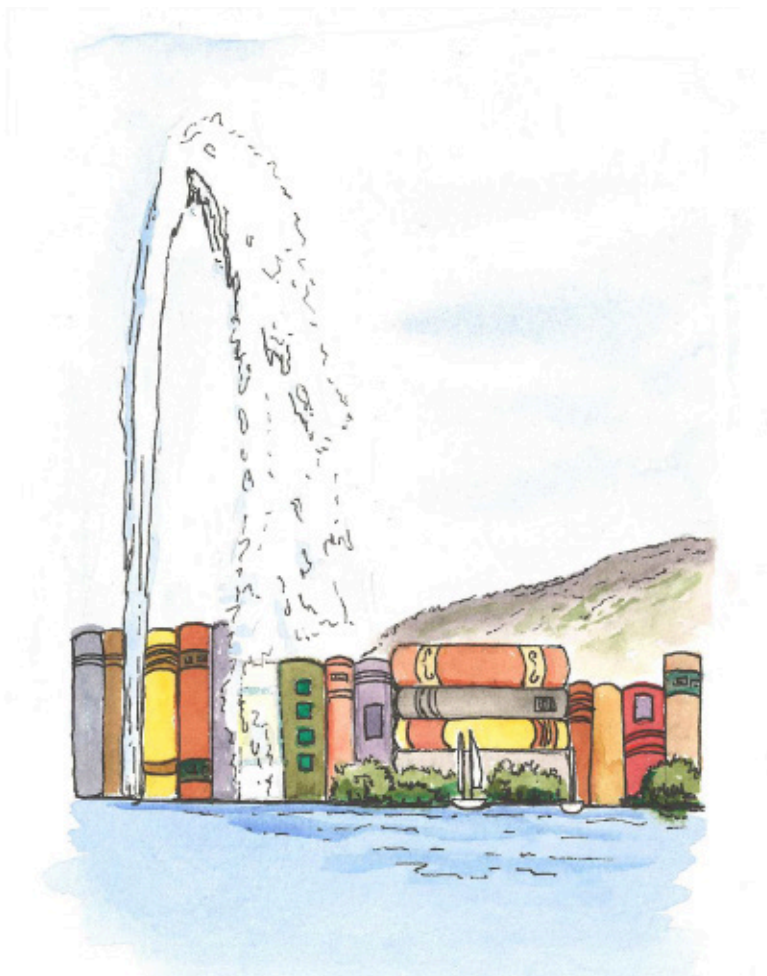


NOTED

— THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT JOURNAL —



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**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

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Letter from the Editor

BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

One of the most common comments I hear about living in Geneva is that, culturally, there isn't a lot going on. Yet, part of what makes Geneva such a unique city is that, unlike some of the famous hubs of urban culture – New York, London, Paris, Tokyo – Geneva doesn't give up its charms easily. Compared to the famed insomnia of New York and the light pollution of Paris, Geneva can seem rather *tranquille*. Like a great book, however, when it comes to Geneva, you have to pay attention to find the really good stuff. But once you know where to look, it's everywhere – from film, music, and wine festivals to book readings, boat races, and ballet.

This is why I am particularly fond of this edition's cover image, "Book City," commissioned especially for *Noted*. Geneva, in my mind, is a book filled with stories, adventures, and characters. And this edition in particular seems to be an exploration of these urban "pages," making it not just a reflection of our department, but our city. From our own colleagues – see **Oran McKenzie's** interview with **Professor David Spurr** and **Kimberly Frohreich's** interview with **Juliette Vuille** – to visiting authors – see **Paloma Lukumbi's** interview with **Tom Cho**; from our favorite things to watch – see the recap of the *Black Movie Festival* by **Anna Iatsenko** and her intrepid crew of reviewers as well as the reviews and previews of our department's own *Emmet Theatre Group* by **Nicholas Weeks** and the *Film Club* by **Sylvère Guyonnet** – to our favourite meetings to attend or niches to visit – see **Sam MacDuff's** piece on the *Ulysses* Reading Group and my own interview with **Helen Stubbs** of *OffTheShelf* bookshop, our *tranquille* Swiss city positively buzzes with cultural activities. Finally, **Olivia Lindem** offers some "Food for Thought" to while away those precious remaining minutes between shows, festivals, books, classes, and more.

In contrast, the Creative Writing section seems, at first glance, to offer a scenic respite to this urban bustle, perhaps due to the number of contributions to the "Spring is Coming"-themed writing contest announced in the previous edition (winners announced on page 3). Don't be fooled, however; while there may be many flowers and a kitten or two, watch for flying beer bottles in **Saskia McCracken's** "Thelma and Lisa," a garden murder in **Andréas-Benjamin Seyfert's** "A Case in the News," and a melting speaker in **Misha Meihls's** "Spring is Coming." If the pollen doesn't get to your sinuses, the tales of deeply-felt love and loss surely will in **H.M. Ji's** "Blooms for Iris" and **Manon Guignot's** "Acrylic Bitter Sweetness." In addition to the contest entries, the Creative

Writing section was especially busy this semester, with contributions as far-ranging as a beheading in Saudi Arabia in “Rizana” by **Marlon Ariyasinghe**, a suspicious game-show involving Aquirii murders, Irish prisons, and cocaine in “A Masters Degree in Astrology” by **Matthias De Groeve**, and a concise and thoughtful observation on the barriers we all carry within our very flesh in “Our Own World” by **Cristina Simoni**. What's more, this Spring edition welcomes the new drawing talent of **Ellen De Meester** who, with “Johnson's Cat,” offers a feline perspective on Samuel Johnson's working habits.

But wait! Perhaps you're wondering about that tricky little number on the back cover of the last edition. Yes...the ever-so-frustrating “Fall-ing” crossword puzzle. After much diligent puzzling, the afore-mentioned **Cristina Simoni** was named *Noted's* Grand Master Puzzler and carried away a fancifully bound and Doré-illustrated copy of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But don't despair; an equally tricky “Vvorde” search awaits whomever can complete it *and* the bonus question. But take your time for “ther nis no werkman, whatsoevere he be, / That may bothe werke wel and hastily.”

Until next time, my fellow *Noters*, read, write, watch, and be merry,

Bryn

Winners of the Spring Writing Contest

As you may have guessed from the above “Letter,” this semester’s writing contest was a riot of flowers, fights, pollen, poetry, and murders...so many murders! It should come as no surprise, then, that the voting process to determine the winner was a battle *royale*. Every piece was within a vote or two of the next place and the judges (members of the English department staff) were at pains to fill in their ballots, to assign each of these diverse pieces a specific place. With this in mind, *Noted* roundly congratulates and thanks each and every contributor for their thoughtful and thought-provoking pieces. We look forward to your future contributions, though we feel we must wish your characters luck in their ensuing adventures!

- First place:** “**Blooms for Iris**” by **H.M. Ji**
100Chf. gift certificate to OffTheShelf English Bookshop
- Second place:** “**Acrylic Bitter Sweetness**” by **Manon Guignot**
50Chf. gift certificate to OffTheShelf Bookshop
- Third place:** “**Thelma and Lisa**” by **Saskia McCracken**
20Chf. gift certificate to OffTheShelf English Bookshop
- Honorary mentions:** “**Spring is Coming**” by **Misha Meihsl**
“**A Case in the News**” by **Andréas-Benjamin Seyfert**
10Chf. gift certificate to Starbucks

Please contact *Noted* at noted-lettres@unige.ch for details on prize collection.

Note from the Director

DEBORAH MADSEN

The event that is occupying the department at the moment and will continue to do so throughout the coming semester is of course the imminent retirement of Professor Spurr. In this issue of *Noted* you can read Oran McKenzie's in-depth interview with David. What emerges from their discussion is the portrait of a teacher, scholar, and intellectual who is very, very difficult to imagine replacing. And yet that is the task facing us as a department this semester. The advertisement of this post – Full or Associate Professor of Modern English Literature – prompted more than seventy applications, from candidates around the world. The *Commission de nomination* has narrowed the “long shortlist” to fewer than ten candidates, a number of whom will be invited to Geneva to present a lecture, attend an interview with the commission, and meet with members of staff and students. These lectures will take place on **Friday 21 March** and I cannot urge you strongly enough to attend as many of these lectures as you can. We will also organize an opportunity for staff and students to meet each candidate in a more informal setting than that of the lecture room. Probably in the Writing Lab, each candidate will be available for a chat over a cup of tea so you can ask questions and generally get to know each person a little. We are welcoming a new member into our departmental community and so it is important to select someone who is as effective at communicating outside the classroom as in it, someone with whom you are able to talk in more informal settings as well as in class. It is crucial that everyone who will be working with the successful candidate takes the opportunity to become involved in the selection process. The student representative on the *commission de nomination* is Linda Hinni, who has played an active part in the selection so far. Linda is a long-serving member of the department's *Commission mixte* and, even if you do not know her in that capacity, you can certainly find her contact details on the departmental website, in the *Commission mixte* section. I know that Linda is looking forward to hearing your responses to the potential candidates and she is ready to pass these thoughts to the commission. If you are wondering why you should spend a Friday listening to lectures that are not related to the courses you are currently following, allow me to point to one very concrete reason. This selection will have an immediate impact on the studies of many students and most likely on you: the kinds of seminars in modules BA5, BA6, and BA7, as well as the range of MA seminars, from which you will choose in the autumn of the present calendar year will depend in part on who is selected as the successful candidate. If you want to have a voice in determining the kinds of topics that will be offered in future seminars, then this is your chance. The schedule of lectures will be published closer to the date, but please do note **21 March** in

your diary as a day to contribute in this important way to the future of the department.

The procedure for appointing a senior member of the academic faculty involves rather a lot of thinking about what we do – as teachers and students – and why we do what we do. Writing the job description, formulating clearly the competencies and expertise we as a department most need in our Professor of Modern English Literature ... these tasks provoke reflection on the value of an education in English Literature specifically and the Humanities in general. So my eye was caught by an article in the academic press which quoted President Obama who said in a speech last week: “[A] lot of young people no longer see the trades and skilled manufacturing as a viable career. But I promise you, folks can make a lot more, potentially, with skilled manufacturing or the trades than they might with an art history degree” (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/01/31/obama-becomes-latest-politician-criticize-liberal-arts-discipline#ixzz2sGOn7qz8>). This kind of dismissal of liberal arts education is sadly commonplace in the media. But the article I was reading in *Inside Higher Ed* went on to point to a new study that shows this disparagement of students of the humanities as unemployable or under-employable is just wrong. Despite the wide currency of this view, it is not true. The Association of American Colleges and Universities and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) have published a study entitled *How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment: A Report on Earnings and Long-Term Career Paths* by Debra Humphreys and Patrick Kelly. A summary brochure, entitled “Liberal Arts Graduates and Employment: Setting the Record Straight” can be read at <http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/nchems.pdf>. What the report documents is the trend among humanities graduates to earn significantly more over the entire span of their career, even if they might earn less immediately upon graduation, in comparison with students entering the job market with specific vocational or professional skills. Not only do students graduating from departments like ours earn more but they report higher levels of job satisfaction and, very importantly, contribute in significant ways to the quality of life in society. The press release that announced the publication of this report explained:

[i]n addition to providing useful information about long-term career success of liberal arts graduates, the report also shows ‘the extent to which degree holders in humanities and social sciences are flocking to a family of social services and education professions that may pay less well than some other fields (e.g., engineering or business management), but that are necessary to the health of our communities and to the quality of our educational systems.’ The authors note that ‘the liberal arts and sciences play a major role in sustaining the social and economic fabric of our society.’

(http://www.aacu.org/press_room/press_releases/2014/liberalartsreport.cfm)

So even in the most easily quantifiable terms (salaries), we can be assured that what we do does indeed have value and that this value is far from limited to financial terms. This seems to me to be a fine thought with which to begin the spring semester!

Deborah Madsen

Staff News

David Spurr has been awarded the prestigious Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize for Comparative Literary Studies by the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) for his latest book, *Architecture and Modern Literature* (University of Michigan Press, 2012). Our warmest congratulations go to David on this recognition of the intellectual stature of his work.

Emma Depledge has been awarded a research grant by the Fonds Nationale Suisse to enable her to pursue her postdoctoral research in libraries in the United States. She will be away for eighteen months, from autumn 2014 to spring 2016.

Kimberly Frohreich has also benefitted from a grant by the FNS. She is spending the spring semester 2014 in libraries in London and Paris, working on her doctoral project.

Johnson's CAT.



BY ELLEN DE MEESTER

FEATURES

Interview with Professor David Spurr

ORAN MCKENZIE

For twelve years, Professor David Spurr has proposed lectures and seminars on a wide variety of authors and subjects to the students of English and comparative literature. With him, they were offered the opportunity to embark on a journey through modern poetry, from William Blake to John Ashbery, including, among others, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, W.B. Yeats, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Prose fiction also played an important part in his teaching and the titles of his classes reveal an even wider range: Giacomo Casanova, Marquis de Sade, Jane Austen, Edgar Allan Poe, Lewis Carroll, Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Elizabeth Bowen, Samuel Beckett, J.G. Ballard, John Banville and many more. But if one element was to characterize Professor Spurr's teaching at the University of Geneva, it would be the ways in which he proposed to read modern literature in relation to other aspects of modernity like urban space, the sacred, memory, architecture, the visual arts, and Irish history.

For the students and staff who always appreciated the breadth of his interests, the subtlety of his approach and the vivid and contagious intellectual curiosity he transfers in both his teaching and writing, the news of his approaching retirement is a sad one. In anticipation of this major turning point for our department, Professor Spurr kindly accepted my request for an interview to be published in *Noted*. He welcomed me in his office in the Comédie building on a Friday morning early in November. Sitting between a majestic hardwood desk and a more modest table for his computer, surrounded by black and white photographs of Dublin at the beginning of the twentieth century and under the portrait of a smiling Samuel Beckett, we talked for two hours on a wide range of topics: what brought him to Switzerland and Geneva, his life-long passion for James Joyce, his views on the impact of modern technology on literature, human subjectivity or academic teaching and his work on the relations between literature and the other arts. In this interview, Professor Spurr shares many inspiring thoughts on issues related to literary studies and criticism that I hope will interest readers of *Noted* and beyond.

OM: To begin with, could you say something about how you started your career? Did you always want to become an academic?

DS: No. I did take a degree in English Literature, a BA at the University of Michigan, but

after that I went to work as a journalist for a period of two years, first in Paris and then in Yugoslavia. Working for a news agency, I did a bit of everything, covering politics, diplomacy, and even sports: the European Cup in football was held while I was there, as well as the skiing World Cup in Kranjska Gora. I was also writing what they call feature articles; I would go up into the mountains and interview gypsies and peasants to try to get a feel for the country. I had a lot of good experiences; it was a very interesting society.

Did you choose journalism out of an interest for writing?

I was interested in adventure! My university had a student newspaper for which I wrote during my studies, and since this gave me an opportunity for immediate employment and travel after graduating, I thought “why not?” I was 22 then, pretty young for the job and constantly reminded by people of how young I was. For example when interviewing the Finance Minister of Yugoslavia, every time I tried to point to problems with the communist regime he would say: “Well, you are young, you don’t understand these things.” But after two years I decided that what I really wanted to do is to study comparative literature, so I went back to the University of Michigan and did a PhD.

What made you realise that you preferred studying to journalism? And why comparative literature?

I had never lost my interest in literature and I could see that a lifetime of writing journalistic articles was just not going to be interesting or intellectually challenging enough. I chose comparative literature because I wanted to work not only in English but also in other literatures. I had learned French at school ever since I was little, and then I lived in Paris for part of the time I worked as a journalist. I had also lived in Italy during summer holidays while I was studying for my BA, so I first learned Italian that way and later I studied it more systematically at university. At that time, I was as much invested in French and Italian literature as I was in English literature, so comparative literature was a good field for me to go into.

What did you study for your PhD?

I ended up doing my PhD on T.S. Eliot, partly because he was an Anglo-American poet who had close ties to French and Italian literature. He was very much influenced by Dante and by the French Symbolists. I was always interested in poetry more than prose, and, at that time, Eliot was—he still is, but even more so at that time—the major poetic voice in English for the twentieth century. I had a real feeling for his poetry even though

it was difficult, and I had an idea of new things that could be said about it.

Did it become clear to you at that time that you wanted to pursue an academic career?

Yes, absolutely. After getting the PhD, I continued teaching. My first teaching job was actually as a teacher of French, a kind of *chargé de cours* at my university. After that I got a job as an assistant professor of English in Chicago, and stayed there for 15 years.

What did you teach in Chicago?

I was hired by the University of Illinois in Chicago originally because of my background in journalism. They wanted someone to teach non-fiction writing. That was quite exciting, because Chicago is a great city, with all kinds of interesting neighbourhoods, and I would send my students out to report on them. Because I was teaching journalism, I was also working on a book about journalism which became *The Rhetoric of Empire*. It was published some years later, but its inspiration was in my work as a journalist years before.

Did you ever think of going back into journalism?

No, I liked my job at the university. First of all, journalism, especially today, is an extremely risky profession; newspapers and other media frequently close down. But the other problem is that you are always writing under political and economic pressures, you are always writing for somebody else. You can do interesting things, but you are not as intellectually independent as you are in university writing. Above all, you don't have the freedom to explore things in the depth that you can when you are doing the kind of research that we do at university. You can't really get to the bottom of problems.

What was it like to teach students who wanted to become journalists when you yourself had decided not to pursue this career?

Yes, it's a problem. You have to teach these relatively formulaic ways of writing, but also, if you are intellectually responsible, you have to show students what the various social, economic and political forces are that bear upon the production of journalism. This is not always good news for them, so it's a tricky business. That is why I finally gave it up after a while. Since my thesis on Eliot had been published, I also had the credentials to teach modern literature and I decided to devote myself to literary, theoretical and aesthetic questions.

What brought you to Switzerland?

I had been teaching in Chicago for fifteen years, and although it was a great place to live and work, after a time I felt that I had done everything that there was to do there. I was looking around for other horizons, other perspectives, when this job in Neuchâtel came up. I sent my CV thinking they were probably not looking for someone like me but, to my surprise, they offered me the job.

Did you already know Switzerland at that time?

Not very well. Frankly, at the time I was interested in skiing and there is not much skiing in Chicago! I wanted to come back to Europe for a period, so I went to Neuchâtel as an experiment, to see what it would be like. My university in Chicago proposed to hold my job for two years in case I wanted to come back, so I decided to try it as a kind of visiting professorship. At the end of those two years, we were well established in Neuchâtel. I still remember the day that I had to call the head of my department in Chicago to tell him that I wasn't coming back. I was preparing to teach Shelley's poem, "Mont Blanc," for my English class, and from the desk of my study in Neuchâtel I could look out the window and see the real Mont Blanc on the horizon. Reading Shelley's poem about Mont Blanc and looking at the object itself, I thought, there is no way you can match this experience, so I had to stay in Switzerland. After a few years in Neuchâtel, although I had good colleagues and nice students there, I realised that, professionally, conditions were just better in Geneva, everything was better, so I decided to make the transition in 2002.

Has the English department changed a lot during that time?

The department has changed completely. I arrived in 2002, the same year as Professor Deborah Madsen, when all of the previous professors had left except for Rick Waswo, who also retired soon after. The teaching staff now in the Department are people we either promoted or hired from outside. This was another attraction of Geneva, the opportunity to make a new English department from scratch, and the department we have made is a good one. It is diverse but, even though we do things differently, there is a mutual respect for one another's work.

So you were here during the transition into the Bologna system?

Yes, and it took a couple of years to make that change. We had to write a new *plan d'études* and that was an opportunity, too. The curricular planning was much more than

an administrative exercise, it was the implementation of a vision of what students should take from a university education. I think the way we set it up has had fairly good results. When I first came here the *plan d'études* had an absolute absence of structure, there were great students but I was shocked at what they didn't know. Even if they had native intelligence, they seemed to have read nothing, or the wrong things. What they needed was a solid foundation in the study of literature, a sort of back to basics at least for the first year or two, and that's what we put into place.

You are retiring at the end of this academic year. Are you looking forward to having more time to do other things or is it just an obligation linked to the Swiss system?

I am enjoying myself here and I would continue if it weren't for the mandatory retirement rule. What I intend is to continue what I do best, which is to do research and write essays about literature and the other arts. I can continue to do that, and I'll even have more time to do so. On that level, I will probably be more productive than I have been in the past. What I will miss is the way in which teaching feeds into scientific research. My seminars are typically experimental laboratories where I try out new ideas, for example my MA seminar on literature and architecture, which really helped me in the conception of my book. As a retired professor I won't have guinea pigs!

Concerning the content of your teaching and research, could you say something about how you developed a special interest for certain authors, in particular James Joyce?

I started teaching Joyce from the beginning, from my first job as an assistant professor. And once you start reading Joyce, it's hard not to become more and more interested. I think Joyce is the major writer in English of the twentieth century; he has had more of an impact on English literature than any other figure, and for just cause! First of all, just on the level of the quality of prose, he is a fabulous writer. He is also extremely courageous in his experimentations with the various possibilities of prose fiction. Beckett, of course, is the other great figure, but I don't think that his work, great as it is, would have been possible without the groundwork laid by Joyce.

What about the content? Was Joyce also modern in terms of his political and social views?

I think he was. Joyce was a humanistic writer; he didn't share the prejudices of some of his contemporaries. He had a deep understanding of human nature and I think that he saw human nature equally in persons of different genders, races, religious persuasions and historical periods. Joyce was also the last great writer to try to be universal, to try

to write the world. That is a kind of nineteenth-century impulse that we find in Balzac, Dickens and so forth, a universalising ambition that characterizes *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. After that, writing becomes much more... I won't say narrow, but it becomes much more concentrated on personal and local experiences. Joyce was also one of the first writers to analyse with a very keen degree of lucidity the modern city as a kind of machine of capitalism, without making an obvious political issue out of it; just pure insight, pure analysis of the situation and of the human place in such a situation.

Concerning his insights into the nature of capitalism at the beginning of the century, can we read his parodies of the discourses of advertising or newspapers in Ulysses as an investigation of the ways language functions in relation to power?

He was attentive to how power manifests itself in the society of consumption and marketing, but at the same time he also saw advertising, film and popular literature as manifestations of human creativity. One of the great things he did was to break down the barrier between art and not art, to see creative impulses in fields of endeavour that are not usually thought of as art forms. He recognised the value of popular music, for example, which is everywhere in his work. He also recognised certain poetic values in everyday speech: the way he captures the Irish way of speaking shows how alive he was to the inherently poetic qualities of everyday speech in the city.

Is that another aspect of his modernity?

Yes, absolutely. In a recent book called *Aisthesis*, Jacques Rancière makes an argument which I endorse. For him two things happen in the twentieth century: first, you have a breakdown of the traditional boundaries between the arts, between literature and the visual arts, between literature and music and, as I tried to show in a recent book, even between literature and architecture. But on another level you also have a breakdown of the boundaries between art and what was not traditionally considered as art. An artist like Joseph Beuys built his career on the notion that everyone is an artist, and I think that Joyce—who influenced Beuys—already had that idea: he saw imagination at work everywhere.

Is that related to his notion of the epiphany?

Yes, the epiphany is the appearance of something miraculous in the everyday, in the ordinary, in things that would ordinarily pass unnoticed; a certain way of speaking, a certain hesitation in gesture. Joyce asks us to look at the things that we don't see, to

appreciate them almost as if he were putting a frame around them. That is really what contemporary art does, quite often: it takes ordinary objects, ordinary scenes, puts a frame around them and asks us to see the beauty in them.

This reminds me of a quote from Proust; should we place Joyce in the literary context of the early twentieth century or see him as an exception?

No, I think it was a general movement of that time. You can see it in Proust, you can see it in Woolf—whose writing is very much inspired by both Joyce and Proust—you can see it also in visual arts, in the collages of Picasso for example, where he takes pieces of newspaper and advertising and puts them directly on the canvas along with the forms he paints. There is a real attempt to break down barriers, to make art out of everything.

You mentioned that when you started your PhD you were more attuned to poetry than prose. How do you explain that you developed such an interest for a novelist?

I think it's because Joyce, of all the prose writers in English, is the most poetic in his prose. Just take any sentence at random from his writing, put it on the page as a poem and it works! Oddly enough, although he also wrote poems, they are fairly conventional, not at all as adventurous poetically as his prose. It is clear that he saw more freedom in prose and that this is what his poetic impulses went into. I think the same is true of Beckett, who is also a poet.

I think there is also another reason for my focus on Joyce, which comes from my brief experience in journalism. In journalism your job is to look at the whole of society and try to see the connections, so you develop a vision of the modern world as a set of institutions, a set of enterprises. One of my impulses in the study of literature was to try to see the relations between the production of literature and what we call the conditions of modernity. How does literature fit into that scene? Is it a place of resistance, of criticism? Or, on the contrary, is it just another product among other marketable cultural goods? I think it is both, and that is the fascinating thing about literature; it holds this ambiguous and contradictory position within the conditions of modernity itself. The transition from journalistic rhetoric to Joyce is actually an easy one, because he is doing something like the same thing: he produces parodies of different forms of rhetoric, including journalism. He has a critical view of the various discourses of modernity that is very close to my approach, whether it be in studying journalism and colonial administration or literature. One can even apply that approach to the study of literature itself. Paul de Man wrote an interesting book on the rhetoric of romanticism in which he studied romantic

poetry as a series of rhetorical forms. This is obviously inspired by deconstruction and Foucauldian studies of discourse, but it turns out that it is equally applicable to literature as an object as it is to journalism, political rhetoric and so forth.

In this respect, did you change your approach to the study of literature during your career, maybe evolving from a more formal and internal analysis towards the study of these connections?

Absolutely. My thesis on T.S. Eliot was more or less a reading of the poems and the criticism as *une oeuvre*, looking at various tensions and relations between different elements of the poetic language. There was very little attempt, in that first book, to put Eliot in the context of the larger field of modernity. One of my movements since then has been to put literature in relation to other things, to other arts and to other modern phenomena or institutions. That is the reason for my book *Architecture and Modern Literature*: the third term that unites literature and architecture is modernity, so the question is, how do literature and architecture become alternate and sometimes intersecting reflections of the modern condition?

In the seminar you taught on this subject, you suggested looking at the way in which the built environment and technology shape modern subjectivity. How do you see new communication technologies impacting the production of literature in the contemporary world?

It is bound to have an impact, not just on the material production of literature but on the content and form as well. There are already good works of fiction based on the human experience of communications technology; I am thinking of Douglas Coupland's *Microserfs* or Dave Eggers' *The Circle*. We now have experiences—for better and for worse—that were impossible before the invention of these technologies. The high speed and visibility of communications is changing the nature of human experience, and this is a point already made by Benjamin in the thirties. It is not just that we are able to do certain things faster, but that the actual nature of human experience and subjectivity is being altered.

Do you see a connection between the modernist ambition to recreate the self through poetic language and the current obsession with fashioning a virtual identity through social networks?

I think it is a paradox: this obsession with creating or affirming the self is a symptom of the end of subjectivity, of its explosion and fragmentation into the various components of the universal electronic communication system. You become identified, whether you

like it or not, by Google and other communications servers as a consumer having certain preferences; advertising will be targeted to you according to what you have shown yourself to be in your function as a consumer. This identity that you have perhaps unwittingly created for yourself takes precedence over whatever other identity you might think you have or can create. I think that this, especially among young people, creates a kind of panic which makes them all the more obsessive about asserting an individual identity precisely at the moment when such a thing no longer exists.

In modern literature, this destruction of the notion of individual identity has been under way for a long time, even before the spread of contemporary communications technology, for example in the works of Beckett. Joyce too saw it coming, which you can see in the fact that there is no conventional narrator in his works. Compare a novel by Joyce to a novel by Balzac, for example. In Balzac the narrator, more or less in the person of Balzac, is always intervening, commenting, stepping forward to explain what is going on and so forth. That is not there in Joyce. Is it there in Proust? Yes and no, because what the narrator does in Proust is to auto-deconstruct, and the coherent identity of the narrator becomes broken down under the pressure of his own self-analysis to the point that the conclusion of *La Recherche* is to say that the only way to reconstruct one's identity is through fiction, through creating a work of art.

Are these new technologies also impacting the academic world? I am thinking here for example about these new free online courses, the Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Do you think this will lead to a reconfiguration of the mission of and approaches to university teaching?

Well, there is a gain and a loss. The gain is in dissemination, in convenience. It means that you can follow a course of study without having to go live in a college town and spend \$50,000 a year. The loss, I think, is in human contact, in the kind of learning that can only come from living with other people who participate in the same experience, whether you call it the campus experience or the seminar experience. People sometimes ask me what methods I use, whether there are good teaching methods. I don't know, but when I reflect about teaching I think that what is important is to gather as a group at a certain time in a certain space, a time and space consecrated to the study of a subject. Without that, something would be lost. In my own experience, when I think back to the professors from whom I learned the most, what was important was not so much the content of what they taught as their attitude towards their subject. They were able to communicate an intellectual curiosity, a kind of humility that was very personal to them and yet, at the same time, very beneficial to students. What I learned from them was a human

ethos of learning which was independent of the limited content that can be transmitted through electronic means. I learned an attitude towards knowledge, an attitude towards learning that was very human and depended on personal contacts with my professors.

The first seminar that I followed with you was entitled Le lieu du sacré dans la littérature moderne and proposed to look at literature in relation to the notion of the sacred. Since then, I have noticed that you often refer to religious texts in your readings of modern literature. Could you say something about your vision of the relationship between literary and biblical studies?

First of all, I believe that the study of literature begins with the study of the Bible, historically. All of our methods of interpretation were originally developed by the doctors of the Church as methods of interpretation of the Bible, first the Hebrew Bible and later the Christian Bible. If we ignore these origins, then we are not being fully conscious of our own origins as literary scholars. In addition, I think that the Bible is the fundamental work of writing for all subsequent imaginative works in the Western tradition: every novelistic or poetic situation that has been thought of in modern literature is already there in some form in the Bible. The other relevance of the Bible to the study of modern literature is that the Bible is all about revelation, about *dévoilement*, about revealing something on a level that transcends individual human experience. Joyce, Proust, Eliot, Beckett, I think they are all part of that same project. The transcendence doesn't have to be defined as divine, but it is nonetheless, perhaps in a more Hegelian sense, an attempt to see human experience and history as a collective experience.

Have you noticed a lack of interest from students in modern literature for this question of the sacred? And if so, are you worried about the nature of the cultural baggage of younger generations of students?

Lack of interest? I think it is probably more a lack of exposure; it is not based on having studied the Bible and having found it uninteresting. Personally, my first exposure to the Bible was going to church on Sundays as a child, and it was probably also my first exposure to poetry and to great writing, just hearing it and singing it in the hymns makes you aware, on an intuitive level, that there is a great tradition here, a tradition that is at the very foundation of our civilisation. You ignore it at the cost of a real ignorance. But interest in religion, historically, has always been cyclical and I don't think that it is going to go away. The kind of witnessing that Christianity represents, this witnessing of transcendent value, is not going to simply disappear.

Do you relate this lack of exposure with the spread of new communication technologies that we discussed earlier or other characteristics of the postmodern condition?

First of all, the Bible is a technology. The biblical canon as we know it is a function of the invention of the codex. The invention of movable print in the sixteenth century was another huge advance in technology and, far from doing any harm, it only spread the word of Christianity. So I don't think that technology, in itself, is opposed to the religious impulse or even to religious organisations. There are churches in California which depend heavily on technology for the transmission of their message, and those are the most frequented churches, huge churches that attract thousands of people. So there isn't a necessary opposition between religion and technology.

But, in our postmodern world, it seems that notions such as depth, transcendence or verticality are being contested and abandoned. In your approach to literary studies, I nonetheless have the impression that you attempt readings that can be expressed in metaphors of depth. How do you see this question of depth in relation to the postmodern condition?

I suppose that it depends on how you define depth. It does seem that postmodern society is a world of surfaces, and that, when we try to investigate things in depth, what we find are simply other surfaces. It may be that the traditional distinction surface/depth, like the traditional distinction subject/object, has simply become epistemologically obsolete. What can be expressed in metaphors of depth can maybe also be expressed in metaphors of width. When I try to put literature in relation to architecture, I am seeking something common to them, which perhaps can only be found by plunging into the depths of the respective inspirations for these works. But it is also a movement of width, of looking for architecture at the edges of literature and vice versa. I think that the question of depth itself as a question of the postmodern condition is a profoundly interesting question, to hazard a play on words. Certainly metaphors of depth are precarious in this condition, and we now talk about them as historically belonging to certain movements, like the Romantics, where metaphors of depth are much more explicit and consciously used.

In your work, you quote certain authors who opened the way for the kind of parallels you are making between literature and architecture, but who are also sometimes criticized by specialists in other disciplines for not doing serious scientific work. I am thinking here for example about Walter Benjamin and his reception among art historians. Could you say something about the way you use critical theory in your approach to literature, about what is important for you in a theoretical approach when you consider whether to use it or not?

It is often said, notably by historians, that thinkers who write about the past, like Benjamin or Foucault, are not historically accurate in the sense that they would like them to be, that is to say they have a different version of history from the accepted one. For me that is not a problem. What is important, both in Benjamin and in Foucault, is not whether their particular account of a historical situation can be adequately documented, but that they see the relations of power, the *rappports de force* at work. They have the big picture, which historians sometimes tend to lose sight of because they are working on a more or less empirical basis.

In literary studies, we read and quote critical thinkers that are sometimes rejected in departments of philosophy on the grounds that their language is more akin to literature than to science. How do you react when these writers are accused of not being serious enough because of their play with the materiality of language?

Well, what is serious philosophy? Philosophy takes place within the confines of language; there is no other place where philosophy happens. Philosophy, if you like, is a linguistic construct, and for philosophy to ignore the materiality of language is simply an intellectual error. In some forms of philosophy there is this faith—which is really no more than a faith—that language is transparently rational and that it has absolutely reliable things to say about reality. In literary studies, on the other hand, we are constantly made aware of the problems with such a conception of language. It is linked to the question of the writing of knowledge. Some notions of knowledge are confined to a relatively restricted scientific tradition and seem not to recognise the possibility that other kinds of writing produce other kinds of knowledge. When I read Proust, I find an infinite research into human nature which is much more meaningful and profound than any studies of human cognition that I have ever come across. Or take a novel by Beckett, for example, it is a *témoignage*, a kind of witnessing of the human condition. Literature is written in language, which is the primary mode of the production of meaning for human beings, so by virtue of the simple fact that literature uses language as the material of its art, it engages itself in the meanings of language that are already there before words are put in literary form. I still believe in the modernist idea that literature has something to say about life, that it bears witness to life.

In your seminars and writings, you use a wide range of theoretical texts, sometimes from thinkers who disagree with each other. Do you see your work as belonging to a specific critical approach?

No, not really. I am a bricoleur; I take from different critical approaches things that

are useful to me, and I try to develop my own approach. I find extremely interesting things in a wide range of critical theories and practises: deconstruction, psychoanalysis, sociology of literature. I try to put them all together, perhaps in a way that may not be ultimately coherent but, if it were, there might be something wrong with that too! Today we have a proliferation of theories and approaches, and I understand why it can be confusing or difficult for students. In a way, more weight is placed on students to evaluate these approaches with respect to their own interests and inclinations. But I think that this proliferation is actually a sign of good health for literary studies. For me, what counts in a critical approach is how it can illuminate a subject, how it can move us to see things in new and original ways. In that sense, literary study can be a bit like literature itself, insofar as its object is a new vision of the world, a new vision of its object.

Do you write poetry or fiction yourself?

I have occasionally tried to write poems here and there, but being a literary critic can be an obstacle to creative writing! Instead, I try to be imaginative in my critical writing.

Do you see a radical difference between these different kinds of writing, between fiction or poetry and non-fiction?

No, I don't. And I think that's one of the things that writers such as T.S. Eliot, Derrida or Paul de Man have shown us, that critical writing can be quite imaginative, can be an art form in itself.

Since some of the readers of Noted are the students of the department, could you say a little more about the art of essay writing, for example about the balance between its scientific and creative aspects?

I love the form of the essay, precisely because, as its name implies, it is experimental. This goes back to the origins of the essay in Montaigne: it is free of any doctrine, it is often quite personal but, at the same time, directed towards the world. You are trying to show something about literature or about life to your reader, but there are no hard and fast rules on how to do that, so it is quite an open form. It is devoted to knowledge, but doesn't exclude personal style and self-expression. I think it is really an underrated literary form, and that it should be studied with more attention. I have tried to do that in a BA seminar on Addison and Steele; wonderful writing!

What advice would you give to students or young researchers who begin their path in the

academic world now? What are, according to you, the most important skills to develop when studying English literature?

I think that, whatever you study, you will get the most out of it if you cultivate two main qualities: one is intellectual curiosity: don't be afraid to be curious, don't be afraid to look at relations between two things which might not be obvious at first; and the other is modesty, just don't get into that position where you think you know enough, because then you are dead, intellectually. If there is one thing I have learned in all of these years of teaching, it is how much I don't know.

What about writing skills? Is good writing...

Absolutely essential! Good writing comes from attention to the exercise, from concentration; it is a discipline. Bad writing, I think, comes from laziness and inattention. But reading literature is also attention to good writing. When I read certain writers like Paul Auster, I see that he is someone who sometimes has interesting ideas, but he doesn't write well, and so I don't get as much pleasure from his work. Whereas Joyce, no matter what ideas he has, he writes well. Literature, anyway, is not about ideas; it is all about writing well.

Do you write every day?

I don't work every day on what I would like to work on. I do it regularly, but there are days on which I am teaching or just preparing my classes. But that's a kind of writing, too, because to prepare a seminar you have to put to work many of the same skills used for writing: organisation, expression, exploration of an idea.

The phrase 'publish or perish' points to the pressure on researchers to publish frequently in order to advance their careers; don't you think that the pressure from the academic system can sometimes be detrimental to the quality of writing?

It does, and that is why, when I receive the latest copy of a literary journal, I am lucky if there is one article that I want to read! There is so much mediocre scholarly work that is being published, for the reason you cite. As a student in literature, the one important thing you have to write is your thesis; you can therefore worry about only your MA *mémoire* or your doctoral thesis. Put as much energy as possible into making that good. After that, I think with time and experience it becomes easier to publish, because you develop skills and you are constantly exposed not only to new ideas but also to new op-

portunities for writing and publishing. But I believe that people should concentrate on writing a few good things, rather than a lot of mediocre things.

Do you think slowness plays a role in the process of writing?

Yes, slowness is necessary, in any case for me. I am a very slow writer and I can't help it; I just can't write any faster than I do. I learned that when I had to make the transition from journalism to literary criticism. In journalism, you can write very fast because you have all these formulas in your mind already; it is a kind of *écriture toute faite*. But this is precisely what you can't do in critical writing. Everything has to be sharp, has to be fresh, to be new. The minute you start using received ideas, you are dead as a scholar and critic. But I also think that slowness is something to be desired; slowness in reading, for example, especially in reading poetry. A lot of students don't like to read poetry because they don't want to slow down, they lead fast lives and yet poetry requires stopping, not paying attention to possible distractions. It really requires concentration, and this is a discipline that, in the current context, is difficult to acquire, but necessary.

With regard to student's interest in poetry, do you see a difference between the times when you were studying and now?

Certainly there was more interest in poetry when I was a student. Remember, I was an undergraduate in the sixties, and then poetry had a status that was roughly equivalent to that of rock'n'roll. We were reading Blake and Allen Ginsberg and it was wild! Poetry was where things were happening, people like Robert Bly would come to our campus and they were real personalities. Today I am glad that my classes on poetry are well attended—the seminar on Yeats last semester for example—but this is probably also a function of the fact that there are fewer classes in poetry. Certainly novels are the dominant genre, not only in our department but for literature in general. I am actually trying to write an essay about this very fact, about the status of poetry today, the reasons why it is so marginalised; I am trying to come up with a plausible explanation.

Do you think that the study of poetry nonetheless remains relevant today?

Absolutely, because poetry is the finest use of language and I think, along with Heidegger, that we live in the house of language. Poetry is the refinement of language, the highest experience of language that we can attain. For that reason alone it is a privileged genre, and I think it will continue to be so.

Reading Ulysses

SAM MACDUFF

As you may know, last semester we began an informal *Ulysses* reading group, led by Professor David Spurr. Reading and discussing one episode a week, it's been quite an odyssey! So far, we've followed wandering Telemachus (Stephen Dedalus) from Martello Tower to Dalkey and along Sandymount Strand; we've witnessed Odyssean Bloom eating fried kidneys with relish, followed by his antiheroic visit to the jakes; at the end of "Lotus Eaters" we caught a glimpse of his languid floating flower, the limp father of thousands, as he took a nice Turkish bath before descending into the underworld of "Hades" for Paddy Dignam's funeral. Bloom and Stephen (father and son?) finally came face to face in the seventh episode, "Aeolus," and after all the hot air of the newspaper offices, it was remarkable to see Poldy at the helm, holding his course through the narrow straits of watery vegetarianism on the one hand, and meat-infested carnivores on the other. A glass of burgundy and a gorgonzola sandwich: has there ever been a better repast in all of world literature? Well, perhaps, after all, there has, but if I may say so, it was just the lunch to prepare this latter-day Odysseus for the very un-Homeric adventure of the "Wandering Rocks," after which there was a nice little musical interlude, accompanied by a tasty plate of liver and mash, before a dangerous brush with the point of a cigar and a close shave with a biscuit tin as Bloom fled from the Cyclops.

Now, if you think that's fine literary dining, all I can say is *bonne continuation!* This semester we have six more episodes: naughty "Nausicaa"; that parodic afterbirth of English literature generally referred to as "Oxen of the Sun"; the hallucinatory phantasmagoria of Bella Cohen's brothel in "Circe"; an apology for coffee in "Eumaeus"; Joyce's "ugly duckling" of the book, "Ithaca"; and to top it all off, Molly Bloom's magnificent monologue, "Penelope." As Derrida puts it, "Hear Say Yes in Joyce"! But don't just take his word for it – here's what everyone else has to say:

"Re-reading Joyce's *Ulysses* collectively has turned this pleasurable yet demanding exercise into a series of endlessly playful and witty moments. It has allowed me to advance with a more assured step into the maze of the master-modernist's reworking of Dublin."
– Nicholas Weeks

"The *Ulysses* reading group provides a framework which makes it pleasurable to investigate the sometimes impenetrable prose of Joyce. Without the promise of support from others, and the gentle guidance of an expert or two, a book such as this can be daunting;

but with this framework, through discussion, it is a joy. The varied readings and ideas expressed in the group display that errors, even when not volitional, can still be the portals of discovery!"

– James Tookey

"Of the three main characters in *Ulysses*, Stephen believes in 'the eternal affirmation of the spirit of man in literature,' Bloom tacitly dissents, and Molly's last word is infinite."

– Io M'Intosh

"As Northrop Frye says, 'The work of the greatest artists begins in an attempt to make the appearance real, and ends in an attempt to make reality appear.' *Ulysses* is such a book."

– Anonymous

"I'm looking forward to finding out what everyone thinks of Bloom's insights next semester."

– Saskia McCracken

If you would like to join the *Ulysses* Reading Group, we meet on Monday, from 12.15 till 13.30 in room B 110, starting on **February 17**. We will begin with the 13th episode, "Nausicaa." Please come with your own copy of the novel. If you are purchasing a new copy, for ease of reference we recommend the Gabler edition, available from OffTheShelf. Please note: there are no exams for this course! Just the pleasure (read *jouissance*) of reading one of the greatest novels in English!

All are welcome! We hope to see you there.

Interview with Tom Cho

PALOMA LUKUMBI

Editor's note: On October 4, 2013, the University of Geneva was honored to host Australian author Tom Cho for a conference entitled "Writing to Excess" during which he discussed his creative writing process and his theories on "excessive" writing in "shorter" stories. Mr. Cho also read parts of his critically acclaimed collection of short stories, Look Who's Morphing. Following this conference, Paloma Lukumbi asked Mr. Cho for an extended email interview for Noted which we gratefully publish in full below, along with an excerpt from Look Who's Morphing, entitled "Chinese Whispers."

PL: You have mentioned multiple times that you were interested in writing out of curiosity, to know about yourself and so on. Yet, is there a irrepressible impulse for you to write? In other words, what ultimately drove you to write/become a "writer"?

TC: I have on occasion said that I write to learn more about myself and the world. But I don't wish to glorify writing for self-knowledge to the extent that it is the sole purpose of my writing. Another reason why I write is that I think life can feel heavily scripted and pre-programmed. There are entrenched scripts that tell us what bodies should look like, what love should look like, what art should look like, and such. And as we know, these scripts can give certain ideas authority by elevating them to the status of being natural and just the way things are (we can see this in the myth of heteronormativity, for example). I have found that writing fiction is the best way for me to intervene into that state of affairs. And to do that kind of work, in the way that I do it, I try to cultivate the pluralism of a free-ranging and fun-loving imagination – an imagination that can conceive of many different stories and ways of telling stories.

During the conference, you said that you started off as a poet, but you found it hard. Why is that?

I haven't written poetry for many years and the reason why I stopped was that I found it difficult to narrate in poetry. When I was writing poetry, I was writing in a more observational mode about specific phenomena (for example, I once wrote a series of poems about different parts of the body). I enjoyed elaborating in these poems using descriptive detail and linguistic play. But elaborating by means of a more expansive plot was something I found very hard to achieve in poetry, even when I tried the verse novel form. (I eventually learned that the late Dorothy Porter, an Australian poet, also had this

problem when she began writing verse novels.)

You expressed a strong interest in linguistics when it comes to your writing process. Is it your definite starting point when it comes to writing? Do you think that the “short story” mode is the best one, with respect to the linguistics theories to which you referred? (e.g. Grice’s maxims) If so, did you choose this mode because of your linguistics interests or also because it is the genre with which you feel more comfortable?

Why I turned to writing shorter forms of fiction is an interesting question. Notice how I just used the word “shorter” here since, as I mentioned in my talk, shortness is a relative property. But of course, when we start to talk about shortness as being a relative property in fiction, it leads to the question: what makes short stories so distinct from novellas and novels then? In other words, does the short story exist as a distinct genre of fiction? I think in some sense the short story does exist, in that it has an “institutional life.” The notion of the short story has a life within all these different institutions that present and promote literature, such as publishers and literary festivals. It also has a strong institutional life in universities where literature and creative writing are taught. And in my career, I’ve had a stake in all of those institutions, particularly as a student of creative writing because short stories are the dominant medium for teaching creative writing, especially fiction. So all of this is a long-winded way of saying that I probably turned to writing short stories primarily because I had studied short fiction writing at university, I’d been to sessions at literary festivals that focussed on short stories, and I knew that most of Australia’s literary journals publish short stories.

Linguistics isn't a starting point for my writing but I've remained interested in certain concepts that I learnt about through my linguistics studies. One concept is expressivity. (Expressivity can be defined, following Axel Hübler’s definition, as the topicalisation of “an inner state” through either the “reporting of one’s inner sensations” or the “live performance of the sensation at issue”). Expressivity is interesting to me because, as I mentioned in my talk, creative writing pedagogy can appeal to many norms that tell authors to exercise restraint – to use more indirect forms of exposition, to not preach to the reader, to not use rich and ornate language, etc. So I’m interested in the idea that expressivity could be read as a form of excess on the part of the author.

I’m also interested in phatic communion! (This term was coined by the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski when he observed a form of “small talk” that aims to establish relational bonds between people. Some examples might be using greeting formulas and making idle chit-chat about the weather.) The novel I’m writing explores some key

questions drawn from the philosophy of religion and the chapter I've been working on addresses the question "Does God exist?" Part of this chapter is going to draw on the concept of phatic communion. I know that phatic communion seems irrelevant to the question of God's existence. But you may have noticed that one of the features of my writing is that it brings together seemingly disparate and remote ideas!

During the conference, you were talking about the rules/tools about story crafting that were given to you during your BA in creative writing. Is a narrative such as "Pinocchio" a direct response to this teaching? I am asking because I read this particular story as a narrative about story crafting too. Do you, in the end, agree with the two maxims:

- 1. the lie (narrative) is embellished with the appropriate amount of details.*
- 2. The lie (narrative) is ultimately about something that, for the time being the target wants to believe in" ("Pinocchio," Look Who's Morphing 124).*

Well, to be honest, point 1 ("the lie (narrative) is embellished with the appropriate amount of details.") is probably a bit of a "nothing" sentence because on its own, I don't think it really tells us very much. I might even be inclined to delete that sentence from my "Pinocchio" piece these days. But point 2 is more interesting to me. It is not something that I was specifically taught in my creative writing classes, but both my university studies in general and my life outside of university have taught me that we don't arrive at our interpretations of texts as "blank slates." We bring to our readings all kinds of pre-suppositions and desires, and so we are pre-disposed to favour some ideas, some stories, above others. In writing fiction, you can play on these desires and expectations that the reader brings to your work, and you can reverse and unsettle them in fun and potent and pointed ways.

Are the ideas of authorial restraint and applied linguistics means through which the reader engages with the text? More specifically, do you employ these devices in order for the reader to use his/her imagination and think beyond what is on the paper?

The fact that I wrote a book called *Look Who's Morphing* can already suggest that my work is pretty open-ended and slippery and that it tries to refuse being solidified into any authoritative interpretation. But at any rate, in my experience, readers use their imaginations regardless of the author's intentions to steer them here or there. In this respect at least, readers can be very wilful creatures, which is a good thing and it is an expression of faith that I have in readers. At its best, during the reading process, the author and reader can have this playful tussle, like play-wrestling perhaps, that can feel both mysteriously

distant (if only because the author usually isn't in the room while the reader is reading) and yet mysteriously intimate. When this happens to me as a reader, these are the times when I fall a bit in love with the author.

The way that the narrator focalizes through popular heroes is interesting. Their motivations tend to seem ridiculous at first; yet, the transformations always add a new layer with respect to the self. For instance, there is a discovery of sexual maturation in "Dirty Dancing" while in "Look Who's Morphing," the narrator, and his father, discover the implications of change. The narratives offer a possibility to start anew, or let's say, to reinvent oneself; but, there are also risks. In a narrative such as "I Robot," it seems that, more than highlighting the blessings of technology, there is an emphasis on its downsides. As a result, putting aside their stylistic form, I was wondering if your short stories served as a medium to denounce some things? Is there moralistic content to your work? If so, is there anything that you wanted to stress more than any other thing?

There is always a rhetorical dimension to the act of writing and Wayne Booth, one of the scholars I mentioned in my talk, has said just this. In his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he said that all fiction is inescapably rhetorical in nature and that authors can only choose the kind of rhetoric they use. (In elaborating on this idea, one of the things Booth did was to debunk the idea that the author can write fiction that is neutral and free of all personal values. These days, that may seem like an obvious statement but it can have less obvious implications. In Australia at least, fiction that is deemed to be "political" can be devalued and yet what types of writing are more likely to be devalued on the basis of being political? I agree here with the Australian writer and academic Enza Gandolfo, who once wrote that "While many of us would agree that all writing is political, it is the writing that is critical of the dominant culture and ideology that is usually tagged as 'political.'")

In my book, due to all the morphings of the characters, we cannot take their identities as immutable givens. That idea is repeatedly stressed in the narrative. What we expect and deem to be natural is up-ended over and over.

And you're right that the morphings are also presented in the book as being a risky business that has shortcomings. One of the shortcomings, I think, is that the morphings in the book bear the possibility of pain. That is part of the human drama of morphing. But morphing can be pleasurable and satisfying too, which I think is also reflected in the book. Morphing is fun (except when it isn't).

Chinese Whispers

TOM CHO

1. Chinese Whispers

I know a game called *Chinese Whispers*.

How to play Chinese Whispers:

One person whispers something to the person next to them. The receiver then whispers what the first person said to a third person. This third person whispers the message to a fourth person, and the message is passed on in this way until all the players have heard the message.

The object is to see how much the message will change along the way.

I know a game called *Chinese Whispers*.

How to play Chinese Whispers:

One person whispers something to a receiver. The message is passed on until all the players have heard the message in Chinese.

The object is to change the message to Chinese.

I know a game called *Chinese Whispers*.

How to play Chinese Whispers:

One person whispers something to a receiver. The message is passed on until all the players have become Chinese.

The object is to see how much the people will change along the way.

2. Chinese Burn

A *Chinese burn* is a form of playground punishment or torture. It is also called an *icicle* or a *Japanese burn*, but I know it as a Chinese burn. To inflict a Chinese burn, you rotate the victim's skin near the wrist in opposing directions. This causes friction burns or a sensation of heat in the victim's forearm.

In recognition of the enduring popularity of the Chinese burn, Nintendo has recently released the game *Virtua Chinese Burn*. This game is currently only available on Nintendo PlayStations.

A *Chinese burn* is a form of torture. It is also known as a *Japanese icicle* or *forearm friction*. To inflict a Chinese burn, a victim is required. The victim and the torturer should be from opposing directions.

Nintendo has recently released the game *Virtua Chinese Burn*. This game is currently popular.

Those who have popularity in the playground inflict *Chinese burns* on others as a form of torture. This causes a sensation. This causes friction.

Nintendo recently released *Virtua Chinese Burn*.

At home, the victims play this game on their PlayStations. They inflict Chinese burns on other, virtual victims to reach a high score.

In the playground, they still receive real Chinese burns.

I know a game called *Chinese burn*. How to play Chinese burn:

A *Chinese burn* is a form of punishment or torture. It is inflicted by the popular.

To be popular is to have recognition.

Popularity is a game.

The victims recognise that popularity is dependent only upon the friction between those who are popular and those who are not popular. The torturers inflict their *Chinese burns* and become popular. A Chinese burn causes a sensation of heat until the forearm is released.

Popularity is a game. Those who are not popular learn to play along.

3. Elvis Presley

Elvis Presley was born to white parents. In this respect, one would say that Elvis was not Asian. However, Asians claimed Elvis from the moment he began incorporating martial arts movements into his performances. When Elvis' *Aloha from Hawaii* television special was broadcast in various Asian countries, it was highly popular. It caused a sensation.

Today, there are Elvis fan clubs all over Asia. There are Asian Elvis impersonators across the world. In addition, karaoke and Elvis are made for each other.

Thangyouveramuch.

Elvis Presley was born in Hawaii. Elvis and Asians are made for each other. Elvis performed martial arts in various Asian countries. It was highly popular. It was special.

Today, Elvis is veramuch broadcast in karaoke all across the world.

Elvis had respect for his parents. Elvis performed martial arts. Elvis performed karaoke.

I know that the white Elvis is an impersonator. Elvis Presley was born veramuch Asian.

Thangyou.

4. Nagasaki

There is a song called 'Nagasaki'.

'Nagasaki' was written in 1928 by two Americans. The lyrics to part of the first verse are:

Hot ginger and dynamite
There's nothing but that at night
Back in Nagasaki
Where the fellers chew tobaccky
And the women wicky wacky woo

There is a city called Nagasaki.

On 9 August 1945, America bombed the city of Nagasaki. Two Americans were in the plane that dropped the bomb. The bomb was filled with ginger, tobaccky and plutonium. It was equivalent to 22 kilotons of hot dynamite. They bombed the wicky wacky woo out of the city. At least 73,000 fellers, women and children died. They were given real burns.

A *Chinese burn* causes a sensation of heat.

The message is passed on until all the players have changed along the way.

Printed with permission from Arsenal Pulp Press. This piece is from the collection Look Who's Morphing, which will be released by Arsenal Pulp Press in Europe and North America in April 2014. For more information, see arsenalpulp.com and tomcho.com.

Interview with New Staff

KIMBERLY FROHREICH

Editor's note: In the Autumn 2013 edition of Noted, Kimberly Frohreich conducted a series of interviews with four new members of staff. Juliette Vuille's interview is the fifth piece of that series, though we have had the pleasure of her company for the past semester.

Juliette Vuille, Medieval Literature

Where are you from?

I come from Switzerland, Neuchâtel (or Newcastle for the English-minded!), to be precise. I have since lived in Lausanne and Oxford.

Please tell us a little bit about your research interests and how you came to acquire those interests.

My interests lie in medieval religious and mystical writings, gender studies, manuscript studies, and translation studies. I came to study medieval English in a really roundabout way: when studying at university, my main passion was for Ancient Greek. I then realized that I was interested in any language that was no longer spoken. What does it reveal about the people who spoke it a long time ago? How did it evolve, and why? Like J. R. R. Tolkien, I feel that the history of the language informs our understanding of literature and culture, and vice versa.

When a position as a doctoral assistant in Medieval English opened in Lausanne, I jumped on the opportunity to study Old and Middle English literature and culture, something that had sparked my interest since the time I had taken a seminar taught by Geneva's very own Dr. Lucy Perry.

I then had to decide where my interests precisely lay. I chose for my doctoral dissertation to focus on hagiography (saints' lives), more specifically on holy harlots, those saints who were reputed to have been loose women or prostitutes before becoming saints. These saints' lives held particular interest for me, as I wondered how medieval hagiographers managed to imbue a woman's body with both sexuality and sainthood simultaneously.

My interests are however very diverse: my next project will be on messenger figures in Chaucer's works, and I am currently working on a ninth-century manuscript containing prognostics and exorcisms!

What do you like to do in your spare time (when not reading and/or writing for research)?

What spare time? No, just kidding! In the winter, I love to go snowboarding and snowshoeing. Anything that has to do with snow, really. In the summer, I like to go to the lake, swim, and then just soak up the sun with a good book in my hands.

Where would be your dream spot for an academic conference (assuming it's fully funded)?

I would love to go to Iceland, as I've never had the chance to visit this country. Amy Brown, who is from Australia, has also sparked in me a desire to visit her country.

If you were stranded on a desert island, what one book would you want to have with you? (excluding a survival guide and one that you might consider using as kindling)

One book? That is just mean! I think I would cheat, and bring my Kindle...there is 3G reception and a plug to charge it on the island, right? Right?

Favorite book, play, poem, film, and/or TV series?

Again, it is really difficult for me to pinpoint one favorite in all of the above. It changes every day, but I'd say that in French literature, I love Emile Zola's work, in English lit., I would say Chaucer (of course! I'd never betray my medieval *auctor*), Milton, or Hilary Mantel (I am reading *Bringing up the Bodies*, the sequel to *Wolf Hall*, right now). In movies, anything by Lars von Trier, or, for comedy, the early Woody Allens. With regard to TV series, my all-time favorite is *Twin Peaks*, but I have to admit a certain soft spot for anything by Joss Whedon: to imagine a space-cowboy world as he did in *Firefly*, or to have such mastery of popular culture references as in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, I mean, is priceless!

Food for Thought

OLIVIA LINDEM

Reading Diane Setterfield's wonderfully bookish *The Thirteenth Tale* over the holidays, I encountered a passage that I suspect will stay with me for some time to come. The premise of the novel is that an elderly and eccentric author invites a biographer to her Yorkshire estate in order to finally tell the true story of her past before meeting her death. It's a gothic novel, replete with orphaned heroines and ghosts and even stormy moors, and yet it speaks to ordinary readers and begs a question every bookworm has asked at one point or another but has likely never dared to speak aloud: *Just how much do you value your books?*

About halfway through the novel, the author presents her biographer with a hypothetical situation:

Picture a conveyor belt, a huge conveyor belt and at the end of it is a massive furnace. And on the conveyor belt are books. Every copy in the world of every book you've ever loved. All lined up. *Jane Eyre*. *Villette*. *The Woman in White*. [...] *Middlemarch*. And imagine a lever with two labels, ON and OFF. At the moment the lever is off. And next to it is a human being, with his hand on the lever. About to turn it on. And you can stop it. You have a gun in your hand. All you have to do is pull the trigger. What do you do?

The biographer dismisses the question, judging it to be "silly" and "too extreme" for a hypothetical situation and yet, she later admits to herself that "of course" she "loved books more than people," that "of course" *Jane Eyre* and "all of Shakespeare [were] worth more than a human life," but that she'd been too ashamed to admit it.

The hypothetical question is indeed extreme and silly and one relates to the character's refusal to answer, but it *does* make one wonder: what would you do to save your favorite books, to save *all* books if they were in danger of censure or banishment? Or worse yet, if they ran the risk of never being seen by human eyes ever again?

(Setterfield, Diane. *The Thirteenth Tale*. 2006. London: Orion Books, 2013.)

Interview with Helen Stubbs, Owner of OffTheShelf English Bookshop

BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

Readers of Noted are probably already familiar with OffTheShelf Bookshop, the book-filled nook above the German bookstore on Boulevard George-Favon. Indeed, when thinking of the shop, I usually first imagine the loud creaks coming from the stairs and the feel of the wooden banister, polished by so many passing hands of English department students. But who among us has ever wondered what goes on “behind the curtain”? How do so many books, on so many fields and interests, find their way to this little haven of bibliophilia? I set out, one sunny December morning, to speak with Helen, in order to find out how OffTheShelf came into being and what it’s really like to work with so many books just waiting to be read.

BSB: What is the background of OffTheShelf? Why did you decide to open a bookshop and has the shop gone through any big transformations before arriving at its current state?

HS: I set up OffTheShelf in 2003, because I felt Geneva lacked a small, friendly exclusively English-language bookstore as well as a fast and efficient place to order books from the UK and USA. I decided to do it myself because I love books and reading and feel they hold an important place in society, but also because I had some experience of book-selling as well as running a business. It was the year I turned 30 and I thought, “now or never!” During these 10 ½ years, we have significantly increased the amount of stock we hold, as well as the numbers of staff and our turnover, and we have constantly changed sections and furniture around. We’re always looking for new and better ways to stock and display the books, so improvement has been an ongoing process, and the bookshop is still evolving towards some undefined ‘perfect state’ that we’ll probably never reach.

How do you choose which books to carry in the shop? To what extent does personal preference play a role in your purchasing?

Choosing the books we stock is a never-ending job that we do on a daily basis. This is very important, because chain bookstores typically order their books in one go every three months from a distributor, based on that distributor’s recommendations. We, on the other hand, look at all kinds of sources – such as publishers’ recommendations, newspapers, blogs and websites, customer comments, our own interests, and so on – so our choice is much wider and much more reactive. We do not rely on any one supplier’s

recommendations, so we can stock books outside the mainstream, and if we see a book we think would be good to carry, we just ahead and order a copy, without having to wait until the next round of mass ordering. While our stock reflects our personal preference to a great extent, and this is something we and our customers feel is important in distinguishing our bookstore from the rest, we do also of course stock a large number of books that we know many customers will like even if they are not to our own taste. We have to cater to as many different tastes as possible, but we do enjoy pointing to a book and saying "I loved that!"

On this topic, are there trends in the book publishing/purchasing field that perhaps influence your stock? If so, what are some trends that you've noticed in recent years?

It is important to stay on top of trends, although we try hard not to let it dominate our stock, as the bookshop is small and we would not have room for other types of books if we stock too many of one kind. An example is the recent trend for dystopian young adult novels, which followed on from vampires, or for erotic adult novels. What we attempt to do is make an informed selection within that particular trend, so that we don't end up stocking 'anything and everything', but rather pick out the ones that are especially well-written, or by more established – or more exciting – authors than some of the run-of-the-mill ones.

Your store holds a number of events (readings, book clubs, writing groups) every month; does any event stick out in your mind as being particularly memorable?

One of the first events we held was a book launch for a biography written about the UN diplomat Sergio Vieira de Mello, who had been killed in Iraq 10 days before we opened the bookstore. He was very well respected and had been tipped as the next UN Secretary General, and the shock and grief at his death was very strongly felt in Geneva, where he had many friends. The bookstore was packed with people who saw the book launch as an occasion to gather in his memory, and it was a profoundly moving experience for us which also demonstrated to us the extent to which our bookstore was already playing an important role in the local community. On a lighter note, we hosted Diccon Bewes, the author of a book about the Swiss [*Swiss Watching*], and we had so many people that no one could move. He was such a funny speaker that everyone was in fits of laughter, and it was a wonderful moment to see such a large crowd having such a great time in our tiny bookshop!

As the owner of the only English bookshop in town, would you say that you have a particularly

unique perspective on life in Geneva? Has your clientele or your view of life in the city changed since opening in 2003?

OffTheShelf is indeed the only specialized English bookstore in Geneva, and this makes us a hub for everyone from expats – both temporary and long-established – to diplomats to local French-speakers, kids, public libraries, non-profit organizations, companies, private banks, you name it. It is amazing to be a central point for such a diverse cross-section of the population, and I would say that we get to see all the layers of Genevan society. It is not enough to be a book-lover, or even just an English-speaker; for the bookshop to work well, it is vital that all who work here also understand the particular needs of our Genevan customers and what makes it a special place. The fact that most of our customers come from a multilingual and multicultural background, and are generally very well-educated, for example, means that there is an interest and a need for types of books that a similar bookstore in the UK or USA would simply have no cause to stock. There are also many families whose children speak 3 or more languages fluently, but whose reading level is often lower than it would be if they were growing up with just one language, so we have to recommend books to them with that in mind. These aspects of our clientele have not changed since we opened, although with the Geneva expat community undergoing a 30% changeover every year, we are constantly seeing different people in the bookshop and finding out that once-regular customers have now moved to Brazil or Singapore!

Finally, what are you currently reading?

I always have at least 5 or 6 books on the go at once. I'm currently reading the latest Booker Prize winner, *The Luminaries* by Eleanor Catton, which at 800 pages will probably be on my bed-stand for some time to come! I am loving the luxuriant feel of her prose. I am also reading Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield's memoir *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth*, which is funny and eye-opening, as well as a novel about a Japanese buddhist who opens a monastery in Brooklyn, called *Buddhaland Brooklyn*, by Richard Morais. And I have an advance copy on the go of a book that will officially be published in May (perks of the job!) called *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* by Tom Rachman – he wrote *The Imperfectionists*, which I adored, and this one is looking promising. Finally, I read *The Economist* and the *Guardian Weekly* every week (and always look at their book reviews first, of course), and I am halfway through Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* in French (I studied French and Russian literature at university). Diderot keeps me sane in a mad, hectic world.

FILM AND THEATRE

A Winter's Tale for the Bastions

NICHOLAS WEEKS

On Wednesday, 18 December 2013, about 120 people assembled in the hall of the Bastions building, not for a course, conference, nor special cocktail evening, but for an unusual performance. Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, as adapted by Emmet [Embodied Metaphors] – The English Department Theatre Group, was a celebratory moment. After the chilling opening sequences during which the audience was witness to the rising jealousy of Leontes, his wholesale condemnation of his wife Hermione, the apparent death of the latter during the ensuing trial, and the denial of the sacred prophecy of Delphos, all were treated to festive food and drinks as our narrator came on stage to announce an interval of 16 years within the diegetic world of the play.



Panettone, champagne, flowers, crisps, and mandarins were distributed to the audience while Perdita and her lover Florizel launched into an impromptu salsa initiated by the tender sway of Florizel's loving words:

When you do dance, I wish you
 A wave o'th' sea, that you might ever do
 Nothing but that, move still, still so,
 And own no other function. Each your doing,
 So singular in each particular,
 Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds,
 That all your acts are queens. (4.4.140-146)

Yet, the anger that had left Leontes as a most dejected creature at the end of Hermione's trial scene seems to have tainted Polixenes, the king of Bohemia. Banished from Sicilia under specious pretenses, the latter chides his son for falling in love with a mere peasant, a low-born lass, daughter of a sheep-hook.

If, after reconciliation, the text ends well with a double marriage characteristic of Shakespeare's greatest comedies; in our performance, a snowstorm ended the play by covering the partners of a single union – intimations of a frozen country where the forsaken are not forgotten.



Emmet in Spring 2014

Nature and politics will be the grand themes of this new semester's project. Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" (1848) and Ralph Waldo Emerson's eulogy for the latter (1862) will serve as a platform to explore issues of conformism and dissidence, but also self-reliance and respect for the trees, rivers, fishes, birds, plants, and all forms of life which constitute our environment. This original outdoor project is scheduled for May 2014, so keep a lookout for additional info on www.emmet.ch.

Focus group meetings are a new feature of Emmet for students who might be too shy to join a project but who are willing to go and see plays in Geneva and to discuss them afterward over a drink. Check the list of plays on the news section of our website.



Theatre and Performance Programme for Spring 2014

To complete the selection of theatre activities started in the previous issue of *Noted*, here are a few more venues and events worth checking out:

Venues in Geneva:

Théâtre Alchimique

Théâtre de la Parfumerie

Théâtre du Loup

Théâtre de l'Usine

L'Étincelle, Maison de Quartier de la Jonction

T50 (ultra small, can accommodate only 50 people)

ADC, Eaux-Vives (contemporary dance and performance)

Théâtre des Marionnettes (these are not only kid's stuff)

Théâtre de l'Orangerie (in the summer only)

Festivals & Dates:

Antigel (Geneva): 1 – 16 February

Festival d'Avignon (France): 4 – 25 July

Edinburgh Fringe Festival (Scotland): 1 – 25 August

FAR° (Nyon): 13 – 23 August

La Bâtie (Geneva): 29 August – 13 September

A few companies to keep track of:

Compagnie de l'Alakran

Compagnie Yann Duyvendak

Esperimentoquadro

News from the Film Club

THE FILM CLUB CREW

“Hey, tell me the truth...are we still in the game?” asks the waiter in *eXistenZ*'s concluding line. Last semester, the Film Club went off exploring different aspects of “The Body” and, given that the upcoming spring semester's theme is “Metamorphosis,” boy, are we still in the game!

With films like *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*, *The Sessions*, and *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer*, emotions were running high last semester. But laughs and more light-hearted evenings were ensured with *Fido* – the “zom-rom-com,” the students' (rather saucy!) choice of *The Full Monty*, and of course, our very first Halloween Special night-in-disguise with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, where we sang, danced, and timewarped our way through the evening. Oh, the costumes! Oh, the singing! Oh, those shorts!

But we should never rest on our laurels nor would we want to, not with the exciting program of films and presenters we have prepared to welcome in 2014. Our very own director, Professor Madsen, takes first billing with a presentation on physical metamorphosis as political activism in Steve McQueen's *Hunger*. From troubled Ireland, we will then move through narratological, genetic, and personal metamorphoses in *The Fall*, *District 9*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. As the penultimate film, and with spring in full bloom, what could be better than Shakespeare's braying cacophony of transformations and mix-ups in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? As always, we leave the final film choice up to you, so start thinking about your favorite metamorphosing film; should you win the vote, the floor and the lectern are yours!

It's always exciting for us in the Film Club to see so many of you at the screenings and we would like to thank everyone who participates: whether by joining in the very valued discussions, by bringing a little something to drink or eat, or by awing us all with such amazing Halloween costumes. We are looking forward to starting this next program and you can find us, as usual, Thursday evenings (specific dates are on the program on the next page) in room B112, with an apéro at 7:00pm and the presentation and screening starting at 7:15pm. Food, friends, questions, and comments are always welcome.

If you want to be part of the Crew, make a suggestion, or have a question concerning the Film Club, feel free to contact Sylvère at sylvere.guyonnet@etu.unige.ch.



UNIVERSITE DE GENEVE
ROOM B112, UNI-BASTIONS
RUE DE-CANDOLLE 5
FREE ENTRY FROM 7PM

THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FILM CLUB PRESENTS:

METAMORPHOSIS

27 FEBRUARY **HUNGER**
INTRODUCED BY DEBORAH MADSEN

13 MARCH **THE FALL**
INTRODUCED BY SYLVÈRE GUYONNET

27 MARCH **DISTRICT 9**
INTRODUCED BY BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

10 APRIL **DR JEYKLL AND MR HYDE**
INTRODUCED BY SAM MACDOUFF

8 MAY **A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**
INTRODUCED BY OLIVER MORGAN

22 MAY **STUDENTS' CHOICE**

At the Black Movie Festival

PALOMA LUKUMBI, NICHOLAS WEEKS, AND ANNA IATSENKO

This year the Black Movie Festival celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. Yay!!! Happy Birthday, Black Movie, and we wish you ever more anniversaries to come. Moreover, please accept our heartfelt thanks for keeping us stimulated, entertained, inspired, happy and unhappy, visually and intellectually for these past few years – without you, January would be just another post-Christmas depression.

The 2014 session was, indeed, as glorious as anniversary sessions should be: from some insane blasts from the past to steak animation (seriously!!!), *en passant par* stylized cherub penises which, when pressed, deliver objects dropping from walls, on-edge characters, mockumentary/docu-fictions, magical realism, etc., etc., etc..

On this fifteenth anniversary edition we went to about fifteen screenings and here are some choicest picks we wanted to share with you.

“Le Petit Black Movie pour adultes” SELECTION AND REVIEWS BY ANNA IATSENKO

***Meat* by Ivan Mirko Senjanovi (2011)**

One of my favourite tropes for talking about vulnerability without revealing myself too much has always been through a simile of an uncooked piece of meat. You know that feeling of rawness which can only be compared to bringing back home a piece of meat from the butchers and carelessly placing it unwrapped on a dirty counter? Yes, everything sticks to the meat and you have to wash it thoroughly for some time – that’s the kind of vulnerability I’m talking about.

Well, I was happy to see that I was not the only person in this world with non-vegetarian fantasies of vulnerability. *Meat* tells of the lives of uncooked meats as they walk around with their shopping trolleys in supermarkets, go to work, fall in love, go on picnics, cook, etc. It’s funny, for sure... and it’s definitely all very meaty... but it’s also all so very vulnerable.

***A Wolf in the Tree* by Jiaxing Lin (2012)**

What if... it's actually the wolf in *The Little Red Riding Hood* who needs to be saved from the little girl? What if the red riding hood urgently needs psychiatric attention and her tendencies to being hysterically expansive may just push the poor wolf to dream of the forbidden (forbidden being drawing a sharp knife across her wind pipe!)?

It's just that the wolf was doing fine before she arrived and took over his hole in the tree, and then his kitchen, and then his sanity. Before she cunningly invaded his private space, he used to wake up in the morning and listen to the sounds of the forest. He would climb over his bed and throw the windows open and sit there and dream.

***Breakfast on the Grass* by Erik Alunurm (2011)**

Breakfast on the Grass deserves my vote for the best animation! To the sound of Ravel's Bolero, a bunch of drunk plasticine figures stagger, fall over, get up, roll around, get up again, stabilize... and finally collapse to form the composition of the famous *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* by Manet.

Of course, my vote has nothing to do with my in-depth understanding of exuberant alcohol consumption as a person of Russian origin... no, no, nothing at all... I insist... Nonetheless I am puzzled trying to figure out whether Alunurm's work is a critique of fine arts or whether there is actually a bit of Manet and Ravel in every drunk out there. If you figure it out, please write to me – I'd love to know.

***Las Palmas* by Johannes Nyholm (2011)**

So how does one tell a neo-colonial narrative of tourism? One puts a real live baby in a bar and makes all other characters into string-puppets. My, oh my! Obviously the baby empties the bar, trashes the room and falls asleep on the floor, blissfully unaware of the trauma it inflicted upon the local inhabitants. That's it, really. But the gestures in this film are absolutely incredible and work to perfection in a neo-colonial environment. If you have a chance to see it, don't hesitate – it will help you write some papers in post-colonial literature!

***Last Life in the Universe* directed by Pen-ek Ratanaruang (2003)**

For my first full-feature screening of the festival I struck gold! *Last Life in the Universe* left me with the impression of entering a non-judgemental world where "good" and "bad" exist at the same time.

The film starts with a premise: "This could have been me..." says the narrative voice

off-camera over an elaborate tracking shot of a spotless (actually more than spotless – a NEUROTICALLY clean) apartment. The tracking shot finally stops at the feet of a body hanging over a pile of books. Indeed, the main character, who seems to be a suicidal-ex-Yakuza-turned-nerd in some sort of existential crisis, meets a girl. Don't get me wrong – it's not some fireworks-type of encounter. On the contrary, it's an accident-on-the-road type where he ends up with the sister of the initial girl (who dies)... and cleans up her flat. Did you get that?

Well, if you don't really understand my description of the more intricate links within the plot, don't worry. Rather, ask yourself when was the last time you've met someone who wanted to clean up your mess? Of course, there is something horrifyingly unreliable about people wanting to "straighten you out". But what if it's done unconditionally? Like someone walks in, cleans up, and doesn't expect anything in return... Incredible, no?

White Shadow *directed by Noaz Deshe (2013)*

REVIEWED BY PALOMA LUKUMBI

["Beep"] – That would be an appropriate comment to make after seeing this film.

More seriously though, if you were looking for "Made in Africa" movies, *White Shadow* was not the screening to pick.

The scenography created a feeling of intimacy. On this soil that is supposed to bring US/ THEM together, I was Alias. Alone. The only thing I recall is the chimerical view that was provided. Again, don't get me wrong! I have been moved quite far away from my comfortable zone. I was "shaken up" or whatever the expression one uses to describe the motion which gets you on a verge of throwing up. That, I embrace and accept. Yet, the narrator did not fill the vacuum of my understanding of ritualistic practices of albinos' dismemberments for others' profit.

"Made in Africa," does not mean: "This movie should have been made by Africans." No, no. It means that insights were partial. Take a camera, follow a boy, get some sensational shots and there you have *White Shadow*. Apart from Swahili, I never got *in* or an idea of the *in*-mechanism that was put into practice in this tradition. A traveller, from Europe,

who gets to watch what some would call “barbarians” take away people’s lives for others’ mystical ideologies. MmMh... Was there nothing to negotiate? Some extra voices and a zoom might have added another level to this two-hour film.

In the long run, *White Shadow* remains one of those movies you should see. Maybe we could discuss the postcolonial myth.

Symbol directed by Hitoshi Matsumoto (2009)

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

I think I am in love!!!

Although this was my first Matsumoto (I am more of a Kitano girl myself and, apparently, in Japan you must pick your side... but I am not in Japan, am I?), I have a feeling that ours is going to be a lasting relationship. How do I know this? Well, with time we all sort of get the feel for it. Or maybe not a “feel”, but some sort of “yard-stick” with which we measure the potential compatibility. Sure, these “yard-sticks” may change in time, but some sort of constant will remain. For me, this constant has always been and still is THE ABSURD!

The absurd, especially when it is comical, is a curious, funky, free-standing soul, and Matsumoto does this type of absurd particularly well.

In *Symbol* you’ve got two parallel stories: 1. A Japanese man wakes up in an empty white room wearing a pink polka-dot on yellow background pyjamas. 2. Somewhere in Mexico, a nun puffs on a cigarette and drives a pickup truck. So there you have it...

But wait, there is a bit more. The man in the white empty room sees something protruding from a wall. He pushes it. It turns out to be a penis of a cherub. All of a sudden, a whole bunch of cute plump cherubs come out of the wall and when they retreat back into it, all of their penises are left sticking out! The man presses them randomly one after the other like some miniature light switches and objects randomly drop out of the wall. So, how are you enjoying the absurd so far?

In the meantime, in Mexico, the Snail Man is getting ready for his wrestling number. He’s wearing a lovely green costume decorated with shapes of snail houses that look like... well...poop.

Yes, you may think that it's all about pee and poop and penises and it is, but it's also about feathers, sushi and doors. Most importantly, however, *Symbol* is a pretty serious and successful attempt at exploring the boundaries of humour and the absurd.

Fatal directed by Lee Don-Ku (2012)

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

A few years ago Toni Morrison came to Geneva to receive an honorary doctorate. In one part of her speech, she mentioned a curious phenomenon of our culture to focus interest on the victims of rape rather than on the rapists.¹ Indeed, we can gather all sorts of statistics on the victims, but worryingly little is said about those who rape.

This is where *Fatal* takes over from Morrison: it is a story depicting the consequences of rape, but not so much from the perspective of the victim, but from that of the perpetrator. The film is inspired by a phenomenon that emerged not so long ago in South Korea: gang rapes performed on classmates are videotaped and posted via social network. Many victims have committed suicide after such degrading humiliations.

Where *Fatal* brings a twist to the problem is that it destabilises the glorification the perpetrators seek to acquire through dissemination of such material. Indeed, the film is clear in its stance: there is no dichotomy between the rapist and the victim because the act of rape generates victims on both sides.

Although this may be a rather unimpressive (or even counterintuitive) statement, its consequences are enormous because it takes a stab at the power imbalance between the discursive categories of “victim” and “perpetrator”. A “victim” will always be further disempowered not only by the act of physical violence, but also in language because the very term – “victim” – further publicly re-inscribes the person's powerlessness. Certainly, this is a term that is useful in legal contexts: I think that it would be pointless trying to explain to the police that being raped does not necessarily make one a victim. But within language, within the discursive practices, the existing dichotomy isn't simply disempowering but further inscribes the violated person into the status of a victim. It is a sort of vicious rhetorical circle.

¹ You can read Toni Morrison's speech on:
<https://www.unige.ch/presse/archives/2011/dies-2011/AllocutionDies2011-TM.pdf>

In order to break this circle, we need to hear the narratives from that “other side”. We need to know about the motivations; about how these people’s lives have changed or not after the event. The silencing of these voices does not encourage any constructive approach to post-rape trauma. Film like *Fatal*, however, provide an opportunity for us to think about what is going on... “on the other side”.

Shield of Straw *directed by Takashi Miike (2013)*

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

I am seriously starting to enjoy Japanese action movies. I’m not talking about the “action movies” of the “Sushi Typhoon” kind (although I am starting to develop a taste for those too), but there is something about Miike’s tortured cops that I am starting to find particularly... how should I put it... “interesting”.

Shield of Straw is a successful take on the principles of the Greek tragedy. Let me explain: according to Jean-Pierre Vernant, what makes Greek tragedy really tragic is the poor hero who gets stuck between two impossible choices: he either chooses the “wrong thing” or the “the right thing” but here the gods show up and make things very complicated. In brief, no matter what choice the hero makes, in the end, it will be the wrong one. See my point?

In *Shield of Straw* the hero finds himself in a similar dilemma: to kill or not to kill his protégé. Certainly, the story isn’t as simple as that: the protégé is a very bad man who was repeatedly arrested for molesting and killing little girls. The grandfather of his last victim – a finance tycoon – issues a reward of 1 billion yen for the murderer’s life. So basically, the whole of Japan is out to get the guy. (If, like me, you don’t know how much that’s worth, a rough count will be somewhere around 8,692,630 Sfr. Trust me, I checked!) Where the poor cop gets entangled is when he is called to serve as a human shield during the transport of the very bad man to Tokyo for a trial.

So you get the picture: as the whole world fuelled by a mind-numbing sum of money tries to get to the murderer, the police officers protecting him during the trip get slowly eliminated one by one and two very obvious questions pop up: Is this man’s life really worth the money? As officers around him drop like flies, one beings to wonder whether his life is really worth all these deaths?

Here, we may run into a purely mathematical problem: last time I checked, I came across an outrageous figure of about 40 US dollars for the total chemical worth of a human body. OK, I suppose that should one sell the body in pieces, one may get significantly more, but we are still nowhere near the 8.5 million. But sarcasm aside, I applaud Miike's idea – you take a creepy thing and make it loads creepier by adding a mind-numbing layer of cash on top of it... and all of a sudden, the value of human life becomes a question of mathematics and the logic of human greed.

Well, as you know, Miike is one of the world's most prolific filmmakers. His filmography counts up to 70 films so he really churns them out like pancakes. However, I was pleasantly surprised with this film: despite the Warner Brothers logo at the beginning, despite the rather expensive-looking logistics, some clever CGI and helicopter views of Tokyo and other Japanese cities, the film remains thoughtful and concerned with such timeless ideas as honor, values, professionalism and, at the same time, exposes our very own human vulnerability. A must-see!

Touki Bouki directed by
Djibril Diop Mambéty (1973) &
Mille Soleils directed by *Mati Diop* (2013)

REVIEWED BY NICHOLAS WEEKS

When contemporary Senegalese director Mati Diop decides to reactivate the memory of the cinematic masterpiece of his late uncle Dibril Diop Mambéry, we, as the audience, undergo a strange sensation of lack, disillusionment, missed opportunities... both intimate and national.

Forty years separate the main protagonist of *Touki Bouki* and *Mille Soleils*. The restless resourceful youth of the “hyena’s journey” – as the Wolof title had it – seems to have turned into a taciturn old man, still affecting the apparels of youth (his jean shirt and cowboy boots) but exuding a mixture of stubborn determination and increasing melancholia.

Part apologetic, one should have encouraged him to pursue his career after *Touki Bouki*; part self-reproach, should he have taken his life into his own hands and endeavoured on the road of cinematic success? Things are left hanging just as kids, attending a public

projection of *Touki Bouki* in a local town square, don't believe that the old man is the actor in the film they just saw: "You don't look like him. Where's your motorbike?"

Yet the really haunting dimension of this pair of films is the dual relation to the land of Senegal and to the protagonist's beloved partner. In the original film, though independent-minded, Mory (played by Magaye Niang) is accompanied by the beautiful and witty Anta (Mareme Niang). They form a pair and share a dream of a better life in exile, caricaturally suggested by the unnerving repeat loop of "Paris, Paris" sung by Josephine Baker throughout the film. Yet, their parting at the end of *Touki Bouki* – on an impulse from Mory who seems driven by both his attachment to his country (his freedom symbolised by his rush to his own motorbike) and a sense of fear (emanating from the soundscape confusing the boat horn with the sound of slaughtered cows) – signals an ineradicable rupture between the characters and their separate aspirations.

Mille Soleils, suffused by a sense of disillusionment, revisits some of the imagery of the original film but as if in a fainter colour scale, slowly exposing, with inescapable clarity, a human predicament put into words by James Baldwin in 1956, "You don't have a home until you leave it and then, when you have left it, you never can go back."²

Syndromes and a Century

directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (2006)

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

Syndromes and a Century asks one important question: "What does it mean to remember?" And if this question isn't complex enough, the director elaborates this into a further question: "What does it mean to remember events you haven't lived?"

By telling the same story in two different settings (rural and urban hospitals), Weerasethakul imagines the story of the meeting of his parents. Although the settings do not seem so drastically different – after all we're still dealing with hospitals – the stories nonetheless begin to shift, rearranging the plots and their outcomes.

Whereas in the village the young man asks the woman: "Have you ever been in love?" this question takes on a different shape in the second setting: "If you secretly liked some-

² Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. New York: Dial Press, 1956.

one, what would you do?” “I’d hide behind a pillar and peek at them”, answers the woman of the second setting. In the first version, she simply replies: “Well, not exactly.” Same subject discussed through two different questions with two different answers, but worlds of possibilities are brought to life in both cases.

However, *Syndromes and a Century* isn’t really interested with the outcomes of the two stories; it is rather the flow of the narration that determines the impression this double narrative leaves. It is here that the visual intelligence of the film resides; *Syndromes and a Century* shows us that memory is not a thing, but a process.

15 directed by Royston Tan (2003)

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

I vaguely remember being a teenager 20-something years ago and believe me, those are not fond memories. It was a very confusing time for me back in those days – very much defined by a whole set of binaries like the feeling of certainty about most things in a world which was constantly put on trial through complete powerlessness and my total lack of ability to influence events taking place around me. In short, nothing ever happened the way I wanted and that was enough to fuel my teeny angst about the state of things in general.

Well, just as I was about to forget that annoying part of my own life, I watched *15*. In no way do I have the pretence of having had it as hard as the kids in this film. The film is rough, gritty, at times simply uncanny (as we watch one of the characters gagging trying to swallow a few drug-filled condoms!). But as the great “teenage binary” would have it, the film is also incredibly fragile, touching and inspiring: love and friendship are thoroughly explored against a backdrop of suicide; moments of intense tenderness take place alongside alcohol and drug-induced stupors; tattoos that have to be retouched regularly because they are drawn on the skin with a marker pen. And there is pop music which adds a touch of surrealism to the whole project, holding it together like glue, except that you can never know whether the glue was actually sniffed or used as binding material in an MTV collage.

The overall result of this brilliant cinematographic adventure is a 21st-century narrative of “coming of age” where the protagonists, oscillating between fallen angels and technicolored home-made superheroes, try to make sense of the insane world they live in.

Jeppe on a Friday

directed by Shannon Walsh & Arya Lalloo (2012)

REVIEWED BY PALOMA LUKUMBI

Get ready to be immersed in JeppesTown. Peacefully, we walk alongside its inhabitants. A-political. A-social. A-judgmental. Carefree. Can we?

Questions are made, and they take a specific path. If a reading is to be made of the protagonists' comments, it is to be strictly about social gaps – according to the synopsis³. Bearing witness of the scenes' montage – yes, you will have to trust me on this one – it looks like the movie's agenda also included racial issues.

The veil regarding the “black versus white” matter is maintained; yet, its presence becomes more and more obvious as the shot's juxtaposition unfolds. That the label of *post-apartheid* does not resolve South Africa's questions of race altogether, I get it. What is singular is that one would deliberately chose, as the sole white figure, this character who embodies a stereotypical representation. I mean, JJ the white property developer, whose only interests are the upper social class... Wait a minute, I am covering the discursive disguise.

Rewind.

JJ is depicted as the white man who is looking to preserve white privileges detrimental to the black working class. There isn't even an attempt to make it more subtle. In contrast, we have black men who struggle to survive. Some of them are successful. And wait. There will always be the African *spirituality*. JJ tries to reach that stage via a failed piano solo of *Hallelujah*.

Overall, though, I keep a warm memory of the protagonists' everlasting smiles. Robert and his band's performance resonates as a lullaby in my mind. And colors...South Africa, and its spectrum of colors, that reminds me of how fruitful it is to be still.

3 http://blackmovie.ch/2014/fr/films/fiche_film.php?id=935

R100 *directed by Hitoshi Matsumoto (2013)*

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

I am not sure what I saw here... and the more I think about bringing some sort of sense to this brilliant film, the less I get a sense of chronology, plot, characters. To tell you the truth, I'm not even sure I can tell you what this film is about. But one must start somewhere, I suppose.

So we have a man... a married father of one... who joins a secret club. So far, so good. But immediately a sub-plot kicks in: he's married to a woman in a coma. Ok... a woman in a coma... So what then? So she lies there hooked up to a respirator. Is this in any way important? Not really... so let me move on.

"Our system brings pleasure in the course of the daily life", says an enigmatic man – the guardian of the secret club. "You will find the tension of not knowing when it will come deeply satisfying." So picture the setting: a darkened room with a wooden-horse merry-go-round in the middle, going at full speed. The view one gets from this vantage point is on walled cubicles staffed by women in black shiny PVC and leather. OK, so the secret club deals in SM practices. And it is here that we are tempted to attach the first "kinky" label.

Except that, well... it's not really just about the workings of the SM practice. Somewhere towards the end of the first third of the film, you get weird breaks in the main story line: the film stops, the title *R100* pops back on screen and some people enter the field: some sit down, some smoke. Some ask questions in the line of "So what was that sub-plot about the hospital?" and others try to justify with replies along the lines of "Oh, the director wanted to show that..." Then the bell rings, they stub out their smokes and leave the shot. This happens a number of times in the film.

Where does this place the audience? I mean me? The different narrative ontologies keep on switching – the main story line (the man and the SM club) escalates into an operation of the SM-ninja-fight-squad, and switches to the first backdrop – the woman in the hospital – well, technically she gets eaten by one of the dominatrices... but somewhere, in another parallel universe another audience is evaluating the film and we are the audience to that evaluation too. This is all so incredibly twisted and fun.

There is release though and it comes at the very end of the film – it is Beethoven's *Ode*

to Joy. But I am not going to tell you how it all fits with the rest of the tale because I will let you find that one out for yourselves.

Char... the No-Man's Island *directed by Sourav Sarangi (2012)*

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

It is interesting how we approach documentaries. Have you noticed that the simple word “documentary” changes something with respect to the way we anticipate the film? There is some sort of “truth” effect that descends onto our eyes when we watch them and, perhaps, we can't really help ourselves to evaluate a documentary according to this “truth”.

Char, however, escapes such evaluations. Well, “escape” isn't really the right term here. You can certainly evaluate this film according to the truth it presents, but this will make you bypass the poetry that is contained within this *chef d'oeuvre*. The story is relatively simple: the camera follows inhabitants of the island called Char, surrounded on all sides by the Ganges river. This piece of land – altogether about 150 square kilometres – is slowly disintegrating into the Ganges. The camera often shows the sandy slabs of coastal earth simply peeling away into the water. This type of erosion by water is simply unstoppable and we know that, ultimately, Char will be doomed to disappear entirely.

In the meantime, the people who inhabit the island are deeply rooted into this fragile soil. This is the conundrum which grounds the story of the film – it is about roots, about human need for anchorage, in a completely unstable environment. This is what produces the tension of the film and its poetry.

Mother's Day *directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga (2004)*

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

You may have heard of Tsitsi Dangarembga's work as an author of fiction. Her novel *Nervous Conditions* often appears on post-colonial reading lists. However, her work as a filmmaker is, unfortunately, less known to the audiences, especially in Europe.

Mother's Day is an enigmatic work. This 30-minute film can be loosely compared to a "musical" as, indeed, there is quite a lot of singing and dancing going on. Personally, however, a "musical" is not what comes to my mind when I try to describe this film. Rather, I find that *Mother's Day* pulls in elements of oral story-telling and evokes the power stories have to teach us something about experience.

The plot of *Mother's Day* is relatively straight forward and presents a mother's struggle to keep her family afloat. She prays to the God of termites for help and her wish is granted: termites come out of their hill and dance and sing as a sign of their goodwill and cooperation. So this is the plot... but it is the way that this plot is told that really comes alive in *Mother's Day*. The characters of the struggling mother, her good-for-nothing husband, their meek and obedient children and the humane termites are used to create a deep and thoughtful narrative on the nature of good and evil against a backdrop of a dream-like setting.

A Touch of Sin *directed by Jia Zhang-Ke (2013)*

REVIEWED BY ANNA IATSENKO

A Touch of Sin presents four stories of people who are pushed to the outer limits of their resilience and thus offers an interesting take on the question: "How much suffering can one person tolerate?" Confronted with random but culturally and socially acceptable acts of violence and human cruelty, the characters of the four vignettes present very lucid takes on the human ability to handle abuse before reaching a breaking point.

There is a man who can no longer tolerate the fact that the local village money is being spent on the rich people's whims. There is a woman romantically involved with a married man: the tangible awkwardness of their affair, the abuse from the wife, the daily manifestations of disrespect at her workplace, the abuse upon abuse piles up until she finally snaps and stabs clients in the bordello where she works. There are call-girls who must attend to their clients' every perverse and degrading whim.

The strength of the story is not to create pathos or some sense of "oh, I'm so sorry for you" or make the audience feel better about their own daily traumas. Rather, by exploring these breaking points, *A Touch of Sin* reveals the fragile empowerment that results from these moments of crisis. Here, the act of breaking down equates with a refusal to surrender to victimisation.

CREATIVE WRITING

Blooms for Iris

H.M. JI

Arthur was a landscape artist who claimed that the most exquisite pleasures in life were of the transitory kind: a hedge recently trimmed or a climbing bush scattered with roses. You gaze upon it, rejoicing in the charm of its perfect symmetry (or the poetry of its haphazard contortions), but a second glance further along would reveal flaws that, although they did not detract from its overall charm, nevertheless brought the most imperceptible changes which contradicted the possibility of a fixed nature. Iris remarked, and she thought judiciously, that a hedge does not alter overnight; smiling, he calmly agreed that indeed it did not, but then, one does not gaze upon a hedge at all times of the day, yet the next time one happens by it as small a mutation as a slightly overgrown branch will prove to be at the root of its fascination, precisely because of its evanescent nature. He had asked her, 'Why don't you write about a girl wearing velvet in her gossamer hair flying in the wind like fairy wings?' But she had tossed her head, saying that what she was attempting to do was beyond his grasp. She did consider the point about the hedge to be somewhat facile but, judging it to be at the moment indisputable, went to her drawing board where a recently trimmed rose bush, with only thorns and spotted leaves, was forming in her mind as the right setting for a tale.

Iris was a children's book writer and illustrator of the 'noir sort'. It always amused her to be asked what a 'noir' children's book writer and illustrator was, precisely; the simplest and most obvious answer being that she wrote and illustrated tales with a dark twist. Then, to explain away the apparent contradiction, at least to some, of the in-existent 'happily ever after' she appealed to their imagination: Cinderella freed solely to be at her husband's beck and call; Sleeping Beauty deprived of sleep due to nocturnal wailing from the crib; the Little Mermaid gaining an immortal soul through pre-meditated homicide; and so on. The smallest room in their rented cottage was actually a drawing room; it always made her smile to think that her working space was, literally, a drawing room. The room overlooked a small garden with rows upon rows of rose bushes mingled with flowers of the most brilliant hue and whose names she could never remember. The flowers have a soul of their own, Arthur would say and, indeed, they spread their petals like wings all around the garden, shimmering in pools of light from dawn till dusk.

The only flaw in that spellbound cottage was that the shower-head dripped rather than gushed water; nevertheless, being in the country pleased them immensely and neither had regrets about their comfortable flat in London. Iris indulged in window-gazing,

seemingly absorbed in some private mysteries when, in truth, no thoughts at all crossed her mind. Arthur teased her for being a dilettante at heart but guessed that, although her hand stood still, her avid mind was regaling her with yet un-drawn sights she could never talk about with him and trace on paper only when alone. On dull days, however, the paper remained blank and no matter how long she remained still, no vision came to seize her hand into motion and, by the day's end, she had nothing to show for all the hours of gazing. She self-deprecatingly called those hours 'tea time' since the only real act she could honestly call her own was consuming tea all day long.

She had at first been averse to his appearance. She considered herself as not being particularly fastidious about looks but he looked wildly unkept, with twigs dangling from all over that mop of hair: What on earth could he have been doing, she asked ('cutting down branches from around the square', he replied). An untamed bird poised for flight, no longer in its first youth but magnificent in its quiet grace, she had caught his eye from afar at the flea market. Iris had a solid, down-to-earth presence yet she conveyed a sense of fragility; her wavy hair was kept long even though it had gone prematurely grey. Her eyes were of the most lustrous green he had ever seen and he found her other-worldly and absolutely bewitching. She had recently ended a relationship with a man whose exacting nature she had, in the end, found burdensome. Arthur was a physically sturdy man in his mid-forties with powerful hands and arms and dark twinkling eyes who enjoyed reading history books and the occasional novel. His former wife had envied him the self-absorbed pleasure he felt in his work and had accused him of being more in love with trees than with her. He suspected there had been another man but had not resented her for it since he had wanted out as much as she had. Arthur sensed that nothing less than an extraordinary overture would do, so he had told Iris he was used to nesting in trees and conversing with wild fauna and would she do him the infinite pleasure of sharing a cup of tea with him before taking flight? It was clear from Arthur's demeanour at the tea room that their intimate conversation – not about anything as real as politics or the state of the economy – had to be the simple continuation of an earlier conversation momentarily interrupted, and Iris was mildly startled by the realisation that she felt the same.

In May, Arthur adopted a stray cat, a small grey thing, scrawny and underfed, whose looks did little to melt people's hearts, but he had a weakness for homeless creatures and gave her a hearth, naming this trifling bit of fluff 'Crumpet'. Whilst her mistress would gaze out the window in silent contemplation, Crumpet would spread her meagre body on the scattered paper, pawing it languidly until she dozed off by the window. On her first day at the cottage, they washed her with baby shampoo in a small ceramic bowl, and

with her hair plastered to her body, she had looked more pathetic than ever. However, both of them had smiled, ‘*There’s* an addition to our family!’

The evening of that particular day, of the rose bushes with the thorns and spotted leaves, Iris had dinner to prepare and, since the menu of her choice was quite time-consuming, she was relieved that all the ingredients had been purchased the day before so that she could at least rejoice at the thought of a day not utterly gone to waste. Earlier in the day Arthur had asked what she had in mind; when she told him their dinner would consist of recipes taken from the late Victorian period, his only response was that she liked to complicate her life because too much sameness would bore her. Her pencil moved across the blank page:

‘Suppose they had saved up all *my* punishments?’ she went on, talking more to herself than the kitten. ‘What *would* they do at the end of a year? I should be sent to prison, I suppose, when the day came. Or – let me see – suppose each punishment was to be going without a dinner: then, when the miserable day came, I should have to go without fifty dinners at once! Well, I shouldn’t mind *that* much! I’d far rather go without them than eat them!...Twas brillig, and the slithy toves...’

Arthur came in from the garden and with garden gloves still on, peered down at her scribblings, exclaiming, ‘But you did write today, darling!’ ‘Oh, Arthur ...’, she sighed, then got up to head for the kitchen.

In June, Arthur adopted a ten year-old boy. He came from the nearby village and would often creep into their garden to snatch a few veggies or flowers for his tired mother. He had three sisters and two brothers, and he was the youngest; some had already left home to work in some city up north. He preferred the countryside and had always been partial to the cottage, especially as there was a family of hedgehogs which the owner had once shown him; he remembered the soft underside of the babies nestled in prickly nut shells when he had held them upside down. One of the fully-grown hedgehogs once got its teeth stuck on an enormous red apple the owner had given it and the boy was hooked. Anything soft and round appealed to his sweet nature. He was like their caretaker, wasn’t he? And since the new tenants seemed to be of that category of city folk who liked to grow their own food, all the better for him, wasn’t it? Prior acquaintance with the owners gave him every right to be in that garden. The day of the adoption, Arthur caught him red-handed and, in his suffused shame, the young boy hung his head whilst, dangling from his freckled arm, peeked the rosy cheeks of perky radishes. His name was Colin and

he was a sensitive, quiet sort of boy who hardly ever spoke, except when his attention was caught by a detail which escaped most people, especially grown-ups; at such times, his eyes intensely focused on the matter in hand expressing what words could not. 'Keep us company once in a while', asked Arthur, 'and once we're friends you won't have to steal anymore; you'll be part of our little family'. Colin thought he was getting away on fairly easy terms so he accepted and both shook hands over the deal. A few weeks later, Colin tip-toed into the house which appeared to be empty but, hearing an odd voice, he peered around the door to the drawing room to ascertain everything was alright; yes, it was merely the cat. But she was talking to it! 'How is that possible', he wondered, 'she is a boorish adult who always keeps to herself and never pays attention to anyone!'. Iris became aware of his gaze but she continued to converse with Crumpet as if it were a matter of course. Finally, when the mystery could be borne no longer, he burst in and abruptly asked her, 'How *do* you understand "cat"?' She feigned surprise at his sudden intrusion and replied with a conspiratorial smile, 'The same way *you* do'. After that episode, he began to see her as an unusual friend of sorts; after all, he told himself, she draws and writes tales and talks to animals. She must be one of *them*! He did not know how to address her, and 'Iris' seemed forward, so he devised a nickname for her which stuck: 'story-weaver'. From his mouth, it came out as 'stree-ver'. The three of them had summer picnics in the garden and gobbled cherries to their fill whilst Arthur looked on with an amused air. 'Look, I've become a living hill!', cried Colin who, with deep breaths, was making ripples with his stomach and Iris, supine on the same tweedy blanket, traced the moving hump with her fingers in a soldierly walk. Then she tousled his hair and kissed his forehead. Arthur was certain Colin would burst if he continued these strange contortions but opted for approval, such lazy bliss was there in their countenances. Crumpet slowly rolled on her back and slumped onto her side, purring in ineffable contentment.

'Sabina's Atonement', the tale Iris began writing that spring, began thus:

When Sabina was a young girl, she believed in her own immortality and the unshakable virtue of her own opinions. 'Death is a cave-like abyss blighted by an eternal winter which no celestial light may reach. Children punished for their selfishness and sloth were cast down into that abyss', she whispered to her little brother, George, over breakfast one morning, scaring him out of his wits. 'And those myths about a land of plenty bathed in light where eternal rest awaits are but a fable'. She then ate her toast, which was prepared just right by her mother, quietly admonished her brother for spilling the milk and, thereby, wasting food. George looked at her with loathing. Last year, the revelation had been about Father Christmas and, as she poured horrid words of truth into his unwilling

ear, ‘Father Christmas is really Father and Mother rolled into one, didn’t you know, you fool?’, he had felt his small world shatter into a million pieces. She continued with a detailed description of that abyss in a low voice, ‘A huge dark cave of unnatural flames casting fiendish light on its walls whilst goblins danced and revelled round the bonfire in wicked glee’. At that, George howled in despair and hid behind his mother’s skirts, which only fuelled his sister’s contempt at his childish behavior. Humph, she sniffed, when she was his age she had already read Milton’s *Paradise Lost* – albeit a simplified version given to her by her father at Christmas. George never forgave Sabina for inflicting the first trauma of childhood and, as they grew into adolescents, their paths drifted further and further apart, although their parents noticed very little since Sabina was very clever at concealing her black heart.

On the first morning of their honeymoon the previous summer, Arthur had surprised Iris with a small folded paper containing words scrawled in his generous arches. What were they, she had asked; he told her that they were the names of their future children and that they should not wait too long, should they? Iris, propping herself against the pillows, had looked at the names carefully then cried out, ‘Arthur, you can’t possibly be serious!’ She told him no sane parents would subject their children to being called ‘Lady Emma Hamilton’ or ‘Jude the Obscure’; or, worse, ‘Charles Darwin’, no matter how fine these varieties of roses were. He could and they would, and their genii would last forever; at those words she had thrown a pillow at him saying he was as mad as The Hatter. Disagreements were short-lived and mirthful for they spent their hours laughing and laughing till they heaved and ached and tears ran down their cheeks in rivulets. In the afternoons, they biked through the countryside, landing in tangled heaps on the grass where she would fill her arms with blooms to bring back to the cottage in a basket and he would plant fierce kisses upon her brow and cheeks and everywhere else he could reach. He smelled of ferns and dried autumn leaves, of something warm and certain that came from working so closely with nature. He cried out from the meadow his undying love for the girl with gossamer hair (it was, in truth, rather coarse) and, at night, bathed in her unceasing light, he could not understand how he could feel so utterly lost yet so safe. He had seen the cottage on a website and had fallen in love with it at first sight: ‘My girl will thrive on these old stones’. Those were remembrances of days when plants, shrubs and flowers consumed them. O, they were glorious!

In the wake of summer, Arthur and Iris returned to their flat in London; when they asked Colin whether he should like to keep Crumpet for himself, he told them no, that they should all come back on the following spring and that he would hold them to their

promise. Colin hugged Iris fiercely. 'Ah, he has that same ferny smell', she realised and breathed in deeply. When autumn arrived, Arthur began to worry about his wife. It was not anything he could put his finger on but he knew something was troubling her. A feeling of unease settled upon him. Nevertheless, she chose to remain silent, so he let it go but only until another occasion would arise to remind him of it. The chilly morning heralded a long winter and he set to the task for one of his regular clients and her abundant collection of plants. She had a partially covered winter garden at the end of her large flat, filled with large clay pots of cannas, caladeus and coleus, ferns and moss. What a marvellous garden, he sighed as he began trimming and snipping; then he laid out the gauze to protect them from the frost. Arthur forgot the time when absorbed in his work, which one of his friends had called "nipped poetry" with the emphasis on the poetry as Arthur was more feeling than scientific. He seemed furiously intent as he moved from place to place but felt deep pleasure; he paused once, smiling at the memory of breakfast that morning: Iris had risen earlier to prepare an unusual fare of organic rice, grilled salmon and pickled radishes. She sometimes felt the urge to step outside the boundaries, although she had simply pointed out it was much healthier than gorging oneself on bacon and scrambled eggs. He could pretend, she had told him, that he was a knight on a long march through exotic lands. Their friends had remarked she always talked to Crum-pet as if it were human, but Arthur had told them that, with her surprising breakfasts, these oddities were hardly over the top and precisely what he cherished about his wife.

In the following spring, the first snowdrops and crocuses sprouted once more as the melting snow left the muddied earth, but the children had not come. She had a 'condition', as the doctors had called it; she then made a sketch of a princess dying of a slowly decaying body, with spring returning one final time at the close, calling it 'Her Wounded Womb'. Sabina's tale continued thus:

When George left home to go to university, Sabina at last grasped how a small child's heart could contain infinite anguish. She had taken it as a lark, this implacable jesting of hers; he called it something accursed: she had robbed him of something essential, of something tender inside of him, and he resented her for it. So when he went out into the world on his own, it was as if the gates of Heaven had opened and flooded him with hope: surely he would meet people who did not always make him feel fearful and cross. He would find his bearings again and, besides, she had lost her power to bully him. What Sabina understood was that, as a young girl, she had envied him his tender heart and, unknown to herself, had pursued a course of crushing it. That is what happens when one presumes to know everything, everything but one's own heart. And hers had been black,

black, black. She shed tears of remorse for her little brother who, in spite of her pernicious attempts and superior knowledge of all things, had turned out so fine. He was kind and loving, bright and penetrating; was it any wonder that his friends and all at university flocked to him? How could she not have foreseen it? Her own flesh and blood. She would pursue another course of action, she swore, and show him that she could become a better person.

A series of tests performed for Iris' unceasing headaches revealed something else. 'Inoperable' was the word for what she had. 'Oh, Arthur', she cried out when they were told, 'My poor Arthur, who will look after you?'. All through the darkest hours of the night they held on to one another like lost children. The following day, Iris told him that she wanted neither the chemotherapy nor the radiation; she held firm in spite of his pleading. She told him it would not be living, merely postponing the inevitable, and for what, she asked. In a few months she would be trapped alone in a small lifeless place without hope of seeing the light again; in the end she would not even know the difference. She was to be that princess with a decaying body after all, but, oh, why could it not have been after their time together, she cried. Arthur would not give up; he spent hours online searching for information, surely there was a cure somewhere. He learnt to cook holistic food, saying that whatever healthy monks have been eating for centuries could do them no harm. Indeed, he was like a knight on an unrelenting quest for the healing powers of the Grail and never had she loved him more. One afternoon, she decided it was time and began storing her manuscripts and illustrations in a leather binder, for the dead leave their house in order. Whilst following her every move in a trance-like stupor, he asked her, 'Do you remember our dispute over the hedge?' But she said, 'Mere banter, darling'. He wept, 'What empty words. The angels are mocking me'. 'Glio...' something, such a foreign-sounding name, such finality in a single word.

They were back at the cottage in spring. Colin was with them most every day and Crummet hardly left her side. That summer, when the most wondrous roses opened their cups amidst hydrangea and hyacinth of dazzling colours, she finished her tale:

Sabina wished she could take back her words and win George's heart. She invited him for a home-cooked meal and asked for his forgiveness. 'It was cruel of me, what I said all those years ago, presumptuous and vile'. George asked her if she had been put under an evil spell by wicked goblins. It was her fault alone, she told him, and no goblins, however hideous, ought to bear responsibility for her own conceit. He asked if she would tell him another tale, one that would atone for the past; he felt he could forgive her if, for once, she spoke to him not with haughti-

ness but with true affection. Sabina realised her brother had never wanted to rob her of their parents' love nor outshine her. The shards of ice in her heart broke into a thousand pieces; as spring flooded the darkness within her, she promised him another tale, a brighter tale. She began, 'Death is but a step through a threshold into a land bathed in golden light...'

Iris finished it then wrote no more. One month later, when she could no longer care for Crummet, Arthur placed the now fleshed-out cat in Colin's arms, saying it was a gift in remembrance of their summer together. Colin burst out of the room with the cat in tow and was not seen for three days. The call-in nurse left after her morning visit. By God, he had never wanted to know what ravaged his wife and took her away from him! He placed a bouquet of her favourite pale *chiffonné* roses near the window, next to Colin's smaller offering of cornflower and daisies. They had found them growing wild in one part of the meadow, and had been meaning to find out their names all last summer. Their scent filled the room and Arthur opened the window. In the garden, the Shropshire Lads climbed over the low walls, as if under an enchantment to reach the topmost tower, whereas the queen's attendants at court, the Princess Anne and the Lady of Shalott, were arrayed in their best colours for the passing of their greetings. Were they celebrating because a magic potion had been found that would restore Queen Iridaceae's health after a hundred years of blissful slumber? No, that had only been a dream of Arthur's the night before. He looked at the *chiffonnés*; they never did find out their names. She turned to him and asked:

'Why such dazzling beauties? Are you my greatest admirer?'

'Yes, dearest?', he asked.

'Well, you look familiar and no one else does', she said.

He looked deeply into her eyes; she was still his girl: 'Yes, I am your most ardent fan.'

'I'm sorry, love, but what is your name?'

He knelt beside her bed and took one of her soft pliable hands, carrying it to his cheek whilst, slowly and tenderly, she glided her fingers through his hair, rippling and swaying like blooms on a splendid summer day.

Acrylic Bitter Sweetness

MANON GUIGNOT

*Experience: that most brutal of teachers. But you learn, my God do you learn.
C.S. Lewis*

Rory finally understood why characters on crappy hospital television shows dramatically shout “This is my wife!” to the poor doctor trying to keep his professionalism. Those words, first mundane to him, had become heavier on his own side of the screen. He wasn’t too much of a romantic but loving Karen had made him understand what marriage could mean, without the usual expectations of pessimism and fear. Maybe some day he would not only relate to being a husband but, even, want to be one again. For now, however, all that mattered to him was that Karen was gone.

Rory had been staring at pictures all afternoon, the ones from the big box she had decorated when they had first moved in together. He could not bring himself to throw it away; if it felt wrong in the moment, he would probably regret it later. In truth, if one thing was to be remembered, it was that Karen had helped Rory understand himself and others better. Beyond the pain of heartbreak, and with the honest knowledge that neither she nor their relationship had been perfect, it didn’t seem irrational or over-sentimental to be thankful for such experience. According to the annoying book his best friend had given him, being grateful for the past was an important step in the infamous art of picking oneself up. It also said that creativity always helped.

In a childish compromise, Rory decided to paint over Karen’s face in all of the pictures he could find. One day, he would be able to laugh at himself for doing so and, more important, he would be ready to scratch over the blue, orange and pink acrylic bubbles. Yet, it would not be like scratching a scab, opening the wound again, but more like scrubbing moss off a wall; the cracks would still be there, yet, they would have acquired an undeniable beauty of their own. One day, the vision of Karen’s face would bring into him a great tenderness instead of melancholy.

Night was starting to fall and Rory could hear through the open window the children of the neighbourhood playing in the park. He closed his eyes for a short moment to smell the evening spring breeze. Funny, how certain perfumes recall other memories. He would soon join his mates at the pub and another one of the last few months’ hard days would end. For one last time, and for himself, he would silently raise his pint to the words Karen had said. He would toast the certitude that their love, though gone, had vibrantly lived and, finally, he would drink to the belief that his bitter sweetness would not last either.

Thelma and Lisa

SASKIA MCCRACKEN

We're like Thelma and Louise, she says, looking at me over her wet sunglasses.

Which one's which? I ask. I look down the road but still no bus. I look the other way, no police, no one running towards us.

I'm Louise, she says. That's the tough one who shoots the guy. You're Thelma, the one the guy jumped.

Except the guy didn't jump me and we're at a bus stop. We have to wait twenty minutes for our getaway car.

Jesus, she says, I can't believe I did that. She laughs and looks at her hands like she's still holding the bottle she threw at him.

I would walk. I'm soaked. The longer we stand here the colder I get and the more I'm sure someone will point her out and say she's the one that did it. The one next to the ginger.

I mean, can you believe it? She says. He thought he was so big and I just...

She stands up and makes a motion like she's chucking the bottle. She doesn't mime us running away.

I was lying on a bench with my head in her lap, looking at the world through an empty Stella bottle. Green clouds, green sun. I had peeled the label off the bottle. The pieces scattered across the pavement and into the lake. I could see Lisa's chin above me, half blocked by her ice cream cone, all green. One of the ice cream huts along the lakefront was open; the rest were still closed for winter. We were in scarves and sunglasses. The only other people around were a family in windbreakers and a guy on a skateboard going back and forth behind us.

Doing tricks, Lisa said. Bad ones.

I tilted my head back far enough to see the family, upside down. They were green too, bubbles at the edges. The father leant towards the hut to order.

Chocolate chip, he said. Uh, les chips chocolat.

Above me Lisa asked, chocolate or vanilla? DiCaprio or Clooney? Divorce or celibacy? We'd both picked strawberry. I'd finished mine. Drip. I felt her ice cream hit my forehead and melt into my hair. Cold.

Sorry, she said. More beer?

Nah, I said. Can't drink lying down.

Food or sex? Me or you?

Chocolate, I said. DiCaprio, divorce, food.

She ate the end of the cone and looked down at me. That looks awful, she said. Strawberry and red hair. It clashes. She took the bottle from me and I turned away from the bright light towards the lake, bright too. The surface spun with flakes of the label, pieces of Stella. The guy on the skateboard skimmed past us.

Watch where you're going asshole, she shouted at him. She turned back to me.

Driver or passenger? Thelma or Louise?

I don't know which is which, I said.

Her sunglasses loomed over me. We need to get that out of your hair. Get up.

We got up and crouched by the edge of the lake. She scooped water into my hair.

The family had almost reached the pier. The guy on the skateboard passed us again and I watched him jump while the board flipped beneath him.

Hey, Lisa pushed my shoulder. Me or you?

He saw me looking and jumped higher. The board flipped twice.

Lisa, come on, I said. You can't ask that.

Just play the game, she said. Me or you?

Me then, I said.

She pushed me again. He jumped higher. It flipped and flipped and he landed on the end and fell off. The board shot towards me, hit me. As I fell into the lake I heard the bottle smash and Lisa shout, RUN. She pulled me out of the lake. The man in the windbreaker ran towards us, shouting. The skateboard guy was on the ground. We ran.

We're at the bus stop, still waiting on our getaway car. It rounds the corner.

I mean seriously, she says as the bus pulls up, we're like Thelma and Louise.

Spring is Coming

MISHA MEIHSL

Spring awakens with a burst of warmth and color.
Primroses and daffodils adorn the valleys,
Rivers rise, the crackling crust of ice is breaking.
In the cedars, dryads dance in gowns of flowers,
Nightshades, ydrad, disappear in sunbathed hours,
Grass grows green and rainbows paint on rainy draperies!

Is this drop a pearl of dew? Or is it a tear?
So I see, my time is due and the end draws near.

Coming slowly down, I feel my last reveries.
Oh! The flowers of frost will wither. No powers
May restore them now. Nor the shimmering towers
In the crystal blue winter skies thawing, aching.
Nor the willows weeping snow on lakeshore alleys.
Gone. Morrow, the snowman I was will be no more.

A Case in the News

ANDRÉAS-BENJAMIN SEYFERT

It was a bright April morning, and, as usual, Jean Child enjoyed his daily walk to work. The rest of the day, he was used to riding around on various modes of public transport whenever he could.

Buses represented not merely a comfort factor for him, they also gave him the opportunity to taste Geneva's most precious delight: the melting pot. Here, Child could close his eyes and listen to the most exotic of languages. He had a first-row seat to the theatre of life: heated political debates among colleagues in suits, people immersed in books ranging from Dostoyevsky to Dan Brown, babies in carriages and youths with their grandparents.

But it was on the street, he found, that Geneva's beauty was at its height: who would have imagined that a city that hosted international organizations could also have cows and vines? The truth is, most people who lived and worked in Geneva didn't notice its diversity of elements, ranging from country to city life, because it flowed from one to the other in perfect harmony. Child regarded this city as his own pleasure garden, and he enjoyed every single flower-bed as he walked to work in the morning.

A ray of sunshine met him as he passed the corner of a street. He loosened the scarf around his neck and took in a whiff of early spring air. It had rained the previous night and the smell of freshness was still untarnished. Soon he arrived at the Radio Télévision Suisse building. As he entered, there reigned the muffled sound of computer typing and shuffling steps while a member of staff busied himself at the next coffee machine.

Standing in the doorway of the open space, this wasn't the first time Child had been welcomed by this seemingly sterile newsroom environment. It certainly hadn't been the atmosphere movies had presented of journalism in his childhood: sounds of loud phone-ringing, fans propelling at full speed but doing nothing to reduce the stifling heat in the room; one journalist, grasping half a ham sandwich in one hand and a fax in the other, screaming breaking news at his colleague three desks down. These were different times. It was the age of emails, scheduled lunch breaks and air conditioning. But all the same, Child wondered now, as he had done more than once, if some of his profession's charm hadn't been lost since those earlier days.

“Catherine wants to see you. She’s been trying to reach you for the last half-hour.”

His brows widened. “What happened? Anything important?” Child asked the new intern.

“Dunno,” he muttered and went on his merry way.

A smile passed the reporter’s lips as he switched on his *natel*, the mobile phone he thought of as his very own tracking anklet. Readily enough, he saw the missed phone calls and a hurried text message: “Need to C U. Catherine.” No hints.

He made his way to her office and knocked on the door. It flew open and a fair-haired young woman in a smart gray suit came out, walking steadily on, leaving it to Child to follow her pace. “Trust you slept well,” she said with a wink over her shoulder. Catherine stopped at one of the desks, handed down a file and changed her course.

“You’re in a good mood today,” Child pointed out. “What’s the occasion?”

“Murder,” she replied emphatically. “And I’ve chosen you for it.”

“Murder?”

“Yes. I got a call from a friend at a local police station. They found a man at the Jardin de la Paix and they’re in an uproar. Take Julie and get as much as you can.”

She disappeared behind her door again. Child typed in the location on his smartphone and called Julie Blanc, his favorite camerawoman. “We’re needed,” he said in English; then added, in French: “See you downstairs by the parking lot.”

Child reached his desk at a quarter past nine. There was a note: “I don’t need it perfect, I need it by ten o’clock. When you’re done, come by my office. You know the drill. Catherine.”

Child sighed and thought back to the words he had uttered for the camera in front of the park gate a few minutes ago.

“The police investigators are still unsure as to the motive for the attack and how the assailant and the victim got into the park in the first place. But one assumption can be made: Geneva’s citizens won’t get much peace and quiet on their daily walks through the park until whoever did this is put behind lock and key.”

He felt the back of his chair for the notebook in the inner pocket of his coat, took it out and switched on his computer. As he looked through this morning’s notes, he wondered why he even bothered to write anything down in the first place. He found his own scribbling even harder to read than his doctor’s prescriptions. But by the time his computer had finished booting and was ready for use, he was rather sure he’d made some sense out of it.

The man had been found at about six-thirty. The head gardener had come in by the back door of the small park, discovered the body of the victim on one of the benches by the pond and immediately called the police. The victim was a Caucasian male, about twenty-five years of age. Cause of death: shot to the head.

Not much to go on to make a report for the news. But Child was used to that, especially in criminal cases, where the police were involved and no one was eager to talk. He was happy he had gotten as much as he had from the young police officer who had recognized him from TV and whom he had distracted, while Julie got some footage through the gate bars.

He opened a Word document and was about to start typing when his *natel* began to ring.

“Jean Child speaking,” he said.

“Hi Dad,” said the voice at the other end.

It was his only daughter, Lily.

“Hi. What’s the matter?”

“Nothing.”

“I’ve known you all your life Lily, remember?”

“Well...actually I wanted to call you because a friend of mine told me a strange story this

morning. He's not really a friend, we've almost never talked to each other before. He said that the house of a friend of his had been robbed three times over the last year or so."

"Wow, that's a lot."

"Yeah, I've got lots of friends whose houses have been robbed, especially in the Petit-Saconnex area. Anyway...he said that the parents of his friend got a gun for protection at home. And that yesterday night they were robbed again. But this time the father went after them. Apparently, he came back trembling. The guy told me that he didn't know what to tell his friend. Should he go to the cops or not?"

Child paused. It would probably be a matter of a few hours to find out which houses had been burglarized last night. Child didn't believe in coincidences. Especially in a small city like Geneva. It was clear to him that the friend of this mysterious "guy" his daughter was talking about did not exist. There was no doubt in his mind that this boy's father had killed the man in the park, accidentally or not.

"His friend should go to the police and do the right thing. Whoever it is should say whatever their conscience tells them is right. If their conscience is clear, they shouldn't say a thing."

"Okay, *papa*. Thanks for the help. See you tonight."

Child hung up and began to type.

"Criminality resurfaced in suburban Geneva last night as a young man was killed in a neighborhood park. After our statistics department announced just a few weeks ago that the number of break-ins in the canton had diminished by fifteen percent, this piece of news comes as rather a surprise. The Jardin de la Paix is a small park located in the Petit-Saconnex commune..."

Child trailed off here, as he remembered an interview he had done with Michael Moore for the world premiere of *Bowling for Columbine* some years ago. He recalled the director's main argument to explain America's predilection for gun violence: the disquieting news Americans were subjected to on TV. At the time, Child had asked him why he thought this was a factor in the US more than in Canada or in Europe. Moore had replied that European and Canadian news hadn't gotten to the same extreme in scaring their nightly viewers about the dangers surrounding them. This conversation had taken

place more than ten years ago and Child wondered if the good old Europeans hadn't caught up with their cousins over-seas, if his own work did not aim at a climate of fear as well. Was *he* in any way responsible?"

This thought left him with a bitter aftertaste, as he continued to type.

Our Own World

CRISTINA SIMONI

Skin,
A barrier between
Two worlds.

One
Visible to everyone;
The other
Known only to
One.

Narrow and confined
Is the
Second,
But richer is it
In essence.

At times
Willing to be
Understood,
Yet inexpressible
By words.

Voice is its
Enemy;
Art and Imagination
Its dearest
Friends.

Our own world
Enclosed
By a barrier.

A Master's Degree in Astrology

MATTHIAS DE GROEVE

Hello there! Welcome to WNW's 'Day in the Life of.' My name is Donal and I am insanely happy to be on the show. I can't wait for you all to see what goes on in my life. The last few weeks have been very hectic. I just got a new job. It's in a prison, so it's pretty exciting. I'm supposed to provide psychiatric help for some of the inmates today. I really hope I can help those guys. It must be difficult for them to be away from their families. Such a lonely life they must lead. Let's see, what else can I tell you about my life? Well, I have a Master's degree in Psychology from Harvard University. I'm thirty-four years old. I'm currently staying with my mother because she's very ill. It's sad, but I think she'll get better, and then I'll start looking for a new place. I guess everything depends on this new job. I can't wait to –

Paul:

Donald, you're up. Cameras are rolling.

Donal:

Now? Umm, okay. My name's Donal. There's no "d" at the end. It's Irish. My grandfather was Irish.

Paul:

So your grandfather had a drinking problem? Tell us about that. Is that what made you take an interest in astrology? The pains of being born into a family of alcoholics made you want to discover deeper meanings in life?

Donal:

Uh – first of all, my grandfather did not have a drinking problem. He died in a car crash when I was 10. It was very sad, and –

Paul:

Does drunk driving run in the family as well? You mentioned your brother Patrick was in prison. How much time is he doing for drunk driving?

Donal:

Patrick is in prison because of a very silly misunderstanding. It doesn't matter. So, uh, hello there! My name is Donal, I am insane to be on the show! I can't wait for you –

Paul:

You just said you were insane. Might that be because your mother smothered you and spoiled you until you left home for college? How long did she breast-feed you?

Donal:

I don't know. I don't think my mother ever fed me breast milk.

Paul:

How disappointing. How long has this secret resentment towards your mother been dragging on? Is that why you started specializing in astrology?

Donal:

Paul, can we just stop the cameras for a minute? I think this is a bad take.

Paul:

Sorry, Donald. Cameras keep rolling. That's what they do.

Donal:

My name's Donal.

Paul:

So could you answer the question?

Donal:

Okay, uh, I've never actually specialized in astrology. Astrology is not a science. I was just writing an essay on the effects of astrology and horoscopes on contemporary society. I'd like to talk about my new job now. Umm. Well, first of all, I have an astrology degree from Harvard – Psychology! I meant to say psychology! – which is why they hired me as a prison psychiatrist, I suppose. It's a very prestigious job, if you ask me.

Paul:

Is it true you were only hired because of the recent horoscope murder case in which you were involved?

Donal:

No, that's not true, and I'd rather not talk about that.

Paul:

It actually is true, Donald. I spoke to the warden, and he said that the inmates have been demanding to have you tell them their horoscopes. That's why they hired you.

Donal:

Is that true?

Paul:

As true as that scar on your cheek. How did you get that by the way? Did your ex-boyfriend give that to you?

Donal:

Umm, I don't have an ex-boyfriend.

Paul:

Is he still your boyfriend then? How long has this on-again-off-again relationship been going on? What does your mother have to say about that?

Donal:

I don't have a boyfriend. I'm not a homosexual.

Paul:

Then who is Alex? Aha! I know that look, Donald. Tell us about how Alex hurt you by revealing he actually wasn't gay and was just experiencing a mid-life crisis and wanted to go back to his wife.

Donal:

Alex was a girl. She was my ex-girlfriend. No one had a mid-life crisis. I'm not that old yet, I think.

Paul:

What are you? Forty, forty-two?

Donal:

Thirty-four.

Paul:

You look older. So why did Alex break up with you? Was it because your relationship

with your mother was too disturbingly close?

Donal:

She died.

Paul:

Your mother?

Donal:

No. Alex.

Paul:

So why did Alex kill himself? Is it because he –

Donal:

Herself. She killed herself. I mean no! She didn't kill herself! She died in a car crash as well.

Paul:

Another case of drunk driving?

Donal:

No!

Paul:

So why haven't you found a new boyfriend yet? Do you prefer living with your mother?

Donal:

I'm only living with my mother because she's very ill. It's sad, but I think she'll get better, and then I'll start looking for a new place.

Paul:

Is it true your mother just has the flu and she didn't actually ask you to move in with her?

Donal:

No! I mean, yes, she does have the flu, but it's a very serious case of the flu. She needs me. There's no one else.

Paul:

Because your older brother Patrick is in prison. Tell me, is he an inmate in the same prison where you'll be working?

Donal:

He is. But that's just a coincidence. There aren't many prisons in this area.

Paul:

How much lobbying did Patrick have to do to get you this job?

Donal:

He didn't do any lobbying. Nobody did any lobbying.

Paul:

He is rather popular though. I heard he's the leader of the most prestigious group of prison smugglers. He can get anyone cigarettes, nude magazines, and Pulitzer Prize-winning novels for a very reasonable price. Is it difficult to live in the shadow of a brother who is so much more successful than you?

Donal:

Patrick is not more successful than me. He's a criminal. And nobody did any lobbying, because according to you, I got the job because the inmates were begging to have me there.

Paul:

So let's talk about the horoscope murder case. How many deaths have you caused by your talent to predict the future?

Donal:

Just the one. I mean none! I haven't caused any deaths! There is no such thing as a horoscope murder case. What happened was just a very, very unfortunate incident.

Paul:

It was a murder, though.

Donal:

I didn't kill the woman. I told the police many times about the misunderstanding, and they believe me, and I haven't been charged with anything, so I'd rather just drop the

whole subject.

Paul:

Let me rephrase the question then, Donald. How many of your predictions have come true? Would you describe your talent as a gift from God? If so, what strange cult are you a member of? Do sects run in the family as well? How long have you been a practitioner of this weird horoscope cult?

Donal:

I'm not a member of any cult, Paul. I don't have any talent. What happened was just a –

Paul:

You mentioned you didn't have any talent. Do you hold your evil mother responsible for this lack of talent and, if so, are you planning to kill her using your crazy cult powers the same way you killed Mrs. Sanderby?

Donal:

Paul, I'm begging you, can we just start a second take? I don't think I'm being portrayed in a truthful way in this first one.

Paul:

I'm sorry you think that way, Donald. If there's one thing the WNW Network values, it's truth and honesty.

Donal:

So you'll start a new take?

Paul:

I'm afraid I can't do that. You say it was a coincidence that Mrs. Sanderby was murdered in exactly the same way that you predicted. How did you come up with that exceptionally cruel prediction? Which crazy cult-god was it that inspired you?

Donal:

I made it up. All by myself.

Paul:

But didn't you tell the woman that you were just simply reading her horoscope?

Donal:

Yes. That was part of the experiment. For my essay.

Paul:

So you lied. Where does this compulsion for lying come from?

Donal:

Nowhere. I mean, I don't lie on purpose. Just for the sake of science.

Paul:

So you're calling astrology a science now. What zodiac sign was she?

Donal:

Aquarius.

Paul:

Did all Aquarii die that day?

Donal:

No. Just Mrs. Sanderby.

Paul:

Why didn't you just tell Mrs. Sanderby her real horoscope, as you would find in any newspaper of slightly lesser quality?

Donal:

I was testing the effects of exceptionally specific horoscopes on gullible people.

Paul:

Did Mrs. Sanderby believe you at first?

Donal:

No, she didn't. It was much too specific. I didn't expect anyone to believe that particular horoscope. It proved my theory. It's in my essay, you can read it if you want. Anyone can read it, I published it last month.

Paul:

You do know that people are buying it only because it was written by the crazy horo-

scope murderer?

Donal:

I'm not a crazy horoscope murderer.

Paul

Then how do you explain that prediction? How did you know that Mrs. Sanderby would be frozen to death by liquid nitrogen, and that her corpse would be shattered into exactly 22 pieces, and that the murderer would hide the pieces all around her house?

Donal:

I didn't –

Paul:

And most importantly, why didn't the police press charges on you? It seems to me you'd be the most likely suspect by far.

Donal:

I have a very clear alibi, thankfully.

Paul:

And what alibi would that be?

Donal:

I – umm – that's beside the issue, I think. In fact, I think all of this is beside the issue. Maybe we could stop the take?

Paul:

Am I correct in assuming that your reluctance to tell me the alibi is a clear sign that you were buying cocaine off of a shady group of drug dealers at the time of the murder and you don't want anyone to know about it? How long has it been since you were in rehab, and when will you be going back? Did you get those red, bloodshot eyes by sniffing too much cocaine in the past week? Are you high right now? Did your mother's smothering ruin your self-confidence in such a permanent way that you resort to cocaine every time you make a public appearance? Was it your boyfriend Alex who got you addicted? Did you kill Mrs. Sanderby because she knew about the addiction and you wanted to silence her? Did your cocaine-snorting buddies lend you the liquid nitrogen? Did they steal the supply of liquid nitrogen from the Russian government, or did the Russians give it to them willingly? Are you a communist?

Rizana

MARLON ARIYASINGHE

"A Sri Lankan maid accused of killing a four-month-old baby in her care has been executed in Saudi Arabia after more than seven years on death row.

Rizana Nafeek, who was believed to be 24, was sent to Saudi Arabia on false documents by employment agents to work as a domestic assistant, though she was under age. She was sentenced to death in 2005, despite having no access to a lawyer, after her employer's four-month-old daughter was found dead in unexplained circumstances. [...]

Nafee[k], who spoke no Arabic, was reported to have initially 'confessed' to the murder during interrogation, but has since retracted her statement, arguing it was made under duress following a physical assault. She said the baby died after choking while drinking from a bottle.

Only three countries execute individuals for crimes committed when minors: Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Iran. Sixty-nine executions were carried out in Saudi Arabia last year, the third-highest number of executions worldwide. Scores of foreign nationals remain in jail, sentenced to death. There has been no official statement from Saudi authorities."

– Jason Burke. "Saudi Arabia executes maid accused of murdering baby." *The Guardian* 9 Jan. 2013:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/09/saudi-arabia-executes-woman>

I heard about you,
Vaguely, back in 2008.
Didn't bother with the details,
Couldn't even catch your name,
Or what happened exactly.
Just thought to myself,
It would make a great poem.
But forgot all about it.

Now I sit in front of my PC,
Typing away, thinking of clever words
To best describe your fate:
Atrocious! deplorable! shameful!
Murderous! barbarous! malicious!
Should use alliteration:
“Saudi Sharia sword slashed swiftly.”

Oh, you know what I should do,
I'll write about the gang rape.
Wasn't that sensational?
The way they mutilated her.
Atrocious! deplorable! shameful!

But I guess others beat me to it.
The papers are in a frenzy
Tycooning about the gory details.
The news reporters won't shut up.
Ban Ki-moon has denounced the act,
And we are all over the moon about that.
UK/US embassies sent their remorse,
Parcelled in nicely written articles.

They talked about you all week.
Watched your execution
Thinking it was really you.
In stunned perverse curiosity,
Half in shock, half in relish,
They gazed.
They gazed at the big sword.
How it rose. How it came down.
How she was tied. How the head!
With a clean, swift strike!

Then they looked away, covered their eyes.
Or pretended to, but peeked again.
Wouldn't want to miss all the blood!

The government blamed the law,
Ranjan blamed the government.
Journalists blamed the mother,
Activists blamed Islam.
King blamed the parents,
Parents blamed her.
Mother blamed the agent,
Agent blamed the translator.
Everyone was shocked! appalled!
How Atrocious! deplorable! shameful!

I never could come up with a great poem for you.
You know...to immortalize you,
Comparing you to Joan of Arc or some heroic woman,
Like what poets are supposed to do.
I never shed a single tear for you.
I never watched the fake video.
I don't want to understand you.
I guess it was just that one week,
The whole world talked about you.
But now, you are truly dead,
And I'm going to sell you!

This poem appeared in the stage play "Rizana."

In Closing...

This Spring 2014 edition of *Noted* has been a weighty and intimate exploration of our department, our city, and our imaginations. From the thoughts of departing colleagues and visiting artists to friendships and interviews gone awry and the media gone mad, the stories, interviews, and reviews contained within this semester's *Noted* provide quite a lot of "Food for Thought" (to borrow from Olivia Lindem).

With this in mind, while this edition is coming to a close, there are, nevertheless, two pieces of good news to offer on the penultimate page of our beloved student journal:

- The first is that the *Noted* Writing Contest is back, by popular demand! You asked for another contest and we endeavor to please.

- The second is that you have a treasure-trove of inspiration in your very hands as the theme of said contest will follow the implicit theme of this semester's *Noted*; with the Film Club offering a whole program of "Metamorphosis-ing" films and an outstanding example of metamorphosing fiction in Tom Cho's "Chinese Whispers," not to mention the many personal and emotional transformations that took place within these pages, there is plenty to inspire and fuel your own narrative metamorphosis.

The nitty-gritty: entries can be up to 4,000 words long, with no other restrictions on style or form: simply a piece of creative fiction on the theme of "metamorphosis." If you've ever hankered to write your own sestina, stream-of-consciousness, song, pass-along short story, or screenplay, now's your chance. Keep in mind that the theme of "metamorphosis" could, of course, always be addressed through the form of the piece itself... Contributions should be sent to noted-lettres@unige.ch by **15 August 2014**, with your intention to participate in the contest announced within the email.

In closing, we at *Noted* wish you all a most transformative spring semester and look forward to reading your pieces this summer!

VWORDE SEARCH

M A A N A H R G I P O Y U N A
A W L I N O P C R I I I L I L
R E R A G O C A T E L C T T U
G F L E E A V A R L L C I S C
I R L C C O T A U G O C L U A
N L O C I P G M T U O K I G N
A R O M A N I R R I N I N U R
L B E D A N O T A I O S G A E
I J A L A N E R G P Z N U A V
A W Q T I S C H H Z H B A X H
T C I Q Y C T E N C B Y L V M
N O I T A R E T I L L A G O U
N M A N U S C R I P T S L O B
D A N T E U Q S E N A M O R E

ADAPTATION

AUGUSTINE

CLERGY

EPIC

ILLUMINATION

MANUSCRIPT

PALAEOGRAPHY

ROMANESQUE

ALLEGORY

BOCCACCIO

COURTESY

FRIAR

INNOVATION

MARGINALIA

RELIC

VERNACULAR

ALLITERATION

CHRONICLE

DANTE

HAGIOGRAPHY

KNIGHT

MULTILINGUAL

ROMANCE

BONUS QUESTION:

Hears eighteenth-century philosopher hesitantly inter yarns for medieval stories.

Completed puzzles (*with* the bonus question answered) can be submitted until 1 May 2014 to Bryn Skibo-Birney's mailbox in Comédie. The prize-winning entry will be chosen at random.