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Letter from the Editor

BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

You know it's hot when every book you read seems to refer to the state of being abysmally, swelteringly, depressingly, and oppressively *hot*. For example, *As I Lay Dying*? Tell me about it. "It was a queer, sultry summer..." Check and check. "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new." Sadly, yep. "It was a pleasure to burn." I assure you, it's not.

Thinking maybe it would help to read something from a chillier clime, I head to the land of snow and Nabokov, only to find, "Lolita, fire of my life, light of my lions." *Nyet*. Even the typically rain-sodden Scottish narratives can't help: "The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling." Me too, Sick Boy, me too.

Fortunately, I—and now, you—have this edition of *Noted* to help us beat whatever is left of the summer sun come September. How? If you can't stand the heat, get out of the city! In the time-honored tradition of academics everywhere, some of our contributors used the summer "break" to head further afield, where they, and/or their characters, luxuriated in the cooler corners of the world. **Roberta Marangi** may have burned under the sun during her visit to the ancient city of Pompeii (see "My Last Days of Pompeii"), but her protagonist "escapes the heat" as she dives into the Bay of Naples in "The Strange Case of the Long Summer and the Good Woman." Meanwhile, ensconced within the cool, stony walls of the York Minster, **Olivia Lindem** and **Antoine Willemin** relax into a modern revival of the centuries-old mystery plays, complete with a hipster Jesus and suitcase-toting bunnies. (Is the Ark the first recorded instance of a trip to beat the poor weather?) Finally, the **Film Club**'s newest roster promises a mix of heat-seared deserts and snow-blasted tundras as they take on "Landscapes."

While some contributions discuss visiting new, and perhaps cooler locales, other pieces address revisiting times, places, and books gone by. From his forthcoming collection of short stories, **Ted Van Alst**'s "Blood on the Tracks / No Mas" provides an immersive glimpse of the sounds, sights, tastes, and experiences of an urban childhood in Chicago. Amid lake breezes and golden-hour strolls, nickle-candy and RC cola, the story veers between nostalgia and awakening as the young protagonist hurtles towards adulthood faster than he knows.

Summertime always seems to recall childhood days spent doing whatever you pleased. **Olivia Lindem**'s childhood was filled with novels, and a recent trip to London prompts her to revisit some of her favorite childhood stories. Now armed with an education in literary analysis, her rereadings reveal that novels she once characterized as "fluff"

often sharply (and sometimes humorously) rebuke the gender expectations of the day. Her narrative investigations and discoveries, discussed in “Rereading in Waves,” are all the more engaging as they reveal that books we thought we knew so well, always hide treasures for those who take the time to come back.

New discoveries through literary analysis are precisely **Misha Meihsl**’s point in his essay, “In Defense of the Humanities,” which offers an impassioned rebuttal to those who might question the value of reading (and rereading). Putting Misha’s “Defense” into practice, **Aymeric Nicolet-Dit-Félix** offers an enlightening perspective to the effect of the “gaze” in his outstanding essay, “‘I See You’: The Hybrid Constructed as ‘Other’ by the Gaze in Avatar and District 9.” If such excellent examples of academic prose have you feeling a little intimidated at the start of the semester, I recommend that you take the euphuistic advice offered in **Lorraine Devillard**’s “Gather Your Thoughts and Your Courage.” The cool, clear-headed logic at play in these pieces is just what we need to take our minds off of the swelter and on to the joys of literature (Ha! As if it was ever far from this topic.).

But before you dash off, refreshed and relaxed, I strongly suggest that you take a tour through the poetic contributions in this edition of *Noted*. While every reader will enjoy the riddling complexity of **Diana Moyo**’s poem “Can You Perceive My True Color?” and the tempestuous paradoxes in **Téo Verhoeven**’s sonnet “To Heaven Love Transports Us with Passion,” the beauty, the passion, and...dare I say it, the *heat* emerge after a more critical rereading.

Until next time, happy reading and remember sunscreen,
Bryn

FEATURES

Rereading in Waves

OLIVIA LINDEM

One of the things that's always taken me by surprise when discussing female authors, be it online or with colleagues, is the repeated claim that others had to go out of their way to find books written by female writers when they were children. This probably shouldn't surprise me considering that the Great Western Canon has always been bogged down by white, male authors, but it still does. I was lucky enough to be primarily brought up by my grandmother in an all-women household and to have women as English and literature teachers in primary and secondary schools. They were all aware of the gender divide in literature and I consequently always had books written by women at hand, from Austen and the Brontës to Jhumpa Lahiri and Margaret Atwood, and if anything, I grew to assume an author was female unless blatantly stated otherwise (I still think of Wilkie Collins as a woman and am repeatedly startled when presented with pictures of a bearded man). Call this what you will, but it's something for which I've always been thankful.

I read voraciously as a kid, and the authors I repeatedly revisited were Louisa May Alcott, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and L.M. Montgomery. Looking back, I struggle to think of male authors I read at that age, only able to remember the time I put *Tom Sawyer* down in bored disappointment, never to pick it up again. Fast forward to studying feminist literature and reading plenty of Second Wave criticism, and I started to wonder if I had fallen into a trap after all. My favorites had all been women, yes, but they weren't exactly groundbreaking. They were the ones who'd survived the canon because they'd appeared to comply with societal demands. They talked about young girls growing into young ladies (yes, for the most part, *ladies*, with all the social connotations implied), and they presented a fair share of domesticity. They glorified notions of home and family, and all the books and series that saw their female characters through to adulthood also saw them enter into the marriage plot. Anne Shirley gives up teaching to marry Gilbert Blythe; Laura Ingalls Wilder does the same and dedicates the final book in the *Little House* series to her marriage; and even Jo March, who spurns Laurie and goes off to New York to live on her own and become a writer, comes home, marries, and brings up not only her two boys but an entire school of children. Alcott even put together a sequel to *Little Women* called *Good Wives* (if you don't remember this, that may be because it's generally printed in one volume with *Little Women* and appears as the second part of the book). Critically awakened, I began to re-evaluate the books in my memory, sadly thinking of them as propaganda which had

driven me to romanticize marriage and domesticity despite growing up with a heightened awareness of divorce and female empowerment.

I was mistaken, however, in making this judgment without revisiting the books themselves until earlier this year. On a trip to London a few months ago, I visited Persephone Books, a publisher and bookshop dedicated to printing forgotten novels by women writers from the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, and came away with two novels by Frances Hodgson Burnett—*The Making of a Marchioness* and *The Shuttle*. I hadn't reread any of her writing since I was about ten years old; more to the point, I hadn't been aware of the fact that she had widely written for adult women. While *The Secret Garden* and *A Little Princess* are her most recognized novels, they only constitute a small portion of her work. I quickly read *The Making of a Marchioness* in April and was thrilled to find that, though it appeared to be a bit of an adult fairy tale at first glance, it gloriously echoed the realism found in the likes of her contemporary, Edith Wharton. I went into a little research binge reading about Hodgson Burnett after that and found that she wasn't the conventional late-Victorian/Edwardian woman I had assumed her to be. She was independent, earned her own living, and had two divorces under her belt at a time when marriage played a definitive role in women's lives. This made me not only want to read more of her work but to take a closer look at some of my other old favorites.

I've only begun to scratch the surface of my rereads thus far, with the very pretty Puffin in Bloom edition of *Anne of Green Gables* bringing me back to L.M. Montgomery's works this summer. I've reread two of the books in the series for now—the aforementioned opening to the *Anne* series and *Anne's House of Dreams*, the fifth book in the series. Rereading the first was a delight. Taking place in the late nineteenth century, it tells the story of an eleven-year-old orphan who's accidentally adopted by Matthew and Marilla Cuthbert, an elderly brother and sister who run a farm on Canada's Prince Edward Island. Anne stays with the Cuthberts, gets into lots of mischief, and excels at school, proving along the way that she was a much better addition to the family than the boy they originally wanted to adopt. The first volume is truly a children's novel, but it was refreshing to revisit after well over a decade.

The following books in the series are far more interesting from critical and social points of view. They follow Anne as she gets older and enters into adult life. Rather than getting married at the first opportunity, she pursues her education, teaches, earns a BA, and turns down multiple marriage proposals. Montgomery turns away from the heteroromantic norms of her time, prioritizing education over marriage and providing commentary on women's issues. Characters like Rachel Lynde criticize women turning away from the home in a way that implies ridicule, while others like Cornelia Bryant speak out in favor of women's suffrage and constantly make statements like "Drat the

men!” Anne eventually marries, but she doesn’t do so until she’s met all of her personal goals in the fifth novel of the series. She is twenty-five at the time, closer to the average marriage age of today than of the pre-1900 world. Her marriage is presented as a true matter of choice and preference, not an obligation or matter of convenience. In fact, it is opposed to another marriage in *Anne’s House of Dreams*, where Leslie Moore is pressured into marriage with a tyrannical drunkard to save her family’s farm. Her unhappiness is explicitly depicted in the novel, and the dramatic extent to which Montgomery goes almost suggests a satirical depiction of the most extreme cases one can imagine. Other passages in the novel also suggest a somewhat satirical nature. An odd contradiction presents itself, for instance, with the topic of childbirth. Montgomery doesn’t completely shy away from the issue. The first time it is evoked, Anne is said to almost lose her life in giving birth and then loses her baby shortly after. This suggests that Montgomery is ready to be a bit more darkly realistic than other authors writing for young women at the time. But then, several chapters and over a year later in the story, she adopts what can only be thought of as an absurdly ridiculous attitude when she turns away from the natural world to the mythology of storks. I could quote just a line of the passage in question, but it is comically golden and deserves to appear in full:

One morning, when a windy golden sunrise was billowing over the gulf in waves of light, a certain weary stork flew over the bar of Four Winds Harbor on his way from the Land of Evening Stars. Under his wing was tucked a sleepy, starry-eyed, little creature. The stork was tired, and he looked wistfully about him. He knew he was somewhere near his destination, but he could not yet see it. The big, white light-house on the red sandstone cliff had its good points; but no stork possessed of any gumption would leave a new, velvet baby there. An old gray house, surrounded by willows, in a blossomy brook valley, looked more promising, but did not seem quite the thing either. The staring green abode further on was manifestly out of the question. Then the stork brightened up. He had caught sight of the very place—a little white house nestled against a big, whispering firwood, with a spiral of blue smoke winding up from its kitchen chimney—a house which just looked as if it were meant for babies. The stork gave a sigh of satisfaction, and softly alighted on the ridge-pole. (Montgomery)

That such a passage was written in 1917, about the 1890s, is not surprising, given that “shocking” issues such as childbirth were taboo and that the book was still mostly geared towards young women; but Montgomery’s attitude towards so many other feminist issues suggests that it cannot be other than satire. How else can the extreme shift from near-death to idealized innocence be explained? The thought of it being satirical criticism of the idiotically simple way in which popular culture addressed women’s issues is reassuring. I began my reread of *Anne’s House of Dreams* fully aware that I was likely to be

disappointed. I found it to be—to put it in colloquial terms—a fluffy book when I was little, and I was pleasantly surprised this time around precisely because it isn't actually as fluffy as I remember it being. It has critical substance, and it has humor. Plus, the ridiculous stork imagery paired with the other samples of criticism in the novels made me think of a pro-birth control postcard from the early twentieth century that floats around the internet, depicting a woman beating away a stork with an umbrella, and what is there not to like about that?



Whether Montgomery's passage is actually satirical criticism or whether it's hopeful interpretation on my part, it still opens the text and the topic up to a variety of questions. What is so shocking about female realities that they supposedly need to be constantly covered up over the centuries? What ways might female writers of the early twentieth century have had to combat social censorship? And if such "subtle" criticisms are in one childhood favorite, what might there be in others? Is not something to be made of the fact that the two March girls who fit the mold of "good" nineteenth-century femininity in *Little Women* are the two to meet tragic ends: Meg in being pre-maturely widowed and Beth in literally dying because she went out of her way to help the sick? That Jo and Amy, the two flawed sisters, are the ones to have happier ends? That Anne finds domestic happiness through choice and that the heroines of Hodgson Burnett's novels tend to be more triumphant than the men? The feminist values of these novels are ambiguous but nowhere near as easily dismissed as I feared them to be, and I look forward to revisiting them over time and seeing what more they have to offer.

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“I See You”: The Hybrid Constructed as “Other” By the Gaze in *Avatar* and *District 9*

AYMERIC NICOLET-DIT-FÉLIX

Editor’s note: Aymeric Nicolet-Dit-Félix’s essay, “‘I See You’: The Hybrid Constructed as ‘Other’...” was originally submitted as his BA7 graded paper for Ms. Kimberly Frohreich’s BA6 seminar, “Allegories of the Alien” (autumn semester, 2015). Due to its outstanding analyses of the films and its rich consideration of the topics addressed in the seminar, both Ms. Frohreich and Professor Madsen recommended the essay for publication in *Noted*; after a final review, Mr Nicolet-Dit-Félix very kindly contributed it to this edition of our journal.

In some modern science-fiction narratives, the “transformation of the human species into a subject position that moves from an oppositional politics of segregating the human ‘self’ from the ‘other’ to one acknowledging the ‘other’ as part of the human ‘self’” results in a physical “acknowledging of the ‘other’ as part of the human ‘self,’” where human subjects undergo a physical transformation that combines the “self” and the “other” (Nanda, 115). The hybrid, defined in the *OED* as “anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements,” becomes a being where the “self” and the “other” coexist; subsequently the hybrid is confronted with the ideology of the purity of species. Two movies, *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009) and *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009), depict the transformation of a human protagonist into an alien; the core of both movies is the transformation process when the human protagonist—Wikus and Jake, respectively—is on the verge of becoming alien. This transformation leads to the hybridization of the protagonists between the human “self” and the alien “other.” The hybrid then becomes a threat to the purity of the species and is distanced from society, which constructs him as a monstrous “other.” This construction is echoed with Lilith, the protagonist in Octavia E. Butler’s novel, *Dawn* (1987), who also undergoes physical transformations, making her a human/alien hybrid. Her transformation leads her to be characterized by the other humans as a monstrous “other” through speech, sight and a blurring of her gender performance, which makes her a figure foreshadowing Wikus and Jake.

In both movies, the hybrid is the subject of a dehumanizing gaze—from the

humans in *District 9* and from both humans and the Na'vi in *Avatar*—constructed through a *mise en abyme* of the filmic experience. Indeed, in both movies the monitoring of the protagonist displays a construction where the hybrid becomes a performer for the gazing entity who becomes spectator. In *District 9*, through the reflexive documentary, the spectator is mainly human. However, in *Avatar*, the spectator is both human and Na'vi, or rather *either* human or Na'vi, depending on which side Jake stands. Even Jake's experience of controlling the avatar body is reflexive of the video game experience as well as of the modern filmmaking process where the actor is thrown into a CG world. In both movies, the hybrid is spatially distanced from the human spectator in order to depict him as “other” and is pushed away into the space of the “other”—the ninth district in *District 9* and the forest of Pandora in *Avatar*—a space constructed by the *mise en abyme* as the space of the performers in opposition to the space of the spectators.

In her 1975 article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey argues that movies construct female characters as the object of the masculine gaze through a *mise en abyme* of spectatorship where the female is the subject of a masculine spectatorship. In her later works such as “Cinematic Gestures: The Ghost in the Machine” and her lecture “Becoming History: Spectatorship, Technology and Feminist Film Theory,” she argues that the passive female, who is similar to an automaton, forces the masculine gaze on her, the classic Hollywood movies displaying several moments where they take a pose in order to attract the male's gaze. Therefore, female characters are both objects and subjects of the masculine gaze, attracting it through their actions while being reduced to passive objects because of it. The hybrid characters in *District 9* and especially in *Avatar* are also displayed in a similar way, the hybrid being feminized through the masculine gaze of the pure species. Therefore, the *mise en abyme* described above leads to a feminization of the protagonists and thus leads to the blurring of their gender performances. In this paper, I will argue that the hybrid is depicted as a monstrous “other” through a dehumanizing gaze constructed by a *mise en abyme* of filmic experience and reflexivity, as well as through the spatial boundaries between the space of the spectator and the space of the performing hybrid; both processes therefore lead to the blurring of the hybrid's gender performance.

Before moving to the filmic medium, I would like to start with Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* where Lilith, the human protagonist, just like Wikus van de Merwe and Jake Sully, undergoes a physical transformation that makes her less human and is then constructed as a monstrous “other” by the other humans. Although, unlike Wikus and Jake, she does not become alien nor is she a hybrid like her children, the humans nonetheless consider her as “not human.” As a consequence of her actions in *Dawn*, Lilith is dehumanized through language in *Adulthood Rites* (1988), just as she explains to Tino when she reveals her identity to him: “they decided I had betrayed them to the Oankali,

and the nicest thing some of them called me was Judas” (297). She puts a clear distinction between herself and the Resisters, calling them “they,” and shows her lack of power in her construction as “other,” since the Resisters have “decided” that she was a traitor to her species. She is even constructed as a monstrous figure “as though [she] w[as] a second Satan or Satan’s wife or some such idiocy” (297). In her book *Representations of the Post/ Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*, Elaine L. Graham writes about the monster:

for their audiences—and monsters were, even before the notorious freak shows of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, intended to be public spectacles—monsters signalled a terrible breach in formerly inviolate categories. For such a dislocation to occur signified a heinous offence against nature, and the horror of monsters rests in this capacity to destabilize axiomatic certitudes. (39)

The monster is therefore intended as a spectacle, or, in the case of Lilith, the subject of stories (which is a verbal form of spectacle) and inspires horror from their “capacity to destabilize axiomatic certitudes.” Lilith is therefore constructed as a monstrous “other” through discourse because of her deviant nature as an enhanced human being.

How the other humans see her is a constant concern for Lilith in *Dawn* because their gaze constructs her as monstrous. When she must reveal her capacity to heal faster to Joseph, she “fear[s] that he would begin to *see* her as alien or too close to aliens—too much changed by them” (emphasis added; 155). Her modified body makes her vulnerable to the gaze of the human, a gaze that she “fears” and that constructs her as “different.” Joseph “stare[s] long at Lilith” and she “sp[eaks] when she th[inks] she ha[s] endured his stare long enough” (156). Joseph’s gaze not only makes her vulnerable but also pains her, as she must “endure” it. It is painful because it is a dehumanizing gaze, which constructs her as a monstrous “other”—a spectacle for the human spectator. All her enhanced capacities “would make her *seem* less human,” meaning that her humanness is based on how the others see her and how they construct her as human based on what they see (emphasis added; 120). It also means that on the surface, in the eye of the others, she “seem[s]” less human, but inside she is still human. Therefore, despite what she is on the inside, what makes her human in the eye of the others is how they perceive her; thus, her body becomes key in her construction as “other.”

Due to her transformation, Lilith’s gender performance is blurred and is thus constructed as sexually deviant by the other humans, which reinforces her construction as a monstrous “other.” Indeed, when she meets Tino, he tells her that he “even heard that perhaps [she] didn’t like men at all” and Nikanj informs her that Joseph is being called a “faggot” for being with her since she is such a masculine woman (she is a very active and dominant woman, and is also tall and stronger than other men because of

the Oankali modifications) (299, 159). Her construction as sexually deviant reinforces her alienation from the humans since she would be the only human with homosexual tendencies in the novel, thus isolating her even more. Her construction as “other” leads to a questioning of her sexual orientation by the humans since Lilith is a more masculine woman; by questioning her sexual orientation, they reinforce the alienating discourse that surrounds her. This double movement relates to what Elaine Graham writes about the monster, a human construction of a being that “signalled a terrible breach in formerly inviolate categories,” but it is also constructed as such because it is perceived as such by the “audience” (39). Perceiving the “other” as monstrous leads to constructing it as monstrous, and the construction of the “other” as monstrous reinforces the perception of it as monstrous. There is a constant exchange between the discourse and the perception concerning the “other” in order to construct them as monstrous.

In *District 9*, the fake documentary is part of the filmic discourse that constructs Wikus van de Merwe as “other,” assembling different interviews and testimonies concerning him, and it is addressed to an implied viewer who is already aware of who, and what, Wikus is. In the interviews that open the movie, one of the speakers says, “I think I was—‘disgusted’ would be the word. There was always a hint of something not quite kosher with van de Merwe” (*District 9*, 8:29-8:36). Another speaker says, “Nobody saw it coming at all,” while a third adds, “It was like a betrayal” (8:37, 9:27). All these speakers refer to an event that has not been shown to the real spectator, but it already constructs Wikus as a monstrous “other.” The real spectator views this scene through external focalization, which François Jost and André Gaudreault define as “*une restriction de notre savoir par rapport à celui du personnage telle qu’elle produit des effets narratifs*” (141).¹ The narrative effect that it creates is that the real viewer is distanced from the implied viewer because they do not share the same knowledge concerning Wikus. The implied viewers are constructed as being part of the alienating discourse concerning Wikus, since they are the spectators to whom the discourse is addressed.

As said above, the documentary constructs Wikus as the “other,” but through its reflexivity, the film shows itself as a construction. Indeed, from the very beginning of the movie, the documentary is shown as a construction, with Wikus referring to the “nice background with the people there” and being directed by the cameraman to look into the camera, thus underlining the staging of his interview. The characters of the documentary also use deictic markers to refer to it, like Fundiswa, Wikus’ assistant, when he says: “I just want everyone watching *this right now* to learn from what has happened” (emphasis added; *District 9*, 8:09-8:13). The deictic markers construct the documentary into a diegetic object and are therefore another reflexive tool. Furthermore, the scene where Wikus discovers the alien fluid is also reflexive, as it reveals Wikus’ attempt to con-

¹“A restriction of our knowledge compared to that of the character in order to produce narrative effects” (my translation).

struct his image as he yells at the cameraman to “turn it off,” before cutting to the staged discovery of the alien fluid (22:21). However, the documentary shows these supposedly censored images, which reveals that Wikus, by becoming the “other,” has been stripped of the power to manipulate images in order to construct a discourse. His transformation into the “other” parallels his passage from producer of the discourse to object of the discourse.

Wikus becomes an object of the human gaze during the most dehumanizing passage of the movie—his captivity in the MNU labs—through a *mise en abyme* of spectatorship. The tests on Wikus are all being filmed, resulting in his body becoming the subject of the mechanical gaze of the camera. One shot shows a screen split in four, all with images of Wikus, thus fragmenting his body (37:11). The use of video images dehumanizes Wikus, who is a victim of the ubiquitous power of the camera. The dehumanization by the video images distances Wikus from the humans, who are watching him through the monitors like spectators (38:26). The *mise en abyme* constructs a dehumanizing gaze, the screen separating the humans and Wikus, thereby allowing them to distance him and to exclude him from their space.

By becoming a hybrid, Wikus is no longer allowed in the space of the human spectators and is subsequently forced into a new space. The MNU lab subjects him to the gaze of the cameras and he becomes a space of the “performer,” in opposition to the space of the spectators, which is the space where all the humans are. Even when the humans are in the same room with him, discussing the dissection of his body, they are never filmed by the diegetic cameras. The scientific footage leaves them off-screen (40:07-41:17). In order to escape the gaze, Wikus “hid[es] in the one place he knew no one would ever come looking for him”: District 9 (47:05-47:09). District 9 is the place of the “performers,” the space where all the subjects of the humans’ gaze are assembled. The aliens, the Nigerians, and Wikus are all the subjects of the documentary; they are those upon whom the spectators can gaze. Opposed to the space of those being gazed at, the space of the city is rarely shown because it is the space of the humans—the space of the implied viewer of the documentary.

Wikus’ wife, Tania, is also forced into a new space, the space of the spectators, which leads her to construct Wikus as “other.” Indeed, in the scene where Wikus is being transported to the MNU labs, his wife is prevented from looking at him (35:34-36:12). The scene is internally focalized² through Tania and so the sequence is restricted to what Tania can know and it ends when Wikus completely disappears from her sight. From this moment, the two are kept in separate spaces, never meeting again, and Tania is forced into the space of the spectator, thus being kept off-screen for the rest of the “classic,” or non-documentary styled, remainder of the movie. However, she transgresses

² Internal focalization is defined by Gaudreault and Jost as “*quand le récit est restreint à ce que peut savoir le personnage*” or “When the narration is restricted to what the character can know” (138; my translation).

her position as spectator by using the telephone, which leads her to doubt the image of Wikus that the media constructs, and to tell Wikus that she does not “know what to believe anymore” (58:56). Transgressing the boundary between spectator and performer destabilizes the construction of Wikus as a monstrous “other” and reveals to Tania that she is not a spectator in zero focalization (which is when the viewer knows as much as the characters on the screen) but in external focalization. She knows less than the characters. Furthermore, Gaudreault and Jost specify that in external focalization the knowledge is restricted in order to produce narrative effects which, in this case, relates to Tania’s realization of the *construction* of Wikus as “other.” The violation of her role as a spectator by addressing the subject of the spectacle weakens the construction of Wikus as a monstrous “other,” and the spatial boundary is violated through the use of the telephone. Therefore, the deconstruction of the space and the image of Wikus happens through sound, the only medium that is not contaminated by the image, and deconstructs the *mise en abyme* of spectatorship (58:30-59:51).

After escaping, “the entire world [is] watching [Wikus]” because of the images that circulate in the media, and like Lilith, Wikus’ construction as a monstrous “other” happens through a deformation of his sexual orientation; although this time it is not homosexual desire but inter-species desire (46:51). Indeed, Graham writes, “The monster is personified as a threat to purity and homogeneity” and therefore the circulation of images of Wikus having sex with an alien personifies him as this “threat” (53). Like Lilith, Wikus is constructed as a monstrous “other” in order to be perceived as such by the humans, who then also construct him as “other” by staring at him and by chasing him off into District 9. The scene in the fast-food restaurant shows him being stared at after the news of his sexual deviance, thereby becoming an object of the human gaze, before being shot at while being called a “fucking freak” (45:03-45:51). In this scene, Wikus is trespassing on the space of the spectator by becoming the subject of the images on the television, and is thus chased out of this space in order to maintain the model of spectatorship. Therefore, the construction of Wikus as a monstrous “other” happens through a *mise en abyme* of spectatorship, which leads to the construction of a dehumanizing gaze on him that forces him to escape to the space of the “other”: District 9.

In *Avatar*, the access to the “other” happens through a device reflexive of the modern filmmaking process theorized in Hye Jean Chung’s article “The Reanimation of the Digital (Un)dead, Or How To Regenerate Bodies in Digital Filmmaking.” The Na’vis in *Avatar* are what Chung calls Synthespians, which he defines as “virtual characters that merge live-action and CG bodies” (62). Therefore, in *Avatar*, “the story of the consciousness of a human individual plugging into a different ontological state thematically resonates with, and is reflexive of, the process of filmmaking in a digital age” (*ibid*). In other words, Jake’s act of plugging into his avatar is reflexive of this new process of

filmmaking, where the characters are combinations of live-action performances merged with a CG body. It is only by becoming a Synthespian that the humans can access the space of the Na'vi the space of the "other." By this reflexive process, the space of the "other"—the forest of Pandora—reveals itself as being a digital construction and is thus distanced from the space of the human characters. Indeed, if plugging into the avatar is reflexive of modern filmmaking, then the space in which the Synthespian exists also becomes a construction of modern filmmaking, and the reflexivity shows it as such. Furthermore, Jake's final transformation, when the "other" becomes part of the "self," resonates with the suppression of the reflexive process; the space of the "other" thus ceases to be a construction by being accepted by Jake as the space of his new "self."

By trespassing on the space of the Na'vi, the hybrid Jake is constructed as the monstrous "other" by becoming the subject of their gaze through a change in narrative perspective: specifically, the Na'vi are introduced into the film through internal focalization as Jake is *seen* through Neytiri's gaze (*Avatar*, 36:07-37:00). As seen before, "monsters [are]...intended to be public spectacles" and by becoming subject to the gaze of the Na'vi, Jake is presented as a spectacle (Graham, 39). During their first excursion, Dr. Grace Augustin, the leading human expert on Pandoran flora and fauna, says that she is "sure they are watching right now" (29:22). The human hybrids then know that they are being watched and thus become performers for the Na'vis' ubiquitous gaze. When Tsu'tey, the leader to be of the Omaticaya people appears for the first time, he tells Neytiri that "[t]hese demons [Jake] are forbidden here," thus referring to Jake as a monstrous "other," a "demon" (46:53). He also reveals that Jake has trespassed on the space of the Na'vi. The Na'vi are kept off-screen until Jake transgresses the spatial boundary between performer and spectator by entering their space, leading to a change of perspective. Indeed, the first appearance of the Na'vi occurs through a change of narrative perspective, showing Neytiri watching Jake even though he does not see her. The change in narrative perspective constructs Jake as the "other" as the "self" becomes Na'vi through Neytiri's internal focalization / gaze.

The humans construct the Na'vi as "other" through a *mise en abyme* of the filmic spectatorship, and when Jake shifts to the side of the Na'vi, he is also constructed as "other" through the dehumanizing gaze of the human spectator. Throughout the movie, the humans observe the space of the "other" through monitors and 3D holograms. Both construct a *mise en abyme* of the filmic spectatorship, the 3D holograms of Pandora even mirroring the new 3D spectatorship that *Avatar* introduced. Furthermore, during his fight against the humans, Jake repeatedly blinds them by destroying their cameras or leading them into the Flux Vortex, a magnetic field where all cameras and targeting devices become useless. Like *District 9*, the use of *mise en abyme* creates a distance between the space of the humans and the space of the "other," the humans being

able to access it without having to physically enter it. Like Wikus, the human Jake is also a producer of images, his videolog being reflexive of the filmmaking process. During his first entry, Jake manipulates the camera as he watches the image on another screen. He has the power to manipulate images and to be a spectator of those images (13:32). Both features relate to his human status, since all the humans are producers and spectators of video images. However, when Jake becomes one of the Omaticaya people, his videolog becomes an object of the human spectatorship and is used as a tool to construct him as “other” (1:42:03). The realization of Jake’s “betrayal” corresponds with the screening of the first diegetic filmed image of his avatar (1:36:50). Like Wikus, the construction of Jake as “other” happens through the *mise en abyme* of the filmic spectatorship.

The *mise en abyme* not only constructs Jake as “other” but also feminizes him; in other words, the dehumanizing gaze also acts as the masculine gaze, as Laura Mulvey writes: “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (4). The world of *Avatar* presents not only a “sexual imbalance” but also an imbalance of species where the pleasure in looking has been split between active/pure breed and passive/hybrid. Indeed, every time Jake’s humanity resurfaces while in his avatar body, the gaze of the Na’vi feminizes him. When he is “human,” Jake is not used to his new body, revealing his hybridity, and he therefore attracts the Na’vis’ gaze by his clumsiness. When his humanity resurfaces, he is always shot in a high-angle shot while the Na’vi characters gazing on him are shot in low-angle shots. This power construction feminizes Jake, showing him as being vulnerable to the gaze of the Na’vi. His arrival at Hometree displays him as an object of the Na’vis’ gaze, and his immobility during this scene reflects his passivity, whereas the Na’vi looking at him are active watchers, walking around him while gazing on his body (*Avatar*, 47:48-50:56). The Na’vi are shown as the active watchers while Jake is feminized through his passivity, becoming what Mulvey calls an automaton, a passive being that attracts the visual fixation on him by taking a pose. The gaze in *Avatar* is thus both dehumanizing and feminizing.

Jake’s training in becoming a Na’vi parallels a re-emergence of his masculinity by evolving from being the object of the gaze to being the active gazer. Indeed, during his training with Neytiri, he starts gazing at her, thus feminizing her and asserting his masculinity, before being ordered to look away (1:07:58-1:08:04). During his rite of passage into the Omaticaya clan, where Jake chooses his *Ikran* (the flying animal that each Na’vi must bond with before becoming “one of the people”), Jake is subject to the gaze of the Na’vi, and is constructed as a spectacle through the *mise en abyme* of theatrical spectatorship. However, the now active and masculine Jake bonds with the banshee in order to escape the “stage” on which he was “performing,” thus breaking the theatrical devices that constructed him as “other.” The move from a passive/feminine Jake to an

active/masculine Jake resonates with his passage from human to Omaticaya. Finally, towards the end of the movie, he is standing above the Na'vi army, gazing upon the assembling fighters as he becomes their leader (2:13:33-2:13:12). He has regained his masculinity by becoming Na'vi and has retrieved his ability to gaze upon others, which is emphasized in this sequence by the combination of a low-angle close-up and a dolly shot moving in towards his eyes. In the final shot of the movie, Jake's gaze even transgresses the ontological boundary by looking straight into the camera, thus breaking the fourth wall. The movie therefore ends on Jake's final gaze, one powerful enough to gaze at the final entity that was gazing at him, the implied human spectator.

In conclusion, the *mise en abyme* and reflexivity of filmic spectatorship constructs the hybrid as a monstrous "other" by displaying the hybrid as a spectacle in front of a dehumanizing gaze. In both movies, the dehumanizing gaze towards the "other" is constructed through reflexive devices and is literally a dehumanized gaze, since it is a mechanical one, thus reinforcing the boundary between the gazing humans and the objectified "others." Dehumanization is reinforced by the *mise en abyme*, which constructs spatial boundaries that distance the spectators from the performers—those gazing from those being gazed at. Furthermore, based on Elaine Graham's text, the monster is intended as a spectacle for an audience, and the *mise en abyme* of the filmic spectatorship in the two movies constructs the human-alien hybrid as such, and thus as a monstrous "other." Furthermore, the construction of Wikus and Jake as "other" also leads to the blurring of their gender performance. They become feminized men by being the ones who are gazed at, and their acknowledgement of the "other" as part of the "self" resonates with their retrieving of their masculinity. By doing so, they move from the ones being gazed at to the ones gazing. Both characters cease to be the objects of the dehumanizing and feminizing gaze by embracing the "other" as a new "self," both movies ending on one last diegetic image of them—the helicopter shot in *District 9* designated as "the last known footage of Wikus van de Merwe" (*District 9*, 1:38:09) and a last videolog for Jake (*Avatar*, 2:43:00-2:43:15). By escaping the eyes of the cameras, they both put an end to their construction as "other" through *mise en abyme* and leave their human body for the body of the "other," accepting it as being part of the "self."

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In Defense of the Humanities

MISHA MEIHSL

I have often been asked why I study English and French, and more than once the question was teasingly presented as a joke. How could reading and analyzing texts all day be considered as anything but a hobby, almost a waste of time?—that is what the question more or less implied. I was sometimes tempted to reply that if my interlocutor had to ask, they could hardly understand the answer. Well, even though one might disagree that there is no such thing as a stupid question, it would sure as hell have been a pretty dumb answer from my part. It is a complicated subject and not one to be lightly dismissed as irrelevant or self-explanatory. Even more so since there are various ways to look at the matter and some of them are quite subjective. But it is precisely the inherent importance and complexity of written information that make reading a skill that is never wholly mastered—and therefore has to be taught and learned.

I do not pretend to cover even remotely the span of the possible answers but, having myself been unable to respond properly, and having met others in the same delicate position, I hope to offer some thoughts so that we, as students and teachers, can defend the study of any language, whether from a literary, linguistic, fictional or non-fictional, or any other approach.

Let us start with words. This page is covered in them. They form combinations of letters, with a tendency to reflect groups of sounds with arbitrarily determined meanings, which we use to communicate. This is a simplistic way of looking at it, but it draws the attention on one major characteristic of the evolution of language: in some societies, *oral* words were turned into *written* words. It should be pointed out right away that no hierarchy can or should be established between oral and written language. The focus here will be on writing since most of us devote large quantities of energy and time to this specific part of language in our studies, but one must keep in mind that the analysis of oral literature is also conducted in this department and in some societies is much more crucial.¹

Alright, we now resume the core debate.

In the first place, words are information. The main difference is that writing

¹Moreover, the analysis of written language may prove useful in oral contexts, too. After all, we do have dialogues in books. And it is hard to believe that “oral” information surrounding us (radio and TV ads, political speeches, scientific conferences, and so on) was not, in the first place, written down to be thought out and controlled, before any oral utterance. As for everyday conversation, misunderstandings are not infrequent and we all spend a lot of time trying to sort out what our loved (and less loved) ones meant or implied the other day.

is a physical support that transcends the moment. It survives longer in time and allows humans to surpass the limitations of individual memories, enhancing notably the capacities for scientific research and the storing and preservation of knowledge, as well as multiplying the possible listeners to one speaker, thus accelerating the spread of organized thought. As you are reading my words now, they become information in your head, yet I wrote them weeks, months or years ago. I conceived of some words in my head and in a kind of telepathic transmission, you hear them in your own head later. Maybe I am dead right now but you are still “hearing” me. Words are the voices of the far away, in time or space—or both. It is also the inner voice of thought: the one that we dare not speak out, or the one that is too complex to be formulated without organization on the page (for example: I could never have improvised this essay in a conversation). In other words (if I may use the expression), words that are written have transformed our society, whether for good or bad. They may last longer (if they survive their inherent instability—more on this soon) and serve to express different things differently. Written words condense and preserve information which can thus be passed on from one generation to the other in the hope of not—as humans often still do—repeating the same mistakes. And there are other less serious but rather enjoyable uses of written language: I can still laugh at medieval jokes in the twenty first century.

A word is a tricky way of preserving information, though (a phoneme transcribed by a letter is too, since pronunciation and sounds evolve and vary from one person to another). In time, words change meaning. Written words often lack the guidance of oral intonation and visible gestures to help circumscribe their intended meaning. Authors can deliberately hide their meaning, and create new words or new meanings. And of course, reading is an interpretation. An actor’s work is, among other specifics, to give the same words different meanings depending on the interpretation of the director. We are all actors as we read texts in our minds, except that most of us are not aware of it nor have the competence to do it in more than one way. And still, we are sometimes wrong, skipping information or missing the knowledge to understand a reference, a technical word or any other subtlety inserted by the author. Sometimes, authors themselves make mistakes. They might lie, or get their facts wrong, or involuntarily use a word in an unconventional or wrong sense.

With sentences (or phrases, or anything you want to call combinations of words working as a whole to convey specific information), the situation becomes more intricate, for sentences provide infinite ways in which to put words together. They therefore offer an infinity of meanings and the individual interpretation of words is only a prerequisite for the finer sifting of the possible meanings of the sentence. And books... well, they possess the potential for infinite combinations of sentences. The possibilities are dizzying. In time, rules and patterns have naturally developed to get a grasp of this in-

finity and the knowledge of these rules and patterns are essential to see how it works, but the beauty and danger of it is the unavoidable subjectivity affecting the process. Finding islands of meaning in a sea of interpretation is possible but the reader is always presented with an archipelago. To determine what is being said, what is possibly being said, what is or might be implied, and hopefully to differentiate it from what the text does *not* say constitutes an exercise in approximation, the search for an equilibrium threatened by an abyss of interpretive fallacy. The humanities aim at providing the much needed know-how and experience of analysis to cross the tight rope—and even then, no one is free from free-falling.

Nonetheless, books are read and interpreted every day and, as it has been argued, they are made of words which are the voices of other places, other people, other times. They present a mirror of the frames of mind at the time of their writing and at the time of their multiple reinterpretations. They also present mirrors of individual personalities, who gain centuries to teach and delight (or destroy and despair!) through their works. Literature is, in a sense, sociology. No one makes fun of sociology, why should we mock the humanities? There are few disciplines where, at the heart, what is “human” crystallizes so sharply. History, culture, philosophy, religion, entertainment, relationships whether superficial or intimate, and knowledge in general all depend more or less heavily on language—and in some cases more specifically on texts—to be built, to be developed and to be remembered longer than a human life. One might argue that we tend to study fiction. Yes, that is true. But non-fiction books are still written with words, are they not? The analysis of language, though circumscribed to a part of the entire linguistic production, remains useful, were it only for the universal tools it offers the student, and the sharpening of the attention that comes with regular practice of close “reading” oral or written language.

Again, this is a caricature, an oversimplification of the situation to maybe get a larger picture. The key is to remember that language is a fundamental pillar of our modern society and that at its core is the word, the ultimate building-block, which tends to be an unstable one.

All this amounts to the fact that humanities and literary studies are not about just books or “stories.”² They are about omnipresent mediums of communication and their infinite interpretations, which are vital to understand and “read” human behavior and human society. It seems improbable that the study of literature—like most studies, if not all—is finite or childish. Books are powerful beings and their word-bricks are not always trustworthy or stable. Written and oral forms of language, which are very closely connected, can be dangerous tools—one merely needs to consider our modern situation in order to appreciate how communication or the absence of it is treacherous and

² And no story is just a story: mythologies, religions and huge communities as well as philosophies and dynasties of artists have been established on “stories”.

manipulative, just as it has been for millennia. Like any tool, language is not good or bad, but it is used for both, and most people use words unconsciously on a daily basis and without realizing that others do it consciously—for good or bad reasons. Interpretation will never be outdated as long as we care for justice, communication and beauty. It is subjectivity that helps us understand each other, and to cultivate interpretation is the best way toward accepting and understanding each other (as long as we do not think our interpretation is better, for any reason, no matter how well-founded). It is crucial that some people at least remain capable of seeing through the wall of words; the ability itself to analyze and produce text and language should be perpetuated, refined and spread so that society can work better, on a political as well as an artistic and individual level.

And this is what our studies are—or should be—all about.

As a final thought, here is a beautiful quotation from Northrop Frye's *The Educated Imagination*:

No matter how much experience we may gather in life, we can never in life get the dimension of experience that the imagination gives us. Only the arts and sciences can do that, and of these, only literature gives us the whole sweep and range of human imagination as it sees itself. (61)

He died in 1991. But can you not still hear him?

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My Last Days of Pompeii

ROBERTA MARANGI

I am a cryer. I cry when I watch a sad film, or when I read a sad book. It is my cross to bear. While everyone was enjoying the final installation of *The Hobbit* trilogy, I sat in a corner of the movie, crying because the nascent love between a dwarf and an elf turned out to be doomed. My best friend was aghast. What can I say, my heart is not made of mithril.¹ My latest crying moments, on the other hand, are related to the ancient city of Pompeii.

Once the exams session was over, I picked up a book my parents have had in the house for a very long time, for as long as I can remember. *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), by Baron Bulwer-Lytton, cannot be considered an inviting book: its prose is a bit heavy; the exclamations are too frequent; and learning the name of all the characters takes a bit longer than you'd expect. To be honest, getting past the first hundred pages was quite the challenge. However, once the first of four books ends, it is impossible to put down. All the episodes of love, grief, pain, and malice might seem a bit cliché, but the narrative is held together by the knowledge that the eruption is gradually drawing near: who will perish? Who will be saved? Will anyone be saved, or will it all be gone in a matter of few pages? When the ill-fated day arrives, I almost did not mind the heavy prose anymore; it seemed fitting.

The Last Days of Pompeii is the kind of book that does not leave you once it is over. It makes you think and wonder. In the end, I cried for the tragedy but also for the joy that such a magnificently preserved site must give to its visitors. So, back home in Italy for the holidays, I decided I wanted to see it for myself; I wanted to see the place that had inspired Baron Bulwer-Lytton and many others.

Starting at the entry queue, you can already hear ten different languages. In the front, there's the American enthusiast who has come all the way from Utah and has learnt Italian just for this trip; then, there are the lovely Taiwanese parents, telling stories of Romans and volcanoes to their three small children—but not one-year-old Kevin, who apparently likes his sleep better than anything else; some Italian teenagers are complaining loudly but I could bet they are, in fact, thrilled to be here; the large group of Japanese tourists arrives well-rested and exuberant, despite the fact that they have been travelling and walking around Italy for more than a week; a small Neapolitan boy entertains an elderly lady with a kind smile, whom he has just discovered comes from London, with a recitation of the English "Alphabet Poem" he has learned in school. I

¹ *Mithril*: a rare, indestructible metal extracted and forged by the dwarves; it is mentioned both in *The Lord of the Rings* and in the *Silmarillion* by J.R.R. Tolkien.

stand in the middle of this diverse multitude and cannot help but think that a glorious sight already stands in front of me.

When you finally make it through the entrance, the first buildings to welcome you are the theatres, both small and grand. Laughter, clapping, and cheering still resound today, as they probably did two thousand years ago. I cannot help but think that this scene exemplifies the irresistible charm of Pompeii: with its thousands of visitors every day, the city is as much alive today as it must have been before the eruption. The different lives and cultures of these people—who come from all over the world and who, for one day, cohabit in Pompeii—are reflected in the stories the city itself narrates. The Temple of Isis still stands, with the bust of the Egyptian goddess herself miraculously intact, next to the Ionian columns of the Temples of Jove and of Apollo; nearby are the remains of a small—and probably secretive—Christian Church. These structures, representing the different religions that were practiced in Pompeii, perfectly mirror the same diversity that still surrounds you today. Pompeii brings people together peacefully.

You soon discover that the most visited site is the *Lupanare*, the brothel. Or, rather, it is one of the many brothels that we know existed in Pompeii. However, only one still stands. Walking down the main road, you spot an unusual stone. You would probably stand there, just like I did, with your head inclined to the side, looking at it intensely, wondering if it really is a carved phallus you are seeing or if you have been binge-watching too many episodes of *Game of Thrones*. Thankfully, a guide points it out to the members of her group and you discover that that stone is indeed shaped like a phallus and that it indicates the quickest way to the closest *lupanare*. When you reach it, you soon realise the queue in front of it is as long as the one at the entrance. You have plenty of time to think why such an edifice holds such a strong attraction on so many people while you stand immobile for the longest half hour of your life, desperately trying not to think of the sunburn you are going to sport tomorrow. If you do decide to go to Pompeii, bring sunscreen with you (don't be like me; be smart).

Once inside the *Lupanare*, you are surrounded by some of the tiniest rooms you have ever seen, and the beds within are made of stone. Comfort must not have been a priority for the customers. On top of every door are the famous erotic frescoes, whose purpose was not simply decorative. Pompeii was a rich mercantile city, with a lively harbour. Men from every province of the Roman Empire would arrive and seek solace; many would not even speak Latin, and the illustrations that are still visible today



indicated the kind of service one was expected to find in each room. A man did not even need to speak, but could just point out the room he wished to enter. Prostitution was not only legal in Pompeii, it flourished; male prostitutes were as requested, by both women and men, as the female prostitutes.

The famous graffiti are not easily spotted: because the restorations funded by the European Union are still in progress, many areas are closed to the public. However, if you do spot a couple of graffiti, like I did, be ready for a challenge. Mostly, they appear so high on the walls that you have to crane your neck. One of them was even mirror-written—you know, like Leonardo da Vinci was known to do. They are protected by transparent barriers that reflect the sun and makes reading even more difficult. So, that was not fun. After studying Latin for years, one wishes to use such knowledge in such an appropriate setting. I was not able to spot my favourite one but I would still like to share it. Among the overtly lewd inscriptions, a poetic verse stands out that represents the Pompeians' view on love and loving:

*Quisquis amat valeat
pereat qui nescit amare
bis tanto pereat
quisquis amare vetat*²

The sentiment behind these words is clearly that of a population unashamed about its flamboyant sexual life. Even more than that, it reveals a liberality and, at the same time, an uncompromising demand for acceptance. It is fascinating; I do not find it at all odd that the *lupanare* is the most sought-after site. We all want to peek behind the curtains. We watch period dramas because we are obsessed with knowing what the 'real life' of the past was like. We've read about battles and epic deeds from the biased and partial accounts that form our history. In the end, we desperately search our past for proof that a common human nature exists, that we are not so different despite our differences in costumes.

And, in Pompeii more than in any other place, it is possible to feel this sense of humanity that transcends time.

The last spot is the *Forum*. Here, the view is unobstructed and you can see how near Vesuvius truly is. Everyone who passes through the square stops and stares at it, even if only for a moment. This is where the tragedy is most keenly felt. The higher buildings are no more, but many columns still stand and seem to pierce the sky. A cloudy afternoon takes the place of a sunny morning; a real-life case of objective correlative, if ever I saw one. I imagine Pliny, the author renowned for walking towards the volcano in

² "Those who love, may they prosper; / those who do not know how to love, / may they perish; / and may they perish twice as much, those who forbid love." (Author's translation)

the middle of its explosion, climbing through the cloud of *lapilli*, desperate for knowledge. On the right, where the granary used to stand, there are the casts of those people petrified in the moment of death behind a glass. One of them has his mouth wide open in a never-ending silent scream of agony.

But life is stronger in Pompeii. People eat, drink, and take photos; some even paint. None of it is disrespectful or tasteless. After all, everyone is here to give homage to one of the most astonishing places on earth. There is awe and reverence, everywhere you turn. The preserved city is a photograph of the past, a moment's monument. Hope is stronger in Pompeii. Buried and forgotten for centuries, it is once again alive: the miraculous survivor that stands against all odds.



Photos courtesy of the author.

The Mystery Plays: Between Past and Present

OLIVIA LINDEM & ANTOINE WILLEMEN

As most of you should remember or will learn from your undergrad years, mystery plays are cycles of short plays depicting the biblical narrative—with a heavy emphasis on the New Testament—that were often performed two months after Easter, during the feast of Corpus Christi, in different towns and cities around England in the Middle Ages. Few of these play cycles remain in manuscript form, and amongst those that do, the York plays are perhaps the most celebrated. Originally performed on wagons moving around a circuit in the city for all to see, they—like most mystery plays—stopped being performed in England after the Reformation, before being revived in York in the mid-twentieth century. Today, they're performed every two years, sometimes on wagons as in the original productions, sometimes on a more traditional stage, often in the Yorkshire Museum Gardens, where the original revival took place in 1951. This year, they put on a special production inside York Minster itself – the largest cathedral in Northern Europe!—from the feast of Corpus Christi, which fell this year on the 26th of May, until the end of June, and I was lucky enough to attend one of the almost daily performances.

You see, at some point in the last two years, I accumulated a bunch of medievalists. I took a few classes on the intersection of medieval and contemporary media, my best friend discovered that she was a medievalist, I somehow started hanging out on medieval twitter, and I started dating a medievalist. What this means is that I'm now prone to get things quoted to me in Middle English at any time of the night or day, and apparently, to book holidays revolving around Middle Ages-related events.

Despite, or maybe thanks to, having studied several of the York Mystery Plays in different classes, I wasn't quite sure what to expect of the plays in a fixed environment. I had a very clear picture of what I thought the plays might look like on the different wagons, five centuries ago, but I just could not make any predictions about the Minster performance. York Minster is a truly humongous cathedral, and though it's relatively easy to apprehend as a place of performance – being after all famous for its choral services – it remains difficult to reconcile its rather austere setting with some of the more outlandish aspects of the mystery plays. As a result, I went into the venue with great curiosity but admittedly low expectations, hoping only not to be disappointed.

Disappointed, I was not. The Minster was transformed for the occasion, with stands—enough to seat a thousand—raising in its cavernous nave, opposite a modern,

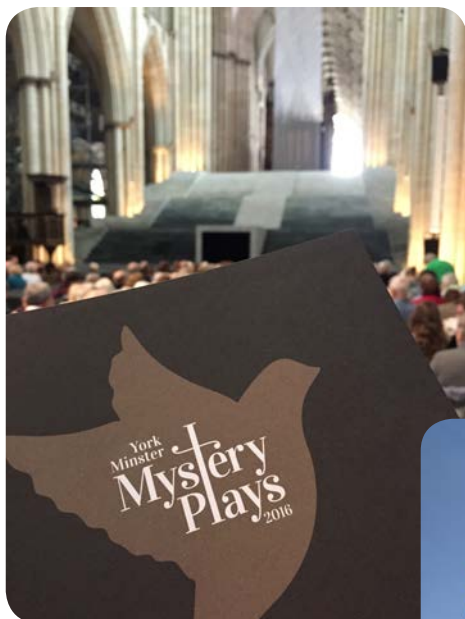
charcoal grey stage, consisting of a giant staircase and multiple levels of platforms. This configuration perfectly displayed a sleek, modern front while still evoking traditional aspects like the different levels present in the wagon performances. The balance between old and new continued throughout the performance with awe-inspiring props creating striking visuals with the likes of giant floating planets representing Creation, a gorgeous Tree of Knowledge brought atop a... wagon (get it?), or hopping bunnies with suitcases rushing onto Noah's Arc, which was impressively built directly on stage. The harmonious juxtaposition of old and new came across perhaps most clearly in the aesthetic of the plays' Jesus, making him a cross between the traditional figure of Christ and a jeans-wearing Mumford and Sons-esque hipster.

Overall, the serious and the visual won over the comic aspects of the plays, and my early worries proved to be groundless. The plays were absolutely engaging, making the almost four hours of performance go by quickly. You might find it surprising given the age of the script, but many of the York Plays are masterpieces of playwriting, especially the group of plays relating the Passion written by an author known only as the York Realist, which wonderfully convey the humanity and complexity of this episode, transcending what could have been a boring adaptation of a too familiar story into a masterpiece of character-building and engaging drama. It's not for nothing that the Welsh playwright Peter Gill famously stated that "if it hadn't been for the York Realist, Shakespeare would have been a second-rate writer": the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon did see mystery plays performed in his childhood, and, as some of its essential precursors, they remained part of the DNA of English Drama.

This 2016 edition featured a modernized text, of course, but while the pronunciation was modern, its adaptor, playwright Mike Poulton—who recently adapted Hillary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* for the stage—deliberately retained a great deal of medieval vocabulary and grammar. What could have sounded staid and dated turned out to be wonderfully evocative of another era's creative sensibilities. In fact, the whole artistic team, balancing old and new, was instrumental in this: they translated familiar stories into enchanting visual performances and an immersive auditive experience, thanks to an appropriately angelic choir and a live orchestra, led by the fitting majesty of the Minster's great organ.

After the performance, we ended up at a pub with eight other medievalists—among whom the plays' organist, himself a PhD student at the University of York. Indeed, though the creative team—and the actor playing Jesus—were all professionals, the cast was made up of 145 amateur actors, and no less than 250 volunteers took part in the production, making the 2016 York Plays just as much a product of the City and its community as its medieval counterparts, which were, after all, put on by the trade guilds of York. Few theatrical events allow you to experience such a colossally collective work,

let alone over a month and over 40 performances! As someone who likes good theatre, I was already very happy with the Plays, but as someone who likes studying the interplay between modern and medieval works, I was especially enchanted to attend a production that took place at the perfect intersection between past and present, through its material as well as, perhaps more significantly, through the spirit of the creation itself.



Photos courtesy of the authors.

FILM CLUB SCHEDULE

Schedule and announcements:

[facebook.com/groups/filmclubanglais/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/filmclubanglais/)

HALLOWEEN SPECIAL

Under the Skin

27 October

The Revenant

29 September

Wuthering Heights

1 December

Edward Burtinski's Manufactured Landscapes

3 November

Priscilla, Queen of the Desert

13 October

+ Students' Choice screenings

17 November &

15 December

Autumn 2016
Landscape

English Department Film Club

Fortnightly on Thursdays
7pm Bastions 112

CREATIVE WRITING

Gather Your Thoughts and Your Courage

LORRAINE DEVILLARD

Dear undergraduate,

Although my face is unknown to your affection, and my pen unworthy of your attention, let your spirits be guided by my good advice, and your merits be lifted by your own sacrifice; for the path is made of more prowess than bleakness, and yet of more bleakness than business.

But now to thy studies. Do not despair before the mounds of work, or the workings of the mind. Be as the knight fighting against the shallow heart; the philosopher thinking in the nicest art; the navigator following his precise chart. Nurture thy curious nature, as you would water a growing flower, or cater for a needing brother. Be creative, but not too wandering; be scholarly, but with humility; be persistent, but without obstinacy.

And to thy own remembrance: By how much the higher the amount of knowledge to acquire, by so much the greater the feeling of satisfaction to come; for as the seed grows from smallness to greatness, as the river springs thin and ends thick, as the dog was born wild and tamed to become mild, so grows effort into comfort. Let not Hamlet's procrastination overflow your good will, or homely meditation overcome your good wit; rather give your judgment good trust and your essay will be a must.

With these gracious yet frivolous words I end my recommendation, hoping that it will neither fall into oblivion nor out of criterion.

Author's note: This text is the result of an assignment for Dr. Oliver Morgan's spring 2016 seminar, "Rhetoric in Early Modern English Literature," in which students were asked to write a 'Euphuistic advice' of one or two sentences to an undergraduate starting at the English department. *Euphues* is a text that was meant to be a meteor, abandoned as quickly and suddenly as adopted, and it worked. It is loaded with the rhetorical tools that were fashionable at the time; each thought is reformulated several times and stretched over many lines. The style has also often been parodied. You might have come across such a parody when reading the words of a paternal figure in a play dear to first-year students... Whether the present text weighs enough rhetorically, I let you be the judges; although I have my own opinion on the matter...

Can You Perceive My True Color?

DIANA MOYO

I am a shattered Kaleidoscope displaying my passion
Colorless Shades

My profound energy encapsulates you with ease
I am dazzling and dim
I am ordinary and eminent
Yet

I am a radiating attraction blurring my special character
I revolt myself from the unknown
I lay out my daunting shades with no shame
Portraying the essence of an eternal flame
Do not be Afraid

I am not here
I am the matter that cannot be seen

But
Felt

To Heaven Love Transports Us with Passion

TÉO VERHOEVEN

To Heaven Love transports us with passion;
Tremendous feelings make our spirits soar,
While our bodies taste with intense caution
The pleasure which we are so guilty of.
You contemplate the wonders of desire,
Though blinded by the artefacts of lust,
Your bliss, by which you were overwhelmed first,
Now oscillates 'tween water and fire.
O! Such is Love, transgressing everything,
Making me feel alive or simply dead,
Unleashing storms, tempests in my troubled head,
While giving seas of glee to my being.
Even cruel, Love does mirror your beauty.
Yield to it or not is my liberty.

Author's note: "To Heaven Love Transports Us with Passion" was written as an assignment for Prof. Lukas Erne's seminar, "Shakespeare's Sonnets" (autumn semester, 2016).

Blood on the Tracks / No Mas

TED VAN ALST

Editor's note: Ted Van Alst is an associate professor and the co-chair of the Native American Studies Department at the University of Montana, as well as an accomplished writer of fiction. As an invited speaker to the English Department's PhD workshop for Modern and Contemporary literature during the spring semester, Prof. Van Alst very kindly accepted an invitation to publish a short story in *Noted*; the story below is part of a collection of twelve which will be published in spring 2018. It is an honor for *Noted* to publish his work and I warmly thank Prof. Van Alst for this contribution.

Author's note: The narrator of the story is a young adult—the Urban Indian story for me starts when we were kids. That background is essential to understanding that particular identity. How was our childhood? Was it different? What does it look like when so many of your cultural experiences happen in the city? I don't think that gets told much at any stage of the game, at any age.

Summer meant a lot of different things, but mostly it meant we listened to George Benson so we could imagine ourselves on Broadway and smoked the Sweetleaf listening to Black Sabbath and figured out what the Sugarhill Gang was trying to tell us while we hung out in the park, our park, Pottawattomie Park, the one next to the tracks, those tracks, the Chicago and Northwestern tracks not the L tracks. It was cool that we could pick our own tunes, and cool too, when we could fight about it. Nothing like a ass-whuppin because fuck Led Zeppelin to break up a hot sleepy afternoon. The arrival of the boombox was a welcome jump in the quality of summertime soundtracks, and it brought a semblance of control to a lot of otherwise unruly lives (when you weren't worried about wasting batteries on rewinds) and was a touch or two better than the Super CFL of those childhood nights where I thought about what went on behind closed doors and what was wrong with Angie Baby and was Billy a Hero in Viet Nam or in the Westerns I always watched my old man watch, and why should Sundown Beware and all that other creepy shit that came on the air through my tiny tinny single-earplugged crystal radio that only played in mono anyways so who cared until the O'Jays or the Spinners finally came on. We hung together strong all day long and drank and smoked and listened to tunes and talked shit and beat each other's ass. But there were times when

all that was a lot and I'd sit on the guard rail next to the street across from this weird hippy community-type garden they kept planting and we kept stealing from (some days there would be carrots, but some days we'd have to go try and get apples and wild grapes from the grounds of this Catholic girls' school; behabited lunatics from the in-house nunnery would chase us away with what everyone said was a German Shepherd whose teeth the good sisters had had removed but none of us wanted to find out) and I would try to imagine my life burning across the sky. But when I put my dreams on that horizon they pulsed like a daytime comet, as if I held hands with Kohoutek that one summer, embraced that fizzled and fuzzy barely visible streak, our ill-formed tail flashing for one sad moment, passing not like Bruce Lee would in July, but more like James Garner and that camel in *One Little Indian*.

One day the stepmother offered to give me a ride up north (the old man got remarried and I want to say, well that's a whole nother story for another time, but it's not. It's just a second marriage. Yawn and shit.) and I was like daaaaang. She never does that. I'ma take that ride and

so I did. We headed up north. I can't remember why she was going there. Maybe to look for a new apartment or something. We were all living in this kinda too small place on Aldine that was surprisingly drafty in the winter ;) and well, yeah. It was time to move anyway. Prolly was going to kill the old man to go more than a couple of blocks, though. I always thought to myself hey weren't we nomads, some of the most mobile people of the Plains but my dad was like a fucking Creek cornplanter or something. He never went anywhere if he could help it. Or maybe it was a routine thing. Because if the bar was 10 miles away, he'd figure out how to get there, no lie.

Anyways, I hop in the car with the stepmom. She asks some perfunctory stepmomish questions of her teenage stepson, and then we smokesmokesmoke all the way up Lake Shore Drive and I just loooooook out the window. Man. I love Lake Shore Dr. when there's no traffic, and that was a stunningly beautiful, sunny, traffic-free, light off the lake, beautiful blue aquaclear day, one of the two or three you get every year in Chicago whether you want them or not, and you can't help but be thankful you're alive to see them.

I flash forward a couple of years. I'm in Beirut. In the Navy. There's this Hook on the boat, too. He's a CVL. His name is Aldo—this West Side motherfucker, a Vice Lord from way the fuck out there, like a Central Ave. Vic or some shit. He got in my face one day when we were in the chow line, like wass up Folks? (Tattoos back then were a far rarer thing, much more noticeable, especially on the hands, and when you're a fan of the explicit, well, there's no hiding who you are.) And I'm like man fuck you're in Beirut we ain't got time for this shit and he kept on talking so I hit him in the face with

my tray and then held the metal edge of that tray up to his neck and these country boys from Arkansas or some shit were like whoa what the fuck y'all doin we got to get along here and I laughed even though we ain't heard of Rodney King yet and I said yeah truce I guess and he said yeah but I'm payin you back when this shit is over and I said deal and then we talked all where y'all from what's your set and all that and I was like hey I went to school with Lord Black and we made fun of Borroso that M/H bitch and he was like alright and we was all good for a long time. One day Aldo says to me

hey Folks check it out. Look like the South Side out there on the beach and
I said yeah it does.

And it did. Me and him are standing there on the catwalk, boat in Beirut harbor, sun setting, magic light coming down like when you're in bed and it's summer and you have just a sheet and you fluff it out with your feet and it comes down light and cool and it's like that and I'm saying

hey this is alright

even if I am standing here watching with this fucking Vice Lord and then wink
wink

tiny red stars flash from one of the buildings, about eight floors up
and then the crash rolls out over the water at us,

the sound of two explosions just hitting our ears as two spots on the facing
building

light up

and I watch the bricks fall

and the flame lick out up the wall

and I think back to the Taylor Homes

that are now gone but not forgotten

and I'm glad I can't hear anyone scream.

At either place.

The stepmom drops me off near the park and I head over to Jimmy's. It was early in the afternoon. Or late in the morning. But it was summer, and it was one of those days. I figured I'd stop by, see what was up. Go steal a bottle of wine or something. OP had these new weird bottles of flavored wine. But not like MD 20/20 grape or whatever, these were Piña Colada / Strawberry Daiquiri / Tequila Sunrise—shit like that. I thought maybe steal a bottle or two of that, and a bunch of disposable lighters that we could throw in a paper bag and light on fire (apparently I was still reeling from cosmic disappointment stemming from that fraud of a comet and felt the need to light up the sky on my own), and kick it at the park for a while. But no one was home. I laid on the bell for a minute straight, long enough to hear the dog bark (he had the only dog out of

anyone we knew and it was a real asshole mean German Shepard. You couldn't turn your back on the dog or it would bite you. Hard.). Still, nothing. I sat on the stoop to wait. Pulled my last menthol out of my sock and lit it up.

Pretty soon Jimmy's little sister comes walking up, swearing and tearing.

What's up? I say.

Shit, she says. It fuckin took forever to get home.

Where were you?

Downtown. I wanted to do some shopping early (that meant shoplifting, but I don't quibble).

So. What happened?

Man, she says. I got stuck on the train for like an hour right before we got to Jarvis. Some dumbass got electrocuted on the third rail.

Dang, I say. That sucks.

Yeah, she says. They had to pry him off there, so that took awhile. Then they had to clean it up.

I shudder a little.

Anyway, she says, pulling out her keys, come on up.

OK, I say.

We head upstairs. Their hallway always smelled weird. Not like the apartment hallways smelled though over on Devon past Western. Those hallways. Man. I hated that fucking smell. I never knew what it was until years later. It was curry. Jeezuschrist. I mean yeah I like to eat it every now and again, but the smell. Man.

But it's OK, because that smell I never really learned to put up with was the prelude to this job I would get. The reason I was in those hallways was because I had a gig handing out flyers for Danny's Pizza, on Clark St. Danny's, which was by Luigi's, which was by Alberto's...that little stretch of Clark St. was awesome. There was a pizza place and two bars on just about every corner, and we had the Affy Tapple place. Broken stick caramel apples for a nickel. That's my old man moment.

Anyway, I was putting these flyers in apartment lobbies and hallways all over the neighborhood. The flyer was a menu that doubled as a coupon. I think one side said "Free quart of RC with your order!" or something like that. Actually, I'm pretty sure it did, because every single pizza place in the neighborhood gave you a free quart of RC with your delivery...

OK. I'm putting these flyers in people's hallways and doors and mailboxes and everywhere they could go. I'm working, "because that's what you do"—Ted Sr. This job is way better than the last one I had—these guys had this business out in the suburbs and they would come pick us up in the city to hang coupon bags on suburban house doors

and avoid their denizen's dogs and glares on superearly Saturday mornings. This was cool, and I'm not gonna lie, I was digging the food we'd get every now and again and it was in the afternoon and it was late fall and man, there's not much better for walking and thinking than a NorthSide Chicago neighborhood in October-November when the deep cold's not there yet and the light is always 4:45; always Magic Light, always Anything Is Possible Light, and you have your bullshit school day behind you and all that you can imagine in front of you and no one looks at you and no one cares what you do and it doesn't get freer than that and you get paid, besides? That's good shit right there.

The bonus comes after I've been working there for a while. I'm watching what's happening. I see cool things like this kid from grammar school's parents would come in every Wednesday because Wednesday was All You Can Eat Spaghetti Night. I had never seen this kid's parents before, I think the kid's name was Terry, but you know I'm probably saying that because he was a ginger, but not like Muck that redheaded fuck. Terry, we'll say, was this quiet kid from school, one of those nondescript kids you look at and you can't really remember what they look like but that's why you remember what they look like, and their faces are a little bit shiny and they seem to be not yet formed—when you try to remember what they look like it's kind of from the side and there's an eye but no real defined form to their face and it's unsettling, but not horrible and yeah, he was one of those kids.

So he brings in his mom and dad and I see he's sort of leading them in and it's dark in Danny's all the time so sure whatever but then I'm like oh he's kind of walking them over which is kind of weird because now I notice that they're both blind and I think shit they're probably better off than he is since it's so dark in here and I'm like OK back to work making up these flyer packets so I can head out on the job but about twenty minutes later Don calls my name. Yeah. "Don." The owner was named Don. And he had these big '70s glasses that were a little bit tinted and these big-collared silk shirts and he drank coffee out of those tiny cups. Coffee. Not espresso. Shit. It was the '70s. I had never even heard of espresso, but between you and me now, yeah—he was drinking coffee out of those tiny cups, tryna front like. And he smoked cigarettes one right after the other. Not chain smoked like when you light one right off the butt of the other, but long enough to crack his knuckles and look around the restaurant from his table centered in the aisle between the booths right off the kitchen and admire all that he had built. He calls out my name and I hustle over from one of the booths. Teddy
can you get me a coffee? he says.

Sure, Don, I say.

I bring him his coffee from one of the big percolators we got in the kitchen.

Have a seat, he says.

I sit.

Smoke? he says.

Sure, I say.

You been working here for a while, huh? he says.

Yup, I say.

You wanna learn how to cook? he says (the “k” at the end has like a glottal stop).

Sure, I say.

You start when you get back from doing those flyers, he says.

Sure, I say.

Hold on, he says. I’ll be right back.

He picks up this envelope he’s been tapping on the side of that little coffee cup of his and walks over to one of the booths near the front. I turn around in my chair and my eyes are following his tall narrow ass walking across the restaurant, moving slow like in their sockets. They stop when they see Terry’s parents enjoying All You Can Eat Spaghetti Night because, well, ok they’re putting the Parmesan on their spaghettis and they’re using their hands to sense the heat that rises from the plate so they know where and when to stop with the cheese and I think man that is the coolest shit right there and then Don pulls up at the booth crossways from theirs and sits down. Across from this old Irish fuck beat cop sergeant type with a ton of face who I thought never left the community policing office. Who is eating and sweating and still wearing that checkerboard banded hat, his mug red and constantly in motion.

I take a drag off my cigarette and watch through the slowly blowing smoke in front of my face. Don and the cop talk for a minute, exchanging what are surely bullshit pleasantries, and then Don slides that plain white letter-size envelope over toward that fat red hand. Loud laughter erupts out of the fatter redder face while gnarly hand and freshly-greased envelope disappear inside cop leather, the flag of Chicago briefly oblique as chubby arm and shoulder lift to accommodate the proceeds from his unearned payday. They chitchat a bit more, probably about how it must be getting pretty cold up there in the apartment above the restaurant for the 12 or so Mexicans that live there and keep an eye on the bread deliveries and make pizzas and do whatever else Don wants, but probably not, probably talking about where Sgt. Slaughter is going for vacation now, or something else entirely, you know, like disco, or civil rights. Hahaha.

Don comes back to the table. I put out my cigarette in the ashtray. A tiny bit of the cherry burns into the side of my finger, but I don’t say nothin. I think Don sees it, or else he just smiles like that for no reason—either way, I don’t know which is worse.

Pays 3.35 an hour. Work from 4 til close, he says.

We close at 2am, right? I say.

Yup, he says.

Well, shit. I don’t think I can do it, I say.

Why not? he says.

Curfew, I say.

Curfew? What the fuck is that? he says.

It's the law, I say. 10:30 on weeknights, 11:30 on the weekends. Everyone under 17 has to be off the streets.

Hahahahaha. He laughs. Curfew, he says.

There ain't no curfew, Don says.

You work for us, he says.

I smile and say, yeah I do.

Bonus. I learn how to cook in this place. I make cole slaw by hand, pizzas, pasta, all kinds of shit in big ovens. Subs, slices, baked fuckin ziti. All that. And this is good, because I still do all the cooking in my house to this day. My old man? He cooked once a week when we were growing up. On Sunday. Chili. Beef stew. Spaghetti. Goulash (macaroni and tomatoes). That was it. In a big aluminium pot that will probably give all of us OldTimer's. And that was what we ate all week, until it ran out. You want something else?

Make it your fuckin self.

So I was learning how to make shit. Eggs. Garlic bread in the broiler. You know, wonder bread with margarine (the old man called it "oleo") and garlic salt. That was about it. There really wasn't anything else in the house. The old man was cheap that way. He left money on the counter one time for me to buy milk. Two dollar bills. Milk cost \$1.75. 'Bout six weeks later he goes

So you got that quarter?

Fuck.

He gave me a dollar a day when I was going to school. Cost .35 each way with a student bus pass. Rolls were six cents each and so was a carton of milk. If I wanted lunch I bought two rolls and a milk. I had twelve cents left over. By Friday I had sixty cents saved up. You know what that meant:

Please sell my son a package of Old Gold Filters.

Thanks,

Pop

A pack of smokes was .55. So I had change. Did candy cost a nickel back then, too, Grandpa? You bet your ass it did. Well, ok, not *all* candy. Fuckin slo-pokes were a nickel. And necco wafers were a dime, if you could wait another Friday. If I couldn't wait, and I smoked too much, then I had to make up the money somewhere. The easiest way to do that was to walk all the way up to the Jarvis L station. If you stuck your back up against the telephone pole, next

to the tracks, you could sort of walk up the wall with yourself wedged in between there. Then when you got to the top of the wall, about 16 feet up at least, you had to make sure no trains were coming then hop hop hop onto the tracks and over the third rail and onto the platform and give everybody who saw you do it a dirty look and then just be all nonchalant.

Yeah. I had had about enough of that shit.

Do I want to learn how to cook in this mobbed up joint where I ain't gotta worry about the local cops and take home about a buck and a quarter a week and buy my own smokes and shit and some pants that fit and some new chucktaylor's? You're fuckin right I do.

And I do. Like nobody's business. Years later in the boonies of Northern Maine I make a fuckin sandwich in my own place for Martha Stewart.

My. That's delicious, she says.

I just smile one of those smiles.

Don would've been proud all the way around.

We get to the apartment. Ria sets down her shit on the counter. I walk into the living room to look around and the dog bites me in the leg. Fuck.

I hate this fucking dog,

this dog that they cook chicken for. Man. I haven't had a piece of chicken in about eighteen months. Fuck you, dog. I flick on the stereo. Her old man isn't home. It's Saturday, so he's at the bar. Their ma is working. She waitresses down the street. I light up a cigarette and glare at the dog. She doesn't like smoke, so I smoke a lot when she's around—it helps to keep the biting down.

Tiny Scorpion Klaus Meine screams at me about his Lovedrive and some winged whore. I ask Ri what happened. From the kitchen she says

Some dumbass, I don't know. He just got zapped. And stuck, right by the station. It took forever to get him off the tracks, I guess. Such a pain in the ass. Damn. Oh well.

What's new with you?

Nothing much, I say.

The dog growls.

Go eat your fuckin chicken, I say.

What, Teddy? she says.

Nothing, I say.

Where's Jimmy?

I don't know, she says. He was still here when I left, but he said something about going to the movies.

Fuck, I say. Must've went downtown, init? No movies around here until night.

Yeah, probably, she says.

I cut Klaus off mid-yell. I flash back to the day I taught everyone how to sneak on at Jarvis so we could go downtown to watch kung fu movies all day and beat the living shit out of each other all the way home. Like you do.

I give Ri a hug.

She jumps a little, and hugs me back.

I keep my voice from cracking and I say

OK, well I'll go see who else is around. They won't be home 'til late anyway.

OK, she says.

See you later, she says.

I shut the door on my way out. The dog never tried to bite me at all.

I walk outside and down to the corner at Fargo and Damen. I look toward the park and

I see that idiot Freckles walking my way, walking with his ugly girlfriend. I'm sorry. But there's no other way to put it. She was just...ugly.

Hey! Teddy! he says.

I just walk away.

I find out later all that happened, how it went down. Some people blamed Freckles, said he pushed him. Others said he slipped on his way across the tracks, some said he slipped off the platform.

None of those things matter, really. None of those things can get between the skin of your face and the palm of your hand slammed so tight to your forehead that tries to drive the tears back into your face, the hand that tries to push this staggering disbelief back inside, and down where it belongs, a kind of thing you might handle later in life but then it's called grief and right now that thing is called something else and it's so profound you can't name it and it would be devastatingly tragic if it was the one and only time it ever happened so instead of sadness it's anger and it's frustration and you know it's not the last and so you mourn for something else entirely, something you might never be able to name but something that will rule your life if you let it out of the box, something that can ruin it if you keep it locked up, but something that will become your rudder if you play it out right.

And then one day after walking away from this totally nasty shit-talking fight, which I won, of course, there I was. I sort of came to, and looked around. I found I was alone, and felt it deeply, but I envisioned myself envisioning this moment, older and tired somewhere, maybe in a shitty suburb, or worse, maybe around the corner from right fucking here, and wishing I had come to that moment differently and I knew the only way to make a different difference was to re-envision myself. I didn't know then what I needed to do, but I knew this, all this, was fucked,

wasn't for me, would kill me dead if I let it, and I wasn't ready to die just then. Not at that age. Not with that buzz, not with that smile on my face, not with that clear forehead, that long hair, that summer-brown skin, that girlfriend, that ice cold quart of Old Style, that boombox, that song, that moment of sublime warmth, no Kings, no cops, no crap, no fear. No way.

I just smile and think.

This line comes in my head, and it won't let go.

"Much to do," the old man said, "even as a sea of bastards is still bushy about us."

The Strange Case of the Long Summer and the Good Woman

ROBERTA MARANGI

I

The Death of the Author

Professor Barnaby Gerbert-Smithe was born in Limmerwood Vale, married Anne Gerbert-Smithe in Limmerwood Vale; graduated and then taught literature at the County's third biggest University whose only and principal campus still stood in Limmerwood Vale. In 1987, he went to London alone for all of three days to present his only book to a crowd of thirty-six postgraduates. It was a huge success, which allowed him to never leave his home ever again. The postman could easily bring his letters of adulation to him.

It was a Wednesday, in the month of April 1991, when inside the little cottage on the left side of the river, the third after the stone bridge, the old kettle started singing, which meant it was exactly five minutes to five, *post meridiem*. In exactly three hundred seconds he will be served his tea and he will complain that his Annabelle had left the leaves too long in. He could have sworn that his Oolong had been terribly bitter for the past three years.

He didn't want it to change now, of course.

Professor Barnaby Gerbert-Smithe was an admirer of homeostasis—someone once explained this concept to him, in front of the local kirk, and, liking it as much as he did, he adopted it as his *motto*. Constancy was the bright light of his life.

And so, the tea was bitter.

Outside the east windows of his sitting room, the strange green and purple flowers were in bloom as never before but still had no smell—which was also good. He was not an admirer of perfumes. In a rare fit of rage, he had once thrown away Anne's Chanel No. 5. She had apologised later about her foolish attachment to that smelly liquid.

'There you go, dearest.' said Anne, offering him a cup.

'Thank you, my dear.'

Anne sat in front of him, as she always did. She opened a book and started reading. She was always reading, his wife. He suspected that if it wasn't for him, she would do little else, and their perfect little house would descend into decay.

The tea was sweet. And with that unpleasant thought, Professor Gerbert-Smithe died.

II

The Ideal of the Harmonious Man in Bourgeois Aesthetics

The Inspector was mortally tired. Never had he been more tired. Indeed, no one had ever been more tired. Yet, he woke up and got on the train from Hammersmith to Limmerwood Vale. When he arrived, he was welcomed by one of the sunniest days he could remember and by a cluster of houses so small and short that he had the feeling that the sky was pressing onto the earth.

Horace Magnusson, it seemed, had been bothered for nothing. Nothing, that is, besides comforting the weeping widow, a woman in her early forties who actually looked much younger than he had expected. The man had died of natural causes; his time on this earth had been up.

Death makes all men equal. That always made the Inspector think.

He would have to buy some fish and chips tonight. Maybe a beer. And this time, he should really try to follow those re-runs of *The Shock of the New*. ‘The View from the Edge’ had been deadly boring. But one has to have something to talk about at the office that made one look smart and refined.

Time to come back to the present, unfortunately. Another kind of deadly boring episode.

‘I will let you know once the official results arrived, ma’am. And, again, I am so sorry for your loss.’

‘Thank you, Inspector.’

Before the Inspector could reply once more and then turn to leave, he spotted a bush of unusual flowers, on the east side of the house.

‘Is that... Belladonna?’

‘I beg your pardon? Did you just call me *bella donna*?’ exclaimed Mrs. Gerbert-Smithe, shocked.

Figure that! The woman spoke Spanish.

‘No, I mean—’

‘How dare you? How could you think offering me compliments when my husband is barely cold, how—How dare you, sir?’

‘No, I didn’t mean that, I meant the plant, I—’

‘Leave. Now.’

He was reticent to grant her what she asked. However, after an outburst of righteous rage, Mrs. Gerbert-Smithe was on the verge of tears again and, before he could say another word, she emitted such a pitiful wailing that he felt embarrassed to the core. He thought, for some reason, he should stay a little longer and ask some more questions. However, the weeping widow started blowing her nose and sobbing even more loudly. Three women, all dressed in black, with white shining hair, appeared as if out of nowhere and were immediately at her side, offering her platitudes, caressing her back, and sending him icy stares that would have made the devil himself run as fast as he could.

Horace Magnusson arrived home in time to watch that final episode, drink his beer, and eat his fish and chips. In fact, he liked it so much, he decided he would always have beer and fish and chips on a Thursday—with or without the art. It was, in fact, with greasy hands that one week later he signed his report for the death of Professor Gerbert-Smithe.

The case was closed.

III

The Laugh of the Medusa

It didn't look as if it was going to crash into the sea. Rather, Sorrento looked like the in-famous Tower of Babel, straining to go higher and higher towards the heavens. However, unlike the Tower of Babel, the city was still standing, mocking the pious viewer with its bright colours and loud noises.

The kitchen had blue, white, and yellow majolica tiles, and the balcony was so big, it could really be considered a terrace. The pungent smell of nail polish permeated the small bedroom and mingled with the fresh perfume of the sea. Anne was lounging on the purple couch, waiting for her red nails to dry while distractedly reading a glossy magazine. The heat was close to being unbearable. The magazine, on the other hand, turned out to be absolutely unbearable and unreadable. She tossed it to the marble floor with impatience and stood up, turning towards the wardrobe. She donned her red swimsuit and a fitted linen dress, and grabbed her straw bag; she checked the stove three times, found her keys only after a fifteen-minute search, and headed towards the beach.

Anne Gerbert-Smithe had swum for the first time on her forty-second birthday and, from that day forward, she vowed to swim whenever she had the chance. If there was one thing Anne Gerbert-Smithe always did, it was keep her promises. Always had; always will.

The sun was starting to set when she decided to climb back towards home.

She stopped at the Pasticceria Marturano to buy almond biscuits. The owner, Peppino, would be singing while pretending to do his crosswords; he would then add a couple of biscuits more on the tray, wink at her, and bring a bony finger to his mouth. As if he did not gift his *pasticcini* to every woman.

She only had to turn left twice, and she would be home. However, she stopped once more. From a small balcony, she spotted the Signora Ceto, smoking a cigarette and cheating death. The woman was seventy-eight but didn't look a day older than fifty. Today, she was wearing a white dress with lemons on it which contrasted beautifully with her dyed black hair.

'Tutt'apposto?' she asked Anne.

'Tutto bene.'

'Have you heard anything from England, child?'

'Not a word.'

She exhaled, and the smoke coming out of her mouth made her look otherworldly, as if emerging from sulphuric depths. The sun had yet to set completely but the moon was already shining, reflecting on the sea below. Anne and the Signora stayed where they were a little longer, enjoying the view and the mutual understanding. After a few moments, the woman shrugged and threw her hands in the air; then, she laughed, the sound throaty and deep.

Anne smiled back at her and waved before turning towards home.

Not a word was ever heard from England.

Rafael is Dreaming on the Tram

BRYN SKIBO-BIRNEY

Rafael is dreaming on the tram.

He wakes up in Mazatlan.
His lips feel parched from the heat,
though it's a humid morning.
The air is still, with only the ringing church bells to disturb him.
But they pull him,
 lull him,
 dull him.

Time for a coffee.
Something to liven this place up, this man up.
The streets are busy, heels on cobblestones,
 clic-cli-c-cli-clic-cli-c-clic.
So many footsteps, interrupting
each other.
A small bar, cool, dark, and quiet, by the beach
would be perfect.

Rafael spends the morning talking, laughing;
even though he doesn't speak Spanish,
he makes friends with everyone.
Like The Mayor.
Or at least he says he's The Mayor.
Everyone can say they're anyone here.
Who's to know?

The sun dips
and the afternoon cools;
Rafael doesn't feel so dry, so gritty, so empty anymore
but he feels tired.

Rafael is dreaming on the tram.
Sgt. Connors won't get up.
The coffee is dark, reflective, like a window at night.
The bells are ringing, roaring.
The air is still, humid, and heels click in the aisle
 clic-cli-c-cli-clic-cli-c-clic.

No one interrupts him.
No one speaks to him.
No one looks at him.
 Despite his shouts,
 Despite his moans,
 Despite his silent cries for relief.

Rafael is dreaming on the tram.
Vas-y, mec, c'est le terminus.

Rafael wakes up in Geneva.
His lips are parched with drink and with thirst.
The air is still until the doors slide
open,
with a high electronic ringing.
A cool breeze glides across his face like water.
It's morning.
Time for a coffee.

Author's note: This poem is based on real events. I am indebted to Rafael for speaking to me.

THE CREATIVE WRITING GROUP (CWG)

So many of us have said, “I’d like to write more creative fiction, but I don’t have the time!” Frustrated with our own transparent reasoning, some regular (and would-like-to-become-regular) contributors to *Noted* had the idea to create an informal writing group that would provide a friendly push to get writing. So, after serious discussions, not-so-serious meetings, and a few scheduling debates, we are happy to announce the beginning of The Creative Writing Group.*

Beginning October 1st, the CWG will meet on the first Friday of every month, from 17:00 to 18:00, at Café Voisins (rue des Voisins, 8). The aim of these meetings is to dedicate at least one hour, every month, to creative writing. You can either bring your ideas and a writing instrument and get to work, or you can bring a piece of writing in any degree of completion to share with your group members and receive constructive feedback in a friendly setting.

If you’ve ever dreamed of running off to a woodland cabin to pen the next great novel, why not stop by Voisins first and share your story with fellow aspiring poets and writers? All students and staff of the English Department are warmly invited to join us, beginning October 1st.

**Disclaimer:* The Creative Writing Group is in no shape or fashion a formal enterprise of the English Department. We are an entirely informal, gradeless, creditless, free-spirited band of poets, writers, and artists bent on producing poetry and fictional prose the likes of which Geneva, and *the world*, have never seen! But we’re happy if we can produce one good haiku by the end of the day.