day out. Did they not look like a gathering of avid children awaiting their treats, with Christmas come two months early? The dining hall came to life as more and more guests arrived, their indistinct voices and laughter dancing in the dense air. He allowed himself the leisure of enjoying the great human comedy at a remove, for to know the human heart was his private conceit. He felt he knew them better than they knew themselves: indeed, none of the whist players and idle gossipers would attend to the concert as they were too busy giving each other the once-over, so she would know he played for her ears alone. As he touched the first notes to the nocturne, he seemed like a saint transfigured. He pictured her, left hand cupping her cheek, eyes half-closed, bathed in filtered light spreading around her figure like a halo, as radiant and slender as the lilies placed in the four corners of the room. His fingers glided on the notes as if they were made of flesh. It was an act of intimacy so secret, so pervasive, drops of perspiration shed from his temple, his longing transmuted into an impassioned act of worship. It was on that evening that, for the first time, she looked at him fully in the eyes and smiled with approval. *To exist...* He held her gaze whilst taking his bows. From his seat, he had only to turn his head slightly to get a clear view of her lovely face. His hand rose by itself when, once, she looked back. At the close of the concert, when guests and residents stood up to mingle with one another, he crossed the room purposefully to reach her.

‘Who are you?’ he asked, his extended hands calling out for hers. Holding hands, they stood still, lost unwaveringly in the depths of their gaze and unheeding of the crowd surrounding them. He had waited for that moment for months.

Walter felt a worm had insinuated itself into his sacred haven and oozed toward his prized rose. He would make a brave stand to safeguard his treasure by confessing his feelings to her before it was too late. He passed away amidst his chamber pots, medicinal ointments and the smell of overcooked veggies, the following week. On the night before

his death, words poured out from his feeble lips: 'I care nothing for my salvation and desire only your freshness and youth. Lie beside me for a few minutes, just this once'. His fervent pleading brought the night-nurse into his suite to intervene till, 'storm allayed', the wild beatings of his heart were under control. *This is my last chance, Margarethe...* She held his hand in her soft grasp as sleep overtook him. Unbeknownst to her, he had in his final will bequeathed a quarter of his fortune to his three sons and left her everything else, she who cared only for art, beauty and literature, and had given them to him in full to meet his fate honourably. Her breath would catch when the will was read: she would know how much he had loved her!

When Gwendoline entered through the doors, Cavill was, once more, struck by the immediacy of her beauty. Something, almost imperceptible about her, had changed, in her air or the way she carried herself. 'This, she does for me', he knew. No one but he, for whom her every turn and glance were burnt into his breast, noticed it. She was wearing her hair loose for once and her lips were a shade darker; in fact when she got closer to him, he saw they were of the most alluring strawberry colour. He felt the first stirrings of the beast rousing within him. She greeted him with both her hands extended, as was their custom; he gazed upon her with greed. She had come one last time to collect the worldly belongings the old man had left her: their shabby editions of Dante's poetry and the Lake Poets, though she had not yet been informed about her inheritance. She wore another pair of those gloves, though he knew they were unnecessary since she only came to gather his small, pathetic collection. She had always known her duties as a niece for she was pragmatic: a girl had to be pragmatic and think of her future, she told him, facing the window of the old man's former suite. She had a collection of fine gloves, she continued, in silk, suede, mesh, cotton, a pair for any occasion and every season. She felt dressed and safe only when wearing them:

'There's no need to become beastly. All you have to do is change your gloves'. A note of discord struck in his ear and a slight chill electrified him. She unpeeled the plastic ones she was wearing and tossed them into the rubbish bin, on top of the old man's gifts.

'You see', she told him, 'gloves have a specific function and place; these are special because, when you're done with your charge, or whatever it is you've set out to accomplish, you can chuck them away, and wear a new pair. Then you won't have to carry the stench of squalor and want on you when you leave, even from an absurdly overpriced home such as this where the meek and idle wait in vain for that last thrill when the only thing awaiting them is their due round the corner, despite all their efforts at keeping the decay at bay after it has already entered. It's like taking an instant bath, except it's much faster

since you can do it fully dressed'.

Eyes closed, she exhaled a deep sigh and inhaled the crisp autumn air through the open window as if she had been holding her breath under water. Cavill could hardly follow what she was saying for he was mesmerised by the very sight and nearness of her, though he was, deep inside in a small place that was still his own, chilled to his heart's core. He felt powerless to remove himself from the ground where he stood. She kept repeating, eyes half-closed, why it was unnecessary to become beastly about the whole thing. He knew his salvation lay in removing himself far, very far from her, but he could not take his eyes off of her exquisitely shaped lips which moved in perfect cadence as those of a witch casting a spell on the credulous.

Baudrillard in Disneyland

SASKIA McCracken

Cinderella sits down on the plastic chair opposite me and holds an unlit cigarette in her hand.

'The French guy is back again', she says.

She's been smoking the same one for three days now. Holds it, sits, chats, lights it if Ursula walks past, stubs it out when Ursula's gone. She says smokers get longer breaks.

One time Ursula asked, 'Cinders, is that even lit?'

Cinders lit up, took a drag and said, 'God yeah, it keeps going out. So annoying'.

Ursula went into the office and she stubbed it back out again. When Ursula is really stressed, she joins us. Then Cinders goes back to work or actually has to smoke one the whole way through.

'Disgusting', she says to me afterwards. 'I don't know how you do it'.

I take off my headband, straighten the feathers and nod for Cinders to continue.

'The French guy from yesterday', she says, waving the Marlboro around.

'Yeah?' I say. 'Still taking notes?'

'Yeah. He asked me about our training', she says. 'So I said, "Why, you want a job?"'

'What'd he say?'

'Dunno, something in French. So I said, "You going to feed the birds then?" I was feeding the birds. I'm like, "You don't go on any of the rides, might as well do something right?"'

'Right', I nod.

'And he said to me...oh, shit, Ursula's coming, give us a light'. She lights up.

Ursula walks up to us, her tentacles dragging around her.

'Hi team', she says. 'How's it going? Birds doing all right, Cinders?'

'Yeah, they tweet, they eat. Same old'.

'Pocahontas?' She turns to me. 'How are the little Indians?'

'I had a puker already', I say.

'Oh God', she says. 'Don't even get me started on my day. I've had a complaint about a man standing by the crèche taking notes. Apparently he doesn't speak English and God, I hate kicking out foreigners, so stressful. And Disney doesn't need any, I mean *any*, more bad press about pervs here, does it? Don't have a spare cigarette do you?'

'Sorry, I'm all out', I say.

'Yeah, me too', Cinders shakes her head. 'Sorry Ursula, this is my last one'.

Ursula picks up one of her tentacles and twists it around in her hands.

'Right', she says. 'Right. Better be off'. She goes back into the office.

Cinders stubs out her Marlboro. 'I thought she'd never leave, right?' She sighs. 'Anyway, he can speak English; he hit on me'.

'Hit on you?' I say. 'And you're only telling me now? Jesus. What'd he say?'

'Oh you know, the usual, did your parents call you Cinderella? Where's Prince Charming? What's your real name?'

'Ugh', I say. 'That's not too bad. I had one of the dads ask me if I was a "real Injun" and had I seen his totem pole'.

'No way', she goes, 'that's so gross'.

'I know, right?'

'Anyways, then he was like, "I'm doing some research for a paper and I wondered if I could interview you". Clearly checking me out. I said if he's not going to feed the birds he can go research someone else. Like, not witty or anything, but you know. Don't want to get in trouble again'.

'Then what'd he say?'

'Some kids ran up and asked for my autograph. He said he'd find me later and snuck off'.

'Creep', I say, picking some gum off my moccasins.

We sit in silence for a bit, me smoking, her picking flakes of bird food off her puff sleeves. Then Ursula runs out of the office shouting into her walkie-talkie for security. One of her tentacles snags on my chair and she tugs at it. We hear the material rip.

'What is it?' Cinders says.

Ursula clutches at the tentacle. 'The French guy', she says, 'Snow White heard him asking some children if they know about simulation. I knew he was a pervert'.

'Here babe', Cinders hands her the Marlboro. 'You need this more than I do'.

The Word Box

KATE McLOUGHLIN

Reader in Modern Literature; Birbeck, University of London

The birds having vacated the bird box,
 The words moved in and set to work at once.
 The nouns in charge, the verbs busied themselves,
 Scoured, mopped and grouted, sanded, plastered, planed.
 The adverbs helped. The pronouns carried loads.
 The conjunctions, out of flat packs, built the
 Furniture. The prepositions pushed it
 Into place. Lazy, the adjectives lay
 In bed till noon, rose finally, painted
 Walls in white and crimson, hung chandeliers,
 Laid rugs. Homesick, the birds, revisiting,
 Saw the improvements, fell quiet. House-proud,
 The words ushered them in, showed off features,
 Cut cake, poured tea, chattered incessantly.

Too Cool to be Used

PALOMA LUKUMBI

TIP TOP TIP TOP TIP TOP

LET

Us get to you.

Two...three cuts to clutch my—your—his—her—their Gene

Ration.

Trace it back [h^] . Free your style: face it. Take it. Swa—

LLOooOOW. From yo head to them toeZ.

(Full stop)

Second Act:

It Cooled off.

Bring it [^:n]

Blow Ain't needed no Mo'. Let's get pass this

FLO-W-ID.

Fier [sssSsSss]

Fix the lips. The hips.

Bend the knees

[h^ . h^ . H^ . H^ . H^ . h^

] Mu: Ve.

Hiccups

ANDRÉAS-BENJAMIN SEYFERT

Back in my younger years, each time my parents would have guests over for dinner, my little sister and I were expected not to draw any unnecessary attention to ourselves.

On this particular evening, the rule seemed to apply even more strongly, since the guests were none other than my mother's former literature professor and his wife. So we made a special effort to display our good manners. It did not take long for my sister to misbehave, though. As soon as the guests had inquired our names, they asked the children to please call them "Dr. Walt" and "Auntie Sue," to which my sister politely returned, Could she please ask Dr. Walt a question? When she was granted that request, she inquired innocently: "Why do you grow your hair on your face and not on your head?" Auntie Sue laughed heartily at this, and I must admit I had trouble hiding my own amusement. My mother's face reddened and she asked Walt and Sue if they might like a cool drink.

It took up until the end of the second course for my mother to suffer further embarrassment from one of her children. This time it came under the guise of hiccups, which in turn made me the center of the conversation. Water, lemon and shock were all suggested as possible cures. I felt bad for drawing so much attention to myself, and assured everyone that I was going to be fine. My mother probably guessed my intentions and suggested we move on to dessert. But Dr. Walt countered this attempt:

"You know, there is a very good hiccup-cure that not many people know about."

"And it's also a good story," added Auntie Sue.

"Yes, you tell it," encouraged Dr. Walt.

"Alright, I will. You see, Walt and I met back in college, in Germany. There used to be only one pharmacy in town, and so you had no choice but to go to that pharmacy. The man who owned the shop had been a Nazi. He would tell us stories from the 'good old days,' interspersed with requests to his wife: '*Gretchen, mein schönes Fräulein, darf ich wagen, dir das vielleicht aufzutragen?*'"¹

¹ This roughly translates as: "Gretchen, my fair young lady, may I possibly be so free as to ask this of you?"

"Which is a reference to—?" asked Dr. Walt pointing encouragingly to my mother. "Goethe, *Faust*," answered my mother, the faithful student that she was.

"Good. Well done."

"If you're done with your German Lit. 101, I'd like to finish the story," said Auntie Sue with a sharp glance at her husband.

"Sure," said he, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms over his chest. "Sorry for the rude *interruptio in medias res*."

"Thank you. So this pharmacist used to boast about all his accomplishments during the Third Reich. One day, he told us a ridiculous story about how he had been called by Adolf Hitler in person, who was supposed to be giving a speech at the university, but apparently was having hiccups backstage and couldn't go on."

"Happens to the best of us," Dr. Walt said, facing me with a cheerful glance.

"Anyway," Auntie Sue continued. "The pharmacist said he gave him a cure that saved the day. It consisted of drinking a glass of water through a straw while pinching your nose with your two little fingers and covering up your ears with your thumbs."

"How funny," my mother said. "Imagine Hitler performing these acrobatics with a straw and a glass of water at the end of his toothbrush moustache."

She giggled.

My father glanced back and forth between my sister and me, and then surprised us all by jumping to his feet:

"Time to go to bed, honey-bun," he said to my sister.

My five-year-old sister yawned, slowly blinking her eyes. My father softly wiped a rebellious wisp of hair from his daughter's face.

"It's probably for the best," my mother said. "Say goodnight to Dr. Walter and Auntie Sue."

My sister said goodnight, got to her feet and grabbed her father's hand. They both started to walk out of the room. But my father suddenly stopped and turned an inquisitive face to me:

"What about you? Aren't you the least bit tired?"

I knew what my father was saying: he wanted me to go to bed. But what I was unaware of then, no doubt because I was still in my younger and untarnished years, is that this was a conversation I was as yet unfit to handle. And that it had gone far enough. As adults, we have come to expect people to be many things at once. But to a child, the concept of evil seems outlandish, mysterious and, most importantly, all-encompassing; in the mind of a child, the word "evil" defines a whole character. There is simply no space in a villain's schedule for human frailties such as fevers, toothaches, colds or hiccups, let alone good deeds. Too much time and effort goes into designing, covering up and carrying out bad actions. How then could Adolf Hitler, Mr. Hell personified, possibly be faced with such ordinary preoccupations as hiccups? After all, does it seem realistic that the Witch takes time to kiss her baby or to brush her teeth before giving Snow White the poisoned apple? I remember that I have later often turned this question, which appeared to me as a paradox at the time, over in my mind. But for now, the issue at hand was getting rid of those hiccups. And so I did not stop to think about this even for a split-second.

"I'll come in a minute, Dad," I said with another hic, "I want to try Dr. Walt's hiccup-cure."

So my father left the room.

My mother helped me to adjust my fingers on my nose and ears. The cure didn't work. The hiccups were worse than ever.

"The story doesn't end there," Dr. Walt told us, grinning. "When we moved to Israel—"

"Years later," Auntie Sue interrupted.

"—years later," Dr. Walt agreed, "we used to attend quite a lot of political rallies. And we became good friends with, with...what's his name again, the one with the piercing blue eyes...?"

"Yes and the funny thing is," said Auntie Sue. "The funny thing is that they used to tell

us, everybody...but sorry dear, I didn't mean to interrupt you. I'll tell the story afterwards."

"Yeah, so, that guy, you know who I mean... We used to go to all of his talks and became good friends. Anyway, so we went for a drink and – you guessed it! – he got the hiccups. And there I was – I hadn't thought about the pharmacist in years – remembering the hiccup-cure. So I suggested that he try this one and, pouf! They were gone. He was ever so grateful, he kept asking me: 'Where on earth did you find this miracle-cure?' Naturally, I felt embarrassed and couldn't tell him: 'I'm sorry, I just don't know. I can't seem to remember.'"

"What I was going to say—" Auntie Sue eagerly started.

"Yes, dear?"

"What I was going to say is that, when we first went to Israel, people all told us: 'Be careful never to speak German. They don't like it here.' And the funny thing is that the first thing this man said to us was 'Good. Now that we're alone, I can practice my German.' That man was amazing. He spoke five different languages."

I must admit that I only half-listened to Auntie Sue. My mind was elsewhere. At times, the *naïveté* of my younger years still manages to astound me. I was mindlessly gaping at Dr. Walt who was now nodding, in silent agreement with his wife. The truth of it is, that I was genuinely puzzled: Why would Dr. Walt have felt embarrassed about telling the full story to that politician in Israel? Wasn't he making a full disclosure of it now, at this very table? How could a story cause you embarrassment in one case and, if you are to tell it to a different crowd, give rise to no concern at all?

"Why, darling," my mother exclaimed. "Your hiccups are gone!"

Undermine

MANON GUIGNOT

The man who had just sat in front of Andrew on the bus stared at him unblinkingly, but Andrew did not return his impoliteness. He was neither intimidated nor making a statement: he was simply lost in his stream of thoughts.

Andrew could not name the fear that paralysed him, but he was aware that it was becoming overwhelming. He did not know how to express his feelings, he only knew the way that they felt. He generally saw labels as threats, as possible reductions of himself rather than indications. His resistance was a type of safety blanket, yet it kept him from understanding what he was experiencing and moving forward.

The sparkle he usually found in the ordinary kept fading away. He observed himself disappearing with it, growing insignificant, floating without intent in between days filled with busy nothingness. The little things that made his life his own, that made it both lighter yet more tangible, were losing their taste while he stood by helplessly.

Suddenly, Andrew caught the look of the man in front of him. For a short instant, he thought that not only did the stranger know what he felt, but he saw it better than Andrew did himself. The idea of it made Andrew almost angry, uncomfortable to be honest. He hated it. Yes, it was ridiculous and even insolent of that stranger to think he had that knowledge, that advantage over him. And yet, Andrew believed he did.

Before he could make up his mind, Andrew found himself standing up, ready to get off the bus. He had to breathe. Breathe. What to do now? He refused to accept the process but he could not go on pretending that this would go away on its own. He was neither mature nor ready, yet it was getting worse. It was a foolish idea. Completely foolish. He needed to act now, he nodded as he join the flock of pedestrians in the street.

The Unknown

CRISTINA SIMONI

The Unknown, a concept
That is difficult to define.
Sometimes associated with images,
Even though none of them
Are able to represent its complexity.
A distant land not yet discovered,
A delicacy not yet savoured,
A creature not yet admired,
It is the world of wonder.

The Unknown, the lack
Of the visible, of the secure, of the definite.
The holder of opposition, of negation,
The enemy of what is known.
A set of questions without answers;
A set of guesses without certitudes;
A set of frames without pictures.
It is the world of absence.

The Unknown, the struggle
Between attraction and repulsion.
The desire to explore and to get to know,
And, at the same time,
The fear of newness
And of leaving what is known behind.
It is the world of ambivalence.

The Crucible of God

MISHA MEIHSL

Two hundred soldiers tread the desert sands.
 On steady wings of hope, with armors bright,
 They fight the twist and swirl of shifting lands.
 Their blinded eyes are burned by the sunlight
 And armorless corpses fall in friends' hands.
 Against the sand they stand, despite the sight
 Of blood-red skins, and scars, that furnace brands.
 Afar, charred trees whose might was wrung by blight,
 Like begging fingers pray for black commands.
 And as the day dies, rises the twilight,
 That shadows slowly drown in darker strands,
 While steady winds, so cold, embrace the night...

Seventy soldiers hike icy cities,
 Slipping and falling; ghost faces all bleak,
 Small meek figures in white immensities
 Paved with shattered diamonds. On a sharp peak,
 Freezing outside under the killing breeze,
 Burning inside with fever, they still seek.
 But sickness seizes them short-breathed. They freeze
 To death, as winter's ice scythe sweeps the weak...

Two dozen soldiers under a black moon
 Walk through vast moors – where snow turns to shadow,
 Where memories mourn in mountain crypts. Gloom,
 In dark waves looms. Who they are, where they go,
 God only knows. In a star's anteroom,
 Doom is a sore requiem's vibrato...

Seven lost souls, covered in sand, sweat and
 Snow, washed up on the shore of Creation,
 Wishing, for a shroud of pebbles, to end
 There, this silent sea, beneath the blue sun...

Two travelers tied on the Throne of Roots
 To split identity's mirror,
 To kill the sorcerer,
 Two true lovers,
 Too late.

A prism of stone, Cold and White, Black and Hot,
 Is but a grey drop, in the sea of Thought.

Fly Kosovar, Fly!

MARLON ARIYASINGHE

They stuffed you in vans.
Led you across the border in bands.
Cast you like feculent filth
Amidst the blood-red sands.
This is not *your* promised land.
Fly Kosovar, fly!

“*S'il vous plait monsieur!*”

The suppliant, hand held out obligingly,
Importunes in a feeble voice.
We gaze at her begrudgingly.
This is not the land of giving.
Cry Kosovar, cry!

The 10 year-old puffs a cigarette,
Huddles close to her mother as if in a nest.
The 8 year-old, while waiting for his turn,
Nibbles a paltry piece of bread in zest.
This is not *your* land of milk and cheese.
Sigh Kosovar, sigh!

We want to cuff you! fingerprint you!
To mark you and brand you!
To vote for and against you.
We are coming to get you!
This is not the land of the free.
Hide Kosovar, hide!

The dye-red earth drains you dry,
Your sigh dies in the night sky,
They spy by the high windows
Then shy away from your cry.
This is not *your* land.
Fly Kosovar, fly!



CONTEST NEWS

Winners of the Autumn 2014 Writing Contest:

Last semester, we launched the "metamorphosis"-themed writing contest and your fellow students went at it with a transformative gusto! Our winners could not be more different in style and subject matter, but both works embodied the theme in terrifying and extremely entertaining ways. So it should be no surprise that, for perhaps the first time in *Noted* history, there was a perfect tie for the winner and so we will award *two* Grand prizes to:

Marlon Ariyasinghe for "The Walking Dead" and **H. M. Ji** for "The Beast."

The prizes are hand-made, cloth-bound, 96-page journals with ribbon place-markers, donated by Bookbinders Design in Geneva Old Town, 15 rue de la Fontaine. Please contact noted-lettres@unige.ch for details on prize collection.

The Spring "vvorde"-search Grand Master Puzzler:

It took the entire semester but finally, after much diligent research and puzzling, someone cracked the *extremely* cryptic "vvorde"-search; well done, **Kwami Okyere!** Kwami won a litograph poster of *The Canterbury Tales*, which should provide an adequate hint to the puzzle's answer!



Perhaps you're wondering about this empty frame? If a picture is worth 1,000 words, we think this semester's "*Noted* Cover Contest" is a pleasant change of pace from our previous writing contests. There is no theme, *per se*, for we don't want to limit artistic inspiration, but keep in mind that the winning entry will feature on the cover of the spring semester edition of your beloved literary journal. Contest entries should be original images, scanned and emailed to noted-lettres@unige.ch by **15 December**. As always, prizes will be awarded, though we will refrain from following Van Gogh's gift-giving example.