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TANGENTS



THE JOURNAL OF THE
MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM
AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IN THIS ISSUE...

Essays by Candy Carter, Laura Moore,
Siddhartha Shome

Personal Essay by Larry Zaroff

Story by Andy Grose

Play by Gene Slater

Poems by Jennifer Swanton Brown,
Faisal Nsour

PUBLISHING NOTES

This publication features the works of students and alumni of the Master of Liberal Arts Program at Stanford University.

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VOLUME 14

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present this issue of *Tangents*, the Journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For this fourteenth volume, we have chosen a diverse group of works by students and alumni, including:

- ✦ a discussion of gender ambiguity in dress in early 17th century England;
- ✦ a short play involving a conversation between two characters from two classic Russian stories;
- ✦ an examination of how the design of early lifelike machines differed from present-day approaches;
- ✦ a study of the ending of *Hamlet* as compared with the reading of the text;
- ✦ a heart surgeon's personal essay on receiving his own pacemaker;
- ✦ a short story in which two young brothers endeavor to catch a huge carp; and
- ✦ two poems that share a fish theme.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

We are sorry to report the recent death of Larry Zaroff, author of the personal essay in this issue.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

We welcome Roxanne Enman in her position as our new Co-Editor.

We are indebted to Theda Firschein for her contributions as a reviewer.

Be sure to learn about this issue's contributors, highlighted on the last page.

We hope that our choices will give you hours of enjoyable reading, and that they will inspire future contributions.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

Your feedback on the contents of this issue would be appreciated, and may be sent to oscarf1@earthlink.net and/or enman28@gmail.com.

HOOKED

Lessons from a Master Teacher

by Faisal Nsour

You took me to the quiet place
on that high mountain lake
where the big fish gather.
Eager for their secrets, I gazed.

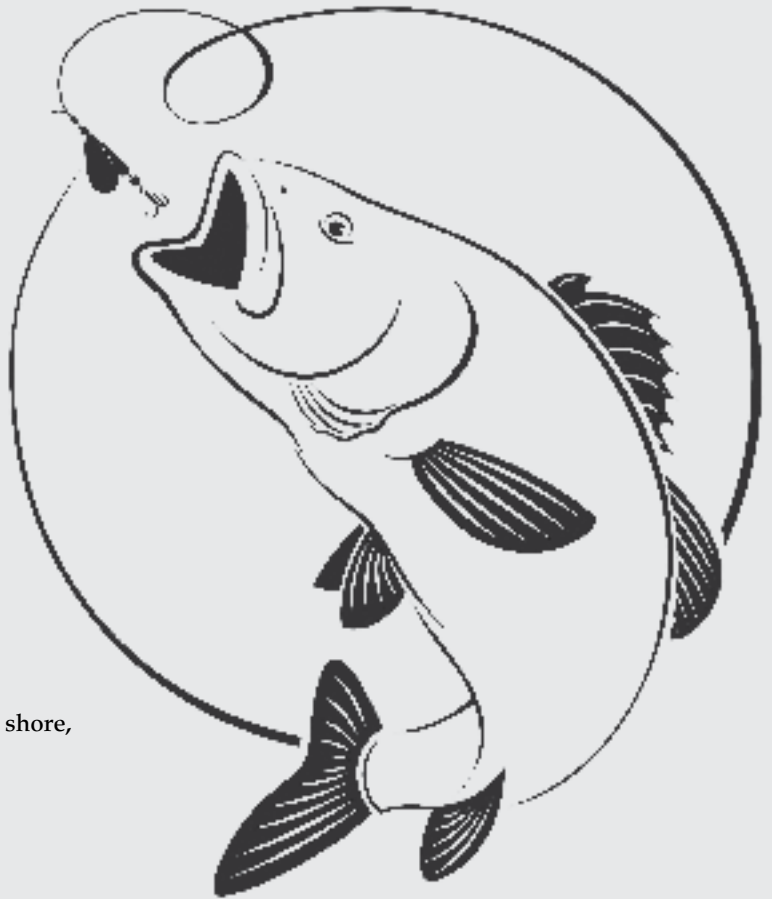
Eyeballs are no bait, you said.
Sink with the line to the bottom
and wait.

Soon I hooked a big one.
He dragged the taut line
sideways, desperate to escape.
Desperate too, I pulled hard toward the shore,
catching a glimpse of his slick side,
a quick pageant of bright reflections,
faces almost,
in scaled windows.

He dove, disappeared,
pulling straight toward the deep
that birthed him.

Release: the hook bent and the line went slack.

The great ones always get away, you said.
Now we are on his line.



CARP LAKE

by Andy Grose

The sun was drizzling down, spreading across the shallow lake as two young boys searched it for a carp.

"There's one," Toad whispered, pointing out across the frog-green surface.

Pete cupped one hand over his eyes to block the sun, steadying himself on the battered outboard motor with the other. He stood on his toes to see what Toad was pointing at, rocking the small boat, sending gentle vibrations through the water far faster than the lazy waves that spread across the surface.

"See it?" Toad asked.

"Maybe," Pete said, doubtfully.

The two young brothers were hunting carp for the first time. Toad would be ten before school started in the fall. Pete was already eleven. Toad was square-bodied and his older brother enough thinner that they were often taken for twins. The summer sun had bleached them both straw blond. The freckling on their faces turned solid over their backs and arms, rich tans that would not fade until long after Halloween.

Pete gave the frayed cord on the motor a swift pull, and then another, working with the quirky choke and throttle. It coughed back to life and was soon puttering steadily.

"It was huge, Pete," Toad said.

If Pete heard him, he did not respond.

Getting the boat motor to the lake had taken longer than they planned. The wheels of their cart had caught in the ground of the fields and the top-heavy load had fallen over twice, leading to arguments that took a while to settle. This was the first time their father had let them use the motor, and they did not want it to be the last.

The carp hunt had been planned all summer. Their father helped them. They coaxed him to get the motor running, changing the spark plug and replacing the cotter pin that held the propeller in place.

Together, they had "worked it out," as their father said. They had even tested it in a barrel of water in the garage.

Now, they were almost out of gas. And they were already tired and thirsty.

Worse, they hadn't seen any "for-sure" carp. Not a single one.

Their boat was only twelve feet long, kept at the lake chained to a weeping willow tree that leaned out over the bank, so that its branches dragged in the water like the tattered hem of a petticoat. The boat was flat-bottomed, and battered. It had once been as green as the lake, but now it showed its under-skin, all scrapes and bulges of dull aluminum. A long, shaggy stripe ran along the waterline where a mossy film had taken hold. The boat belonged to their father, who used it for duck hunting, all draped

with canvas ponchos and clumps of cattails. Or for sitting far out in the catch-basin lake, drinking beer alone, or sometimes with a neighbor. Once or twice, even with the parish priest.

The water in the lake was the run-off from the irrigation ditches that cob-webbed the valley, all the way to the alkali flats where nothing grew, even with irrigation. The water was contained by a low dike that kept it, at least for a while, from bleeding off into the desert itself. The ditches brought the pure mountain water to nurse the yards and gardens of the brothers' town, and to sustain the crops of the few families still farming for a living, plowing the weak soil every spring. And keeping the ditches clear.

Toad and Pete knew from the older boys at school that carp were not ordinary fish. They were big and fierce. But, if you caught one you could sell it to the older women in town, women who loved to make the carp soup they remembered from their own youth in other countries.

Last summer the boys had seen a carp in one of the irrigation ditches that ran into the lake. They only caught a glimpse before it swirled back into the deeper water. Or, maybe up the ditch toward the farms. But this summer there was less water running off the farmland. None reaching the lake. The ditches stretched like broken quills, dry and crackled with white scabby mud, off the body of the lake. The lake level was low. And all the carp were concentrated in the lake.

"Trapped," Pete had explained to their mother.

"Money in the bank," their father had said. "Swimming dollar bills."

As they ate their last candy bar, one brother breaking it in half, the other picking first, Toad cradled their net across his lap. It had taken them a month to make the net, working together, sometimes asking their father for advice. It had a long bamboo handle, cut from the thicket behind the hardware store where a fire hydrant leaked all summer. The wire loop that held the netting, salvaged from a nail barrel, was tied to the end of the rod with bailing wire, and held in place by notches they made with a rasp.

The basket had been made from the remnant of an old tennis net they found, discarded in the field by the high school. It was secured to the wire hoop with yellow plastic banding from a construction site they visited on their bikes.

They had tied a sturdy loop at the end of the bamboo rod with the rawhide laces from a pair of their father's boots, to keep the net from slipping out of their hands. Their father had ruined the boots walking in wet cement, helping a grouchy neighbor put in a new concrete floor. The boots, without laces, had joined the tennis net and other treasures, safe in their tree house.

The net, if not a thing of beauty, was a thing of pride, and this was its first use.



There, not ten feet away, was a carp!

Still eating the candy, trying to make it last, Pete and Toad began again to circle the lake one last time, slowly studying the patches of moss that rafted up in shallower places and along the dike. The sound of the motor, at lowest power, was almost soothing.

"I know I saw one," Toad said, this time to himself.

Here and there a tuft of the moss stood up, disturbed by a passing oar or bird. Or perhaps by the growth of the moss itself. On one patch of moss, about sixty yards off, a strange tuft caught Toad's eye.

"It moved," he said, adding quickly, "I think."

Skeptical, Pete turned the boat toward the bank of moss where Toad was pointing, to take a closer look. The mound was six inches long with a small spike, like a sundial, at its summit.

Pete turned the motor to neutral, but left it running, gliding closer.

The moss was anchored to a patch of cattails.

A large dragonfly landed on the spike, resting, until another dragonfly bumped into it, sending both of them off in a swirl of iridescent wings. The mound moved a little and the moss around it shook, setting off a swarm of gnats which blew into the boat, and then off across the sleepy surface of the water.

"Carp," Pete whispered. "You were right."

"Good we're down-wind," Toad whispered back.

"Carp can't smell us," Pete explained. "Not like deer."

As the two boys whispered back and forth, the afternoon wind slowly moved the boat away from the moss bank, into the lake again. The wind that might have helped them sneak up on their prey was carrying them away instead. They bumped to a stop on a stand of boards, sticking up like jackstraws in the middle of the lake, perhaps a duck blind from last year. Looking back, they saw the moss shiver again, and a minute later felt another dusting of gnats carried by the wind.

"Full power," Toad said. "We'll surprise it."

"Motor's too noisy," Pete said.

"The wind will blow the noise away," Toad said, trying to reason with his older brother.

"No way," Pete said.

"I saw it first," Toad reminded him.

With no better plan, Pete said, "Okay. This time."

Crouched in the back of the boat, with his brother tucked down between the bow and the splintery seat, Toad brought the motor to full power. Keeping his own head as low as possible, he aimed straight for the cattails, which he could see slowly rising over the cowl of the boat. A bug flew into Toad's left eye, and

for a second, the pain made him loosen his grip on the motor. The boat veered to the right, banging Pete against the side. But Toad regained control, and when he was still twenty yards from the moss bank he cut the motor, pulling it up to lessen the drag. The patch of cattails rose slowly, until Pete could see them, too. The boat had more drag than power, and with its motor off it lost speed rapidly. But not before it coasted up to the very edge of the moss.

Toad signaled Pete to sit up and look.

There, not ten feet away, was a carp.

It was showing half of its back to the warm sun, its dry scales a dull copper hue in the sharp afternoon light, like row upon row of muddy pennies. The carp's tail made a small swirl, stirring up another flock of gnats.

Toad slowly raised the net, holding its bamboo shaft with both hands.

"Wham," Toad shouted, as he plunged the net onto the moss over the carp, twisting and pulling back. But the net ripped from his hands and disappeared instantly under the moss. The gnats went crazy. The boys barely stayed in the boat.

Within moments, the end of the bamboo handle bobbed to the surface alongside the boat.

When they took hold of it—carefully, both of them at once—white-knuckled as they pulled up, they found only a handful of moss and a few copper scales. The net was torn along one side, part of it missing.

The carp was gone.

"It ate the net," Pete said, squeezing the slimy moss, which gave off an unexpected, spicy scent.

"That's okay," Toad said, triumphantly rubbing two coin-sized carp scales together before slipping them into his front pocket.

"We'll make a better net," Pete said. "For next time."

But next time never came. The summer stayed dry and the dike failed the next winter, when the rains finally came. They say that gophers undermined it in the drought, with their honeycomb of burrows.

The new net was never finished. The boys moved on to other adventures.

Yet, even as adults, they never saw a copper penny that they did not stop to claim.

Or smell wet moss without remembering Carp Lake.

FASHION AND GENDER DEBATES
IN 17TH CENTURY LONDON:
**THE WORN WORLD OF
THE ROARING GIRL
BY THOMAS MIDDLETON
AND THOMAS DEKKER**

by Candy Carter

When they collaborated in writing *The Roaring Girl* for Prince Henry's Men at London's Fortune Theatre in 1611, Thomas Middleton and fellow playwright Thomas Dekker were undoubtedly aware of the "crowd trouble" that so often accompanied productions at public theaters. With an admission price as low as a penny to stand in front of the stage, up to 3,000 playgoers—courtiers, merchants, tradesmen, apprentices, prostitutes, and pickpockets—packed into the open air amphitheater (Gurr, Shakespearean Stage 34). The playwrights appealed to this diverse audience by placing Mary Frith (known in the play, as she was on the street, as Moll Cutpurse)¹—a real-life cross-dressing woman living near the theater—at the center of the play.

Frith was a well-known and colorful local figure and probably a Fortune Theatre regular (Gurr 276). Although a male member of the acting company played the female part of Moll Cutpurse in the play, theatrical historian Andrew Gurr points out that Frith became the first-ever actual woman to appear on an English stage when she performed a post-performance "jig"—a display considered indecent, and even lewd—on at least one occasion (276). Indeed, her song and dance were so sensational that women would not appear onstage again for another fifty years. The playwrights' use of the notorious Mary Frith was more than a shrewd publicity stunt, however. Like her larger-than-life counterpart, Moll Cutpurse takes center stage and uses clothing as a vehicle of self-transformation. In pushing aside the fragile boundaries of gender and class, *The Roaring Girl's* heroine embodies a shocking possibility, one that emboldened individuals to extricate themselves from socially constructed norms and to fashion their own singular identities.

The historical moment in which the play was written and performed serves an important function, as depicted by Middleton and Dekker in *The Roaring Girl*. London life was, in the words of the contemporary philosopher Thomas Hobbes, "nasty, brutish, and short." Furthermore, rigid legal and social norms dictated that citizens remain



FIG. 1. Frontispiece for the authorized edition of *The Roaring Girl*, printed in 1612. Consistent with the play's descriptions of her apparel, Moll Cutpurse's ensemble includes a costly tall beaver hat with feather, starched (or wired) collar with lace trim, doublet, "Dutch slops" (a type of breeches), and a cloak. She smokes a pipe (primarily a masculine pursuit) and carries a rapier—a gentleman's sword

firmly ensconced in self-contained, stratified roles, widely considered unchangeable. For the example, the Jacobean phrase "roaring boys" described young upper class men with money and leisure time to roam the streets, frequent brothels and taverns, and challenge each other to duels. At the other end of the social scale, "cutpurses"—common slang for pickpockets—worked in crowded gathering places such as theaters. Despite the class differences and hardships of urban life, Londoners nevertheless shared a common obsession: clothes. Approximately one-third of London's workforce, whether male or female, worked in the textile industry in some way (Bucholz and Ward 67). Humble street dealers in second-hand clothes, wealthy drapers and mercers (traders), entrepreneurial merchants sending ships to trade English wool for foreign fabrics and dyes—these were all players on the great stage of London life that made fabric and its byproduct, fashion, into the engine that transformed a small island nation into an *emporium mundi*.

Often appareling themselves in ragtag combinations, men and women of all levels of society were able to achieve singular effects and individual styles, a cultural shift that evolved hand-in-hand with the fashion industry. In this emerging world of global commerce and changing fashions, Londoners viewed clothing as a vehicle for self-presentation, and some, like Mary Frith (Middleton and Dekker), as a means of reinvention. Against this backdrop, *The Roaring Girl* reflects a cultural shift, particularly in London's theater. Moreover, the play's central character, Moll Cutpurse, embodies the notion that apparel was becoming an outward manifestation of emerging ideas about selfhood and personal agency. She stands at the center of the play's primary plot, wearing clothing that allows her to cross boundaries of both gender and class. In the central narrative, Sebastian's acquisitive,

social-climbing father will not permit him to wed Mary Fitzallard because he feels her dowry is inadequate. Sebastian announces that he plans to marry Moll Cutpurse, the roaring girl, instead, gambling that an unsuitable choice for daughter-in-law would motivate his father to approve the woman of his real choice, Mary. In a secondary plot, Moll spars with both words and swords with penniless gallants who try to seduce wealthy merchants' wives.

Moll's costume changes demonstrate her ever-shifting self-presentation. She initially appears in a costume composed of both male and female clothing; for instance, she wears a male jacket with a woman's skirt. Later, she hires a tailor to create a man's ensemble for her that consists of a "great Dutch slop" (a baggy trouser) and a

doublet, a jacket considered to be a masculine (2.2.93-94). Unlike the other female characters, Moll moves freely about the streets, shopping, chatting, and challenging men to duels with a sword (and often beating them). Because she is a “roaring girl” who duels with gentlemen above her rank, she brazenly transgresses lines of gender and class. Notwithstanding such impropriety, the playwrights succeed in restoring social order in the play’s final scene: the merchants’ wives return to their husbands, Sebastian’s father approves his marriage to Mary Fitzallard, and the gallants move on to other conquests. Notably, Moll ends the play in wholly feminine dress, re-inhabiting contemporary conventions in both dress and station. The variations in her costumes reveal her attempts to change her identity and station in life, but also reveal that ultimately, established norms prevailed. Nevertheless, what Moll accomplished was groundbreaking.

Moll Cutpurse and her real-life counterpart Mary Frith have much to teach us about how clothing reflected the attitudes and public discourse in the early seventeenth century. In their studies of Mary Frith’s career trajectory, theater historians Gustav Ungerer and Natasha Korda describe her first appearance in London records as a low-level pickpocket operating in the area around the theater. Over time, however, she self-consciously re-invented herself as a street performer. Frith wore men’s clothes, for instance; but unlike the characters in Shakespeare’s plays, she did not perform in disguise. Like the “roaring girl,” she challenged gallants to sword duels. At least one historian has speculated that Frith’s criminal associates

worked the crowd picking pockets while she engaged her opponent. She also performed bawdy songs with a lute, busking at times on the street or in taverns or tobacco shops, traditionally both male preserves. Some feminist historians and critics have depicted Mary Frith as a transvestite. A less glamorous, but probably more realistic, hypothesis is that Frith was simply a self-promoter, making a conscious choice to establish a street identity that allowed her to break taboos and enjoy a freedom of movement not available to women in traditional skirts. It is significant that the frontispiece of the play states, “I must work for my living,” an indication that Mary Frith was unwilling to depend on others. She was, in fact, a shrewd entrepreneur; because later in her life she became a licensed broker in used goods, another unusual role for a female at that time. She used her position between the criminal world of her earlier life and the world of aspiring gallants and theatrical entrepreneurs in search of fashionable used clothing. She was therefore able to improve her status through multiple re-inventions and changes of clothes, but once she had achieved a measure of respectability, she returned to conventional female apparel.

Mary Frith’s street act as a female in pants also tells us much about one of the most widely discussed social topics of the day—men preoccupied with fashion. These men were accused of appearing unmasculine in



FIG. 2. Title page from a rare variant edition of *The Roaring Girl*, printed in 1611 without a license from the Stationers. Note difference between this depiction of Moll Cutpurse and the more masculine image of Fig. 1.

much the same way that women wearing masculinized apparel courted scandal and provoked debate. Both issues are bound up in the plot of *The Roaring Girl*. A title page from a rare variant edition of the play (Fig. 2) can offer insight into discussions of gender and clothing that appeared frequently in sermons, pamphlets, and public discourse. Unlike the illustration in the authorized edition of the play (Fig. 1), which presents an androgynous figure, this image is more clearly female, but dressed in breeches. Ungerer and others speculate that authorities censored the first printing of 1611, the image of a female in breeches and on stage being too inflammatory to publish (Ungerer 60, 78). The authorized publication of 1612, by contrast, presents an altogether different figure, that of a male actor dressed as Moll Cutpurse, a woman wearing men's clothing. For a play to celebrate a notorious cross-dressing woman was shocking enough; to put her on the stage as well was an unimaginable breach of decorum.

As a woman wearing pants and armed with a rapier, Mary Frith took masculine apparel to the extreme. She was, however, not alone in making these gender-bending sartorial choices. Documents of the period abound with public hand-wringing about how the day's fashions were blurring the conventional lines of gender and class. Indeed, anti-theatrical pamphlets and sermons of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries contain countless shrill complaints about men taking an unseemly interest in fashion. The gallants in *The Roaring Girl* fit this description. Similarly, women wearing such masculinized apparel as doublets, jerkins, broad hats with feathers, or stiletto daggers, were scolded for their fashion choices. Even King James entered into this public fray, admonishing his ministers to, in the words of contemporary observer John Chamberlain, "inveigh against the insolency of our women and their wearing of broad-brimmed hats, pointed doublets, their hair cut short or shorn, and some of them [wearing] stilettos or poniards [small knives]," a statement made ironic by his wife's own occasional choice to sport masculine attire.

Pamphlets and sermons also targeted young men who overspent on clothing and "flaunted" or "jetted" in extravagant apparel in public spaces, as the gallants do in *The Roaring Girl*. The concern, which focused particularly on young men who were dressing above their established social position, caused such controversy that "sumptuary legislation" was enacted to curb the practice. In his review of sumptuary legislation¹¹ for the *English Historical Review* in July 1915, Wilfred Hooper discusses the regulations that outlined what people wore according to station. Everything from color to fabric choice to degree of ornamentation was determined by the wearer's status. Statutes even prohibited working class people from wearing certain colors, like purple, or fabrics, like imported cloth. Under these laws, without a title or wealth, people's fashion choices were extremely limited. Hooper points out that although attitudes about the connection between clothing and status persisted well into the seventeenth century, sumptuary legislation ended early in King James's reign. Early modern men and women saw themselves as knitted into a hierarchy with roles that had been ordained by God. Clothing made this hierarchy visible; to defy one's assigned role was to deceive and to commit the multiple sins of pride, envy, and greed (Hooper 443-449). The increasing importance of textiles in England's economy and rapidly expanding global trade were nevertheless changing these traditional notions. People began to understand apparel's potential to engage in what new historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt calls "self-fashioning," the creation of an identity of one's own making, of which Mary Frith is an early, if not the earliest, example).

Actors, of course, defied established social norms most of all — their very livelihood required them to "disguise" and "dissemble." Imagine a production of *The Roaring Girl* in 1611: the actors, all male; the part of Moll Cutpurse played by a man dressed as a woman who, in turn, dressed as a man. Likewise, the actor playing the part of Mary Fitzallard would be a man dressed as a woman who later disguises herself as a boy. More importantly, actors were considered to be masterless men, a lower status for whom sumptuous apparel was off-limits. Any actor playing a high status role — in the case of the *Roaring Girl*, the gallants, the merchants and

LONDONERS SHARED A COMMON OBSESSION:
CLOTHES.

their wives, Sebastian and his father—was, by definition, counterfeiting, pretending to be someone better than he really was, and worse still, was to play a different gender. One of the most common justifications for the Puritans' closing of the theaters in 1642 revolved around issues of apparel: men dressed as women, men wore clothing above their station, and men were engaged in counterfeiting and duplicity.

Mary Frith and Moll Cutpurse show the beginnings of new notions of individuality, selfhood, and personal agency. Clothing served as a metaphor for how men and women navigated an increasingly complicated commercial world. As Sir Francis Bacon wrote in 1605, "Behavior seemeth to me as a garment of the mind and to have the conditions of a garment..." Social historian Keith Thomas explains that men and women were beginning to fashion themselves for roles they had chosen for themselves rather than roles dictated by arbitrary social conventions. He notes, "the prevailing literary topos was of life as a stage on which everyone played a part, self-consciously fashioning themselves to fit the role they had chosen." Thomas also points to "widespread evidence of active agency, mobility, self-help, and independence of spirit" (40), supporting the idea that individuals saw clothing, a central component of an ever-expanding consumer market, as a means of freeing themselves from the old order. Both the character of Moll Cutpurse and the real-life Mary Frith each demonstrated this new individuality and self-sufficiency. In 1689, after nearly eighty years of civil war, plague, fire, and religious turbulence, John Locke would write of the self as "that conscious thinking thing" in his "Essay Concerning Human Understanding." The Dekker-Middleton depiction of Moll Cutpurse, however, anticipates Locke's philosophy about the relationship between outward appearance and inner thought.

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NOTES

ⁱ For purposes of clarity, I refer to Moll Cutpurse in discussing the character in the play but refer to Mary Frith when discussing the historical figure.

ⁱⁱ Elizabethan Sumptuary Statutes: regulations governing colors, fabrics, furs, and trims to be worn by various ranks of society in the reign of Elizabeth I.

The Play's the Thing... or Is It?:

Hamlet's Final Scene as Theater and Literature

by Laura Moore

Hamlet has much going for it: ghosts, treachery, thwarted love, possible madness, moral dilemmas and revenge. But the volumes of critical analysis devoted to *Hamlet* indicate another of the play's charms—its complexity and contradictions. As performed, *Hamlet* is satisfying theater due in no small part to a dramatic, dueling-and-treachery-filled conclusion, which, for all its bloodshed, offers a sense of vindication and resolution. Evil is exposed and punished, a weak usurper is replaced by a strong warrior, and the hero fulfills his purpose as an instrument of divine providence. The text of *Hamlet*, however, provides a different experience, for the final scene, rather than tying up the conflicts, seems to underscore competing ideologies and incompatible roles. Indeed, the same elements that supply a satisfactory theatrical ending—a duel, expressions of faith in Providence, and the succession of Fortinbras—supply a satisfactory literary work for their very inconclusiveness.

DUELING AND DIVINE PROVIDENCE

For an Elizabethan audience, for whom dueling was commonplace and its rules well understood, the ending duel would have resonated with legal and social relevance. According to critic Sheldon P. Zitner:

In the 1590s rapier and dagger—first introduced into England perhaps thirty years before—had decisively supplanted the aristocrat's older weapons...and during the decade at least five English manuals on the rapier and the dueling code, most of them Italian in origin or doctrine, were published. (Zitner 126)

One of these manuals, Vincentio Saviolo's 1594 *Practice*, dedicated to Robert, Earl of Essex, and probably

familiar to Shakespeare, advocates approaching a duel with a desire for justice, not hatred or revenge. Saviolo counsels that combatants should remember "what a noble and excellent creature man is...the image and likeness of God,"ⁱ so it is therefore the duelist's responsibility to fight a murderer who has marred God's work. Should he do this in the correct state of mind, he is "the minister to execute Gods deuine [sic] pleasure" (Zitner quoting Saviolo 130). In Act 5, Shakespeare positions Hamlet as such a minister. The young prince approaches his duel with Laertes without rancor, even begging the latter's pardon and publically admitting that through his insults, "I have done you wrong" (5.2.204). Significantly, before the duel Hamlet tells Horatio of the strange events that led him to uncover and replace the death warrant Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were transporting to the English king, testifying that "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (5.2.10-11). Hamlet appears to be in the state of mind—and heart—Saviolo advocates; by trusting Providence to guide his ends, Hamlet is ready to act as the "scourge and minister" he believed he was meant to be since killing Polonius in Act 3.

While Hamlet is ready to fight Laertes in a play sponsored by Claudius, he is also ready to play his role in a drama staged by Providence. When Horatio offers to make Hamlet's excuses for him, Hamlet refuses, asserting "There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (5.2.198), again underscoring his new-found faith. Shakespeare lets the audience sense that Hamlet is prepared for this "play of Providence, in which all men have their parts and even sparrows suffer their brief tragic falls" (Calderwood 273). His calmness signifies his willingness to be an instrument in God's hand.

... THE TEXT [OF HAMLET] LEAVES THE READER WITH THE SENSE OF CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES, QUESTIONABLE CHOICES, AND AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE.

Though Hamlet, prepared in body and spirit, approaches the duel calmly, dueling on stage is bound to be exciting, especially after four acts heavy with debate. In the final duel, the excitement is heightened by suspense, for the audience knows the duel is dually rigged. The simple stage directions, "They play," leave room for plenty of exhibition, but the first two hits are decisively Hamlet's. After the second hit, the intrigue intensifies, first verbally, and then physically. Laertes momentarily wavers in his desire for vengeance, musing in an aside, "And yet it is almost against my conscience" to hit Hamlet with the unbated, poisoned rapier (5.2.279). His brief show of scruples adds a moment of hope—fleeting though it is—that Claudius's plan will be thwarted, while it also anticipates Laertes' dying wish to reconcile with Hamlet. The scuffling exchange of rapiers is a more important development, for with this swapping of weapons comes the ironic reversal of Laertes' murderous intentions. Perhaps Hamlet feels the unbated rapier scratch him and intentionally, forcefully switches weapons, or perhaps Providence arms him with the poisoned rapier in the confused fray. Either interpretation would add to the visual drama, and either scenario could lead an audience to believe that the two poisonous cuts were guided by Providence. When it does come, the poisoned sword in Hamlet's hand—an instrument of treachery and subterfuge—becomes an instrument of divine retribution.

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS VINDICATION

On stage, the duel and the death of Claudius are a satisfying conclusion because they provide a sense of vindication that mitigates the tragedy of Hamlet's death. When Gertrude alerts Hamlet—and the court—to the poisoned cup Claudius had intended for Hamlet, Laertes announces: "the King's to blame" (5.2.305). The extent of Claudius's perfidy will be apparent to the Danish court, and Hamlet's moroseness and suspicions will be publically vindicated. Also satisfying is that Hamlet kills Claudius with both the poisoned sword and the poisoned cup, turning both instruments of treachery on the traitor. The audience watches Hamlet go to his death knowing he has fulfilled his role as

"minister" and has rid the country, at last, of its poison. Shakespeare underscored the sense of truth vindicated by giving his audience religious contexts for overlapping and permeable moral codes. For example, whereas Catholics might believe the ghost from Purgatory was speaking the truth and has been avenged, Calvinists might believe Providence helped Hamlet discover the letter ordering his death. But audiences of all stripes can be satisfied with a duel resulting in schemers bringing destruction upon themselves, whether by the hand of God righting the disjointed kingdom, or through the triumph of Hamlet's reason and preparedness. The duel effectively wins the battle for Denmark's health.

SYMMETRY IN FORTINBRAS'S SUCCESSION

The final scene also provides viewers with a sense of symmetry, of events coming full circle. Fortinbras enters to remind the court and audience of his "rights of memory" (5.2.373), hearkening to his and Hamlet's fathers. On the day Hamlet was born, Old Hamlet vanquished Old Fortinbras in single combat. Just as Old Hamlet protected Denmark from a foreign threat, so now does his son protect Denmark from an internal threat. For Hamlet, Fortinbras's entrance provides a doubly poignant purpose. Hamlet prophesies the council will elect Fortinbras and gives the soldier his "dying voice." In doing so, Hamlet restores a kingdom lost to another fatherless son, and sanctions the new king as he was not able to sanction the last one. Most significantly, Hamlet charges Horatio with telling Fortinbras what had happened so Hamlet's story can live on and possibly instruct Fortinbras the way Fortinbras's choices previously inspired Hamlet in Act 4. The bookended references to a life beyond the drama in Denmark provide a final symmetrical touch. The opening scene features a ghost from Purgatory and the final scene invokes flights of angels, giving a sense of a larger scale—of this life being merely an act in a greater play. Hamlet's internal debate and external troubles are finished and the deliberations are silenced, but silenced with a sense of rest rather than nothingness.

COMPLICATIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

While the final scene of *Hamlet* is every bit as compelling on the page as in production, it is compelling for its problems, not its resolutions. The action of the duel does not propel the reader relentlessly forward, but rather encourages retrospective examinations that lead the reader to wander, as though in a maze, through thematic avenues which do not lead to an open, level field of understanding and accord. For instance, Hamlet's crucial assertion that, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends" suggests things will work out for the best: God is aware of the fall of a sparrow and, by extension, of human endeavors. The strength of Hamlet's conviction is underscored by his willingness to be in a state of readiness for Providence's use. However, the language of personal responsibility undermines that principle ("thy fortune," "his own petar," "their own insinuation," "mine own springe," "poison temper'd by himself"). By focusing on the individual, such language indicates that a character's choices, rather than divinity, shape his ends. From the outset of the play, Hamlet's facility with counterpoint attacks is a defining quality as he instinctively turns words, people, stratagems, and poisoned fencing foils against the enemies who first employ them. Claudius enlists allies in his schemes, but Hamlet manipulates them more successfully. It is unlikely that Hamlet would easily surrender his powers of action.

DUELING PROVIDENTIALLY OR PURPOSEFULLY?

The dueling scene exposes that difficulty by providing contradictions to Hamlet's professed acceptance of Providence. In performance, the duel moves inexorably to its conclusion, but a reader has leisure to examine the timing of events—timing that reveals a very human will at work. Despite Hamlet's attitude of reconciliation at the outset of the duel, he is spurred to wound Laertes (and perhaps change rapiers) the instant Laertes cuts him. More importantly, Hamlet is driven to kill Claudius only after he witnesses Gertrude's death and grasps that he, himself, is dying. While this could appear to be the workings of divinity shaping Hamlet to his appointed task, there is an alternate interpretation: Hamlet is provoked into action neither by duty nor by Providence, but by a compelling personal reason: that is, he acts as "scourge and minister" in order to enact immediate vengeance for his mother's life and for his own. In fact, in Hamlet's dealings with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he allowed a desire for revenge to

surpass his calling as minister. The forged letter to England begins with "polite flourishes of diplomacy" (Taylor 154), but ends with a command as abrupt and merciless as the murder it directs. Although Providence might have guided Hamlet to discover Claudius's letter and might also have provided him with Old Hamlet's ring, the murder of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is Hamlet's "sport" of hoisting the engineer with his own petard. In addition, sending the two former friends to their deaths without the chance to be given absolution by confession is pure malice. While there might be Providence in the fall of a sparrow, it is nonexistent for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Rather, they seem to be skewered between "the pass and fell points / Of mighty opposites" (5:2:60-61). Through ironic reversals in the final scene, in which acts of self-assertion result in destruction, Shakespeare hints at a malevolent universe at work rather than benign Providence, suggesting, perhaps, that the cost of resigning one's will to Providence is death.

A SUITABLE SUCCESSOR?

Indeed, in the play's final scene Shakespeare implies moral muddiness and conflicting ideologies in several ways. At the end of the busy, bloody duel, Fortinbras's entrance and command of the situation seem like the restoration of order. Yet looking back over the other appearances of Fortinbras affords the reader a fuller, less easy impression. Dissuaded from attacking Denmark, Fortinbras instead risks two thousand men and twenty thousand ducats "to gain a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name" (4.4.17-18). Such a gamble indicates a rashness that might preclude thought; it also evokes both Old Fortinbras and Claudius, each of whom wagered on a sword fight and lost. The ambiguous quality of honor Hamlet attributes to Fortinbras supplies a greater cause for concern:

Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. (4.4.52-55)

Although Shakespeare employs Hamlet to debate the nature of greatness, the playwright nevertheless introduces doubt about Fortinbras's character. Fortinbras might create a reason for war out of trifling matters if he thinks his honor is threatened—hardly a recipe for national stability. Rather than employing the ascent of Fortinbras to the throne to prove the hand of Providence, Shakespeare could be using the re-ordered state of Denmark to evoke a darker, barbaric

age. In the final scene he shows minor characters sacrificed to the machinations of the mighty, and the innocent suffering for the general guilt. Ultimately, Hamlet does what he is supposed to, but does not survive the ordeal. Like Beowulf's fight against the dragon, Hamlet's purge of Denmark's poison proves a fatal exertion. Shakespeare might intend Fortinbras' entry to underscore the sense of heroic doom, for he is a figure reflecting Norse or Germanic mythology rather than chivalric romance or Renaissance progress. Behind the drums, attendants, and commanding presence lies an uncertain entity who, rather than restore the old order, seems more likely to usher in a new cycle of bloodshed and revenge.

When examined, even the seemingly gracious declaration by Fortinbras about Hamlet's funeral rites carries an inharmonious note. Hamlet was a student, not a soldier, so "soldiers' music and the rite of war" (5.2.383) are undeserved and incongruous. Moreover, although Hamlet's struggle is set against a national crisis, his personal worries outweigh his public concerns; Hamlet's actions might affect the nation, but his heroism is more private than political. To an uncomfortable degree, Fortinbras's evaluation of Hamlet highlights the contrast between Fortinbras's willingness to risk lives and money for the "eggshell" of Poland and Hamlet's multi-faceted ethical concerns. It is the final dissonant tone in a scene rife with subtle discord. Horatio's "flights of angels" are reminiscent of a Requiem Mass—in keeping with a ghost from Purgatory but at odds with abbreviated Protestant funeral rites. Hamlet's Calvinistic pronouncements on Providence are also at odds with both the hints of Catholicism in Horatio's words and the overtly Norse/Germanic heroism of Fortinbras. When read carefully and expansively, the final scene ends not with resolution but with ambiguity. Hamlet might have been "likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal" (5.2.381-2), but his story was truncated, and the story that remains for Horatio to tell is of "accidental judgements," "upshot purposes mistook / Fallen on th' inventors' heads" (5.2.366-9) and a life defined and curtailed by tragedy.

CONCLUSION

While a *stage production* of *Hamlet* leaves the audience with the dual flourish of a sword fight and dramatic, concluding pronouncements over Hamlet's dead body, the *text* leaves the reader with the sense of conflicting ideologies, questionable choices, and an uncertain future. Old Hamlet is avenged, but at what cost?

Denmark has a new king, but is Fortinbras fit to rule? Both in the theater and on the page, the final scene puts an end to play-acting: Hamlet stops Claudius from playing a king and loyal brother, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern stop playing Hamlet's friends and Claudius's minions, and Gertrude is removed from her role as an incestuous queen. Yet Hamlet's struggle to act within a role both true to himself and morally sanctioned cannot save his life, leaving the reader to wonder if absolute self-knowledge is, indeed, possible. The play's opening question of identity, "Who's there?" is therefore left unanswered, and that intricate uncertainty helps make *Hamlet* engaging, timeless literature. The theatricality of Hamlet's final scene provides enough evidence to convince a viewer that Providence prevailed and order has been restored, while also providing enough action to distract from problematic contradictions. But the same scene in the text, unconstrained by the pacing of a performance, offers a reader no such certitude. We may hope Hamlet ascends with flights of angels, but we are certain he will never sink into silence. Shakespeare leaves too many questions unanswered.

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NOTES

- ¹ Zittner directs the reader to V. K. Whitaker's *Shakespeare's Use of Learning*, in which the author "presents strong reasons for believing that Shakespeare had read Saviolo... Yet Shakespeare might also have known the man himself, either through the Southampton circle, with Florio the common link, or might have met him at the Elephant, a tavern mentioned with pleasure in Twelfth Night, and a favorite resort of Italians living in London."



WINTER FISH

by Jennifer Swanton Brown

The water cools, colors deepen.
Birds are gone, the turtle sleeps.
The sky stills, a battered, discarded shield,
while mud, at the crunchy edges, glistens.
Slowly the winter fish slow down,
like balls abandoned on a field.

With swivel and gleam, the oily muscles work.
Gills click open and open. They swim
in darkneses that no dreams yield.
The long black ribbon of stream stumbles around
them that do not weep or listen.

A child watches the hand-sized bodies
turn and live, without a breath.
He asks if they see him, and why
in the air he shares with me
their flashing dulls to smelly heaps.

We pray the fish, their colors strong,
survive the winter, last the night.
Circle and stall, they flicker there
in the liquid murky dance of the cold-blooded.

Let them fall asleep, or, now,
be, as we, entranced.

PACEMAKER IRONIES

by Larry Zaroff

It's one thing to put it in; quite another to have one implanted. My slow heart rate was one thing—not especially bothersome; but always chasing my younger wife was another—very vexing. For the past few years she has zoomed ahead of me on every bike ride. Not that she wasn't pleasant when I complained of eating her dust. But she didn't slow down. I needed to speed up, or, at least, keep up.

Pacemaker. A solution to a faster life through electricity. The first pacemakers required a chest operation to suture the electrodes directly onto the heart muscle. The electrodes connected to a generator the size of a large pack of cigarettes, powered by batteries whose life was so short that a second operation was often required in less than two years to replace the generator. Nowadays, the surgery is less traumatic. The electrodes are slipped through a vein, mainlined directly into the heart, and connected to a generator. The new models are about the size of a matchbook and have lithium batteries that usually last ten years. The latest technology is responsive to the needs of the body, allowing a slow heart rate at rest, speeding up during activities when the muscles need more blood and oxygen. A computer with moves, a brain.

In my younger days, I worked with a brilliant electrical engineer, Baruch Berkovits, who developed the first "demand" pacemaker, a device that, sensing the patient's own heartbeat, would stimulate the heart only when the native beat slowed. The advantages—longer battery life, no competition with the normal heartbeat, safer—were many. In my practice of cardiac surgery I had maintained a special interest in pacemakers, implanting hundreds. I knew how to do the surgery. Yet, I cringed at the thought of someone else operating on my own heart. I was certain I had more experience than anyone else in the San Francisco Bay Area. And I feared complications (though complications were rare and remain so). Nevertheless, like any other patient, I worried that I would bleed, my lung would collapse, the wire carrying impulses would perforate my heart, or I would get an infection. And the psychology. As a cardiac surgeon, I knew the heart was just a pump. But the heart is attached to the brain, not just through nerves and hormones, but also through emotions. And language. The word "heart" is a major metaphor, almost an idiomatic expression: heartfelt, lonely heart, heartbroken, bleeding heart, heartless, have a heart, listen to your heart, eat your heart out, you're in my heart, heart of a lion, matters of the heart. I fretted prior to my operation. I no longer completely believed the heart—mine—was just a pump.

Worse still, I would be walking around with a foreign object in my body. Would I feel diminished, less of a man because of my dependence on a mechanical device? I imagined the progression: hip prosthesis, knee replacement, artificial lens, hearing aids. What about airports, government buildings? The expected hassle. I would be patted down like a household cat. And I would no longer be able to have a MRI, those special studies that can't be done if the patient has metal components in his body. No magnets in my future.

Here it is good to have another doctor in the family. My son, Jon, the cardiologist, reassured me: I would forget about my pacemaker, once implanted. Yet, I was not completely at ease. Jon picked Leslie Saxon, a renowned electrophysiologist, to operate on me. "She does all the tough ones," he said. I did not want to be a tough one.

There is something about women doctors—they are compassionate and empathetic and patient—moreso than many men physicians. The day of my surgery, she smiled, listened as if I were in charge, explained the procedure for the third time. Of course, I told Leslie how I would do my own operation, exactly.

My next preoperative visitation was from the representative of the pacemaker company, who explained, with cloying courtesy, how a pacemaker worked. I was amused. I tried to tell her that I was familiar with the mechanism—to no avail—she continued, to completion, her introduction to voltage, timing, battery life.

Leslie did the operation her way. When I awoke, fuzzy—as if at high altitude—I learned she had inserted the pacer wire through the skin into a large vein (I would have made an incision and threaded the wire through a smaller vein); she had situated the wire in the septum that separates the right heart from the left (I always placed the wire at the apex of the heart); and she had closed the incision over the generator with absorbable sutures (I used silk skin sutures and removed them two weeks later). It turned out that Leslie knew more than I did. I had no complications. The pacemaker functioned well, my incision healed solidly.

I prospered. If not a Spring, a late Summer. More stamina. I was happy. The pacemaker, a miracle—tiny, energetic and muscular enough to meet all my needs, but one. Though now my heart rate increases with exercise, I still cannot catch my wife.

... the biggest problem with the Cartesian mechanistic view of living beings was its inability to explain purposiveness ... inherent in the human being ...

Lifelike Machines and The Key Ingredient of Life

by Siddhartha Shome

Situated at the intersection of technology, biology, philosophy, culture and fantasy, robots and automata¹—machines intended to mimic living beings—provide a window into the ideas, attitudes and concerns of the societies that built and embraced them. Early in the eighteenth century, under the influence of the Cartesian Mechanism philosophy, scientists imagined automata in mechanistic terms, and focused on replicating the physiological aspects of living beings. By the late eighteenth century, however, and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, it was increasingly recognized that the key functional ingredient of life was *purposiveness*, the ability to collect information and to respond actively in accordance with some objective; thinking on automata accordingly, shifted from replicating physiology to exploring the possibility, complexity and implications of purposiveness in machines.

Eighteenth-century Europe witnessed a flurry of activity in the study of automata, with particular interest in replicating physiological processes. In the winter of 1738, for instance, the grand *salle des quatre saisons* at the *l' Hôtel de Longueville* in Paris hosted a remarkable exhibition that captured the public imagination (Riskin, *Duck* 599). On display were three automata built by French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson. Flanked, to the left and right by pipe-and-tabor-playing² and flute-playing automatons, stood a life-size, mechanical duck made of gold-plated copper. It quacked, moved its legs and flapped its wings, each of which consisted of more than four hundred articulated parts (Wood, 25). Most astonishingly, as Vaucanson described it, “this duck stretches out its neck to take corn out of your hand; it swallows it, digests it, and discharges it digested by the usual passage” (Riskin, *Duck* 599). As the centerpiece of the exhibit, this “digesting or defecating duck,” as it came to be known, solidified public curiosity in automata, and epitomized the drive to replicate physiological processes in self-operating machines.



THE DEFECCATING DUCK, CENTER, FLANKED BY A PIPE-AND-TABOR PLAYING AUTOMATON AND A FLUTE-PLAYING AUTOMATON, FROM VAUCANSON, “LE MECANISME DU FLUTEUR AUTOMATE” (PARIS: EDITIONS DES ARCHIVES, 1985)

The emphasis on replicating physiological processes using mechanical means indicates the influence of Cartesian Mechanism on the makers of eighteenth-century automata. In the seventeenth century, René Descartes had advanced the notion that living beings were machines created by God: that is, divinely created automata. Human beings were the only exception, each of whom, according to Descartes, possessed an immaterial soul, in conjunction with a material body. Notably, Descartes claimed that living beings were like machines, while the converse was not true: machines were not like living things. The implication was profound: Descartes did not simply equate machines and living beings; rather, he sought to transform the European conception of living creatures with reference to the accepted understanding of machines, whose behavior

could be explained entirely by the laws of mechanics, expressed in the form of deterministic mathematical equations.

In the Aristotelian worldview, which had dominated the Western intellectual tradition prior to the Scientific Revolution (1543-1600), natural phenomena had been explained within a teleological framework, suggesting that purpose, or design, existed in nature. Thus, in Aristotelian thinking, a stone thrown up falls to the earth because it seeks to find its proper place, just as a bee flies to a flower because it seeks to gather nectar. In this way, the Aristotelian model infused both living beings and inanimate objects with a sense of purpose arising from teleological causality.

Early in the Scientific Revolution, Kepler, Galileo and others showed that natural phenomena involving inanimate objects could be explained using only the laws of mechanics as expressed by deterministic mathematical equations, without reference to purposes or teleological considerations. In the Cartesian formulation, where living entities were equated with machines, phenomena related to living beings were considered explainable entirely by the laws of mechanics, just as they were for inanimate objects. This Cartesian conception had an important implication: if living beings were exactly like machines, then surely machines could be built that could mimic life.

By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the quest to build machines exactly like living beings, along with its motivating philosophy, Cartesian Mechanism, ran into difficulties. Even Vaucanson's much vaunted defecating duck turned out to be partially fraudulent. By the 1780s it was discovered that Vaucanson's duck was not digesting grain at all, but was only ejecting preloaded excrement. As the practical limitations of Vaucanson's mechanical duck became apparent, the conceptual limitations of the Cartesian Mechanistic view of living beings were also coming to light.

Indeed, by the early 1800s, the Cartesian view was being challenged on several fronts. The rise of Romanticism, for instance, with its distaste for strictly rational and mechanical processes, charged that Cartesian processes did not take into account unquantifiable factors like feeling and intuition. Likewise, a philosophical strand called *Naturphilosophie* had emerged in Germany, in the 1790s, shaped by Schelling and Goethe, among others, which referred to the soul or the inner aspect of nature; they insisted on both the unity of nature and the unity between knowledge and feeling (Agutter and Wheatley 118-19). The notion

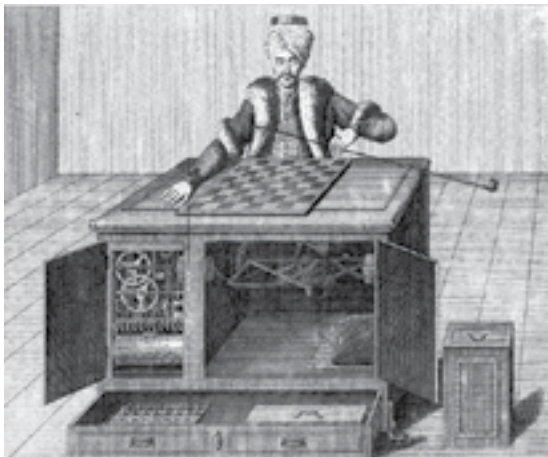
of "vitalism"—which held that living organisms are distinguished by a vital force, or spirit, that disappears when they die and has no counterpart in the non-living world (Agutter and Wheatley 99)—also came into prominence.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the Cartesian mechanistic view of living beings, apparent to any serious observer, was its inability to explain the purposiveness inherent in living beings. The word *purposiveness*, may be thought of as the ability of an entity to collect information from its surroundings and to respond actively according to some objective or combination of objectives. Purposiveness implies active response based on information. Thus, when an animal detects food and moves toward it, it is demonstrating purposiveness, while a falling stone, though responding to gravity, is a passive agent, acted upon, and, consequently, it does not exhibit purposiveness.

Since purposiveness implies active response based on information, to demonstrate this trait an entity must possess suitable detection and activation systems; for instance, sensory systems, a nervous system and muscles in an animal. Purposiveness also implies an active response that is not entirely random, but is shaped by some objective, or combination of, objectives. Notably, purposiveness does not necessarily imply intelligence. Many purposes, such as finding food, may not require intelligence per se, but may be thought of as instinctive. Complex purposes that involve a combination, or even a hierarchy, of purposes do require intelligence. A chess player, for instance, demonstrates complex purposiveness that engages intelligence since each move he makes in the game may have one or more immediate purposes, which are subordinate to the higher purpose of winning the game.

As people grew to accept purposiveness as a key ingredient of life, the notion of purposive automata similarly evolved. In 1770, at the Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna, Wolfgang von Kempelen, a person of considerable mechanical talent, inaugurated a remarkable machine: a chess-playing automaton nicknamed *The Turk*. This machine consisted of a life-sized figure in a Turkish costume, sitting behind a large cabinet with a chessboard on top. Before the demonstration in the palace began, von Kempelen opened various doors in the cabinet to reveal gears, cogs and mechanical linkages. This was followed by a game of chess in which the machine played, and defeated, a human opponent. This first performance in court was followed by several more, creating such a sensation that Emperor Joseph II persuaded von Kempelen to continue giving

performances of his mechanical chess player (Kang 178). From 1783 on, and over the next half century, von Kempelen, and later, Johann Mälzel (the next owner), exhibited The Turk in various cities in Europe and North America, drawing much interest, and attaining fame for the invention that endures to this day (Kang 178). The Turk achieved such fame despite strong suspicions, eventually confirmed, that it was not really a chess-playing machine, but a contraption in which a hidden human being executed the chess moves. Because of this deception, The Turk has been dismissed by some as a doll, a fake automaton, or a puppet (Kang 176), but it can also be described as a fictional automaton, and, like so many works of fiction, it engaged with reality in ways that are significant.



ENGRAVING OF THE CHESS-PLAYING TURK (FROM VON WINDLISCH, KARL GOTTLIEB, BRIEFE ÜBER DEN SCHACHSPIELER DES HRN. VON KEMPELEN, NEBST DREI KUPFERSTICHEN DIE DIESE BERÜHMTE MASCHINE VORSTELLEN, 1783)

As with Vaucanson's digesting duck, The Turk garnered the public attention in the last decades of the eighteenth century and beyond, but their distinctive characteristics reflected vastly different interests and concerns. Unlike Vaucanson, von Kempelen did not seek to faithfully replicate the physiology of living beings. Nor did he seek to replicate physiological processes such as breathing, digesting or defecating. While Vaucanson's duck advanced the idea that machines could replicate the complex physiological structures and processes of living beings, von Kempelen's chess-playing Turk suggested the notion that machines could

collect information about their surroundings, process it, and respond according to complex combinations and hierarchies of objectives, as required when playing chess. Thus, The Turk gave prominence to the idea that machines could demonstrate purposiveness comparable in complexity to that displayed by human beings.

As thinking on automata shifted from the mechanistic outlook to one focused on purposiveness in machines, writers and thinkers also shifted from portraying automata as deterministic clockwork-like machines in the eighteenth century to portraying automata as purposive, intelligent machines in the nineteenth century. Mary Shelley's novel, *Frankenstein* (1818) in which the protagonist constructs a living being from the body parts of corpses represents this Romantic transformation. This being, an automaton, demonstrates purposiveness and intelligence from the moment it is created, completely shocking its creator. The automaton's inventor is depicted as a highly skilled and knowledgeable scientist who is unable to go beyond the logic of Mechanistic Determinism to anticipate his automaton's purposiveness, nor is he able to deal with it once it materializes. Thus, not only does Mary Shelley offer an example of purposiveness in *Frankenstein*, but she also implies that the Cartesian Mechanistic framework of eighteenth-century science was insufficient for understanding and managing purposiveness in machines.

Other authors of this time period tackled the same question. Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) fundamentally changed conceptions of the nature of living beings. It also affected thinking on lifelike machines in ways that raised new questions and concerns about purposiveness, and the implications thereof. Darwin showed how new species evolved through the process of natural selection. He also demonstrated that purposiveness in living beings could, and did, arise spontaneously as organisms evolved. Henceforth, purposiveness in living beings could be explained without reference to any final cause and without any need to invoke an intelligent designer. For instance, the purposiveness that is evident in bird migration could now be explained as arising spontaneously through the process of evolution, rather than from any premeditated actions of a creator. This provoked an important question about lifelike machines: if different kinds of purposiveness could develop spontaneously in living beings without the intervention of an intelligent designer, could not different kinds of purposiveness also arise spontaneously in machines without human intervention, and most

worryingly, in ways contrary and inimical to the interests and desires of their human designers?

Of course, Darwin's theory of evolution applied only to living beings that could reproduce asexually or sexually; it is impossible for machines to reproduce in the same way. However, assuming that, in time, it becomes possible for machines to manufacture other machines,ⁱⁱⁱ could a scenario then arise in which autonomous machines spontaneously adopt purposes without human intercession, perhaps even sinister purposes like world domination or the subjugation of human beings? People began to ask such questions soon after *On the Origin of Species* was published. In 1863, author Samuel Butler wrote a letter to the editor entitled "Darwin Among the Machines," in which he argued that automata, or what he called "mechanical life" and "the mechanical kingdom," would evolve into ever more complex and powerful machines, and might eventually subjugate human beings. Referring to purposive machines, Butler warned,

We are daily giving them greater power and supplying by all sorts of ingenious contrivances that self-regulating, self-acting power which will be to them what intellect has been to the human race. In the course of ages, we will find ourselves the inferior race. (Butler 182).

French author Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel, *Tomorrow's Eve (L'Eve future)*, published in 1886, represents a further step in the evolution of how automata were portrayed. Interestingly, this novel has been credited with popularizing the use of the word "android" in its modern sense (Stableford 22), meaning an automaton that is designed to look and act like a human being. Not only is the android in this novel portrayed as purposive and intelligent, but a human being is shown as being far more mechanical and monotonous.

Concerns such as these highlight that, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the notion that all machines must behave in strictly deterministic, clockwork-like ways had been left far behind, replaced by a growing anxiety over the implications of purposiveness in machines.

Fictional and theoretical automata were not the only automata in nineteenth-century Europe, of course. Many real automata were built as well. However, none of these resonated at the time in quite the same way that fictional automata did, or as real automata had done in the eighteenth century, nor as robots would in the twentieth. According to historian Minsoo Kang,

none of the automata in nineteenth-century Europe "achieved the kind of cultural and intellectual impact that the works of the previous century had, as they were regarded largely as objects of entertainment" (Kang 175). Kang also asserts that when important European thinkers in the nineteenth century referred to automata, "it was Vaucanson's name they evoked, not any of their contemporaries" (175).

Away from the world of automata, however, important technological developments were made in nineteenth-century Europe that would eventually lead to complex purposive machines, dating back to James Watt's steam engine "governor" in 1788. Machines equipped with governors displayed a rudimentary ability to measure the speeds of moving parts and to respond actively (e.g., by increasing or decreasing the amount of fuel going into the combustion chamber) in accordance with some objective (e.g., to maintain a constant speed). In 1868, James Clerk Maxwell, a physicist best known for his work on electromagnetism, published an important paper, *On Governors*, in which he set out "to direct the attention of engineers and mathematicians to the dynamical theory of ... governors" (271). This was the first systematic study of a technology, now known as *feedback control systems*, which lies at the heart of all purposive machines.

The first half of the twentieth century saw the development of several landmark automata and robots that displayed purposiveness, and also witnessed the emergence of new ways of thinking about purposive machines. *The Chess Player (El Ajedrecista)*, built by the Spanish engineer and mathematician Leonardo Torres y Quevedo and displayed at the 1914 Paris World Fair, could play a chess endgame with three pieces. An automated crane, thought to be the first true industrial robot, was built in 1937 by Griffith Taylor (*Mechano Magazine* 172). In the 1940s, W. Grey Walter built "mechanical tortoises," equipped with sensors for light and touch, which could navigate in simple environments (Riskin, Wetware 264). Also in the 1940s, scientists, mathematicians and philosophers established the discipline of "cybernetics" described by one of its founders, Norbert Wiener, as "the entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal" (Wiener 11). Cybernetics researchers developed a common framework for studying living beings as well as certain kinds of machines. Importantly, in cybernetics, the key ingredient that renders certain machines lifelike and makes them functionally equivalent to living beings is purposiveness.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a veritable explosion in interest in lifelike machines, extending across the domains of science, technology, philosophy, and popular culture. Lifelike machines in the modern era, whether real or fictional, all demonstrate purposiveness, so much so that today purposiveness is taken for granted in robots.

Writing in the first decade of the twenty-first century, Jessica Riskin notes that when modern roboticists learn about eighteenth-century automata, they are often puzzled by the absence of sensors. She argues that the absence of sensors in eighteenth-century automata shows that automata builders of that time did not consider the possibility of what she calls “responsiveness” in machines (Riskin *The Artificial* . . . 264). But, of course, the key ingredient that was missing was not just responsiveness, but responsiveness of a particular sort: an active responsiveness based on information gathered from the surroundings by sensors, and guided by one or more objectives; that is, purposiveness. Only if an entity is purposive do sensing systems play any role in determining its response. A non-purposive entity, such as a stone, for instance, responds to applied forces in an entirely passive manner, and even if the stone were to have a sensor to measure applied forces, the information collected would not affect its response. Automata builders in the eighteenth century, influenced by the Cartesian Mechanistic outlook, did not conceive of their automata as purposive machines, and consequently found no functional role for sensors in the machines they built.

The importance of sensors in modern robots and their absence in eighteenth-century automata indicates a fundamental transformation in the conception of lifelike machines, one that has moved from an emphasis on replicating the physiology of living beings to an emphasis on replicating purposiveness. This resulted from gradual changes taking place over the last decades of the eighteenth century, and much of the nineteenth century, in thinking about life and lifelike machines. These changes were assisted by technological advancements, but were primarily driven by new ideas in philosophy, biology, and culture. The effect of these changes has been to elevate purposiveness as the key functional ingredient of life, as well as to make it an essential component of machines that are intended to mimic living beings.

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NOTES

- ⁱ Machines intended to mimic living beings were known as automata prior to the twentieth century and have been known as robots since.
- ⁱⁱ A tabor is a hand-held snare drum.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Modern research on self-replicating machines began with John von Neumann’s work in the 1940s. For a good overview of modern research on self-replicating machines, see Sipper.

*They, all the rules inside you,
they won't let you be anything—except who they tell you to be.*

TWILIGHT IN ST. PETERSBURG

A Play by Gene Slater

SETTING

St. Petersburg, Russia. Late 1800's.
Warm, June evening when twilight lasts till dawn

MAJOR CHARACTERS

IVAN ILYICH: Important judge, 45, on brink of death (from Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*)

STRANGER: Former minor Government clerk, 40 (the underground man from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*)

BACKGROUND

This play is inspired by two mysterious moments from these famous, powerful works. At the very end of The Death of Ivan Ilyich, an otherwise entirely naturalistic work, a doctor bends over Ivan Ilyich and says 'It is finished.' Ivan Ilyich hears and repeats this in his mind. Tolstoy doesn't explain what this means. The major scene in the present play takes place shortly afterward in a similar twilight consciousness, whether of dying or briefly waking from a coma, the reader may decide.

In Notes from the Underground, the tormented narrator describes a defining moment in his life when he shouted out "They won't let me be good!" Although he painstakingly analyzes almost every detail of this episode, the narrator here too, as in Ivan Ilyich, fails to explain what this means..

Although Dostoevsky and Tolstoy had many acquaintances in common, they never spoke. As Tolstoy wrote, "I never imagined we wouldn't meet. And suddenly over dinner ... I read that he is dead." They never wrestled directly together with the questions posed by their works. This play allows two of their characters to probe and argue out the deepest lessons they have learned.

SCENE 1

Blackness. Terrible howling, 'oh,' 'oh.' Well-decorated bedroom becomes visible. Bed in foreground. Velvet-curtained window left, hall door right. Pale yellow wallpaper, paintings, mirror, medicine-stand, Morocco sofa, and incongruous simple oak chair. Dusk.

IVAN, bald, graying beard, black eyebrows, maroon dressing gown, lies on sofa, howling

PRASKOVYA, buxom, well-groomed wife, turns to **IVAN**.

PYOTR, 50, ruddy-cheeked servant, wearing small icon, holds tray.

PRASKOVYA: I'm only trying to help.

IVAN (*realizing*): It's to make yourself feel good—more doctors, the priest.

PRASKOVYA: At least let me change the curtains, something less dark, depressing. More cheerful.

IVAN (*softly*): More lies. It's all lies. (*begins moaning*)

PRASKOVYA (*throws up hands*): What can I do, what do you want? Shall I send in Gerasim?

IVAN, *moaning, nods*.

SCENE 2

Same room. Night. Candles. Door ajar. **GERASIM**, 19, *fresh-faced peasant, in oak chair, holds IVAN's legs up on his shoulders*.

IVAN: How, how can you not mind? The smell, my groans?

GERASIM (*smiles, shrugs*): We all die.

Candles burn down. **GERASIM** *nods off*.

IVAN (*moaning, pleading*): Why? What have I done? Why torment me? If only --

QUIET VOICE (*coming from inside IVAN*): What is it you want?

IVAN (*startled*): Want? To live.

VOICE: But to live how?

PYOTR, *hearing voices, steps in quietly from hallway, holding candle-dish*.

IVAN: As I've always lived: nicely, pleasantly.

VOICE: Nicely, pleasantly? Cards at the club, court is in session, your marriage?

IVAN: Could, could it not have been 'right'? But I did everything expected. No, no, how can it all have been false?

PYOTR (*to himself*): The angel of death. *Begins to cross himself, drops dish*.

GERASIM *starts*. **IVAN** *turns angrily*.

SCENE 3

Bedroom. Twilight. **IVAN** *in bed, chest heaving*. **VASYA**, 10, *kisses father's hand*. **PRASKOVYA** *turns to window, agitated*. **DOCTOR** *stands, looking at watch*.

IVAN (*gasps to VASYA*): Forgive... (*strains toward PRASKOVYA*) Forgoe—. (*then quietly*) Where is it, where's death? Where's fear?

DOCTOR (*bends over, listens*): It's finished. (*closes patient's eyes*)

IVAN (*soft fading echo inside him*): Death, death's finished. It is no more.

Blackness.

SCENE 4

Sidewalk. Purplish twilight. White steps up to four-story fine row houses. **STRANGER**, *skinny, nervous, scraggly reddish beard, old suit, looks up at house numbers, windows above, then at piece of paper in his hand. Hesitates, then climbs steps. Front door is ajar. He peers inside*.

SCENE 5

Blackness. Silence. Then dark reddish-purple glow (like before your eyes open in morning). Purplish twilight from window reveals only IVAN, in bed, opening eyes. Room still shrouded.

IVAN: How, how can there be light? Is there really an after—? Is this what happens? (*looks round*) But why go to all the trouble to make it look like nothing's changed? When everything's changed, when I'm no longer—

STRANGER *now visible, paces, agitated*.

IVAN (*whispers, astonished*): Who, who are—?

STRANGER (*murmuring*): No, it's ridiculous, humiliating. I'll leave before he wakes ... No, it'd be more humiliating to leave, why should I? ... But what can he tell me? ... Maybe he can tell me what I've —

IVAN (*whispering*): Sit down at once! — (*to himself*) That's just what I would have said—before. No, I can't go back to the lies, the choking, the suffocation. But how can you not be the way you were before? ... And if, if this is the afterlife, will how I treat him make all the difference? Oh (*to STRANGER, kinder*). What, what are you doing here?

STRANGER, *surprised, glances at chair and sofa, hesitates, pulls up chair, leans forward, eyes shining, proud, imploring*.

STRANGER: Excuse me. From the moment I heard of your story—

IVAN: My story? I have a—

STRANGER: In the café—no one talks of anything else (*shrugs*), Ivan Ilyich dying, your quiet voice—

IVAN: My—? But who, how can anyone—

STRANGER (*shrugs*): They're buying drinks for, for, Pyotr, is it?

IVAN: Pyotr! But I trusted— (*to himself*) Could I have made him jealous of— . Who, who thinks of such things?

STRANGER (*impatient*): From that moment, it's been burning inside me, this question only you can—

IVAN: Question? There's no question I know the answer to. (*to himself*) The one thing I learned—

STRANGER (*leans forward*): You don't know what it means to me, to finally meet a man of action, who's learned that his whole life was false, that it was all— .

IVAN: Who are you to— what have you ever— (*stops, softer*) Is that why you've come?

STRANGER (*blushing*): It's true, that's what attracted me at first. ... But if it had only been that, only spite and envy, I would have stayed on the sidewalk, looking at your windows, having my fill. No, you're right, it's something else I've kept thinking about for years. You may be the only one who can tell me if this theory of mine's true. Not just the workings of my spiteful mind. ... I've kept dwelling on incidents, no, on a single incident from my past, and I wonder now if there aren't two, two kinds of shame —

IVAN: Shame? That's why you've come?

STRANGER *rises, gazes out window, turns*.

STRANGER: The first shame (*shrugs*), who doesn't know it? From the time I was a boy, an orphan (*fierce eyes, don't pity me*) being looked down on, being different— not fitting in. It wasn't only me who felt this: all my schoolfellows, they constantly clung together. Afraid of being different from each other. Not laughing when one should. Not laughing was a kind of leprosy.

IVAN *nods*. (*to himself*). Is that it, when the lies first—

STRANGER: And our whole country's rooted in shame. The peasant crawling before the master. We're a whole country of riders and ridden. At every level, of course. In the service—yes, I, too, was in the service, far below you, but even there, in the lowest depths, the very sight of those above us, of you, was a weight pressing down. ... And no matter what you accomplish—this, I only imagined, I've accomplished nothing, only dreamt of—you'd still live in constant fear of shame, at any moment not being as you should—

IVAN: You don't only mean shame in front of others.

STRANGER (*shrugs, starts again*): Since I was five or so, I felt there were two people inside me. I'd think of them as I was falling asleep, going over my day. This little judge, this perfect little self. And the rest of me, who was always—

IVAN: That's no judge. A judge's impartial. Your 'judge' is accuser, informer, witness, jury. Even under the old courts—

STRANGER: You don't know the number of times I've felt I'm in a theater, performing a play. I haven't written it, of course—it's been written *for* me. By someone who knows my every weakness, knows what makes me ashamed. God, perhaps (*laughs bitterly*). Still, I have to perform, it's about me, it's because of me— .

IVAN: Yes, yes, it's all been created for me: I'm special, I must be special. That's why I'm here, to have a purpose—I don't know what it'll be, but ... At least when there was God, there was someone to forgive us—

STRANGER: No, no, that's not it, what I felt that night. Not some God I was ashamed before—

IVAN: What's not it? What night?

STRANGER: No, no, it's because she wasn't above me—but *below* me, beneath me, socially, morally. That's why I felt that terrible shame. This second kind, I can't let go of. That's built into me.

IVAN: Who, who's *she*?

STRANGER *looks down, shaking head, lips pressed together.*

STRANGER: Liza. I met her at one of the 'fashion shops.' I was twenty—that's no excuse. I'd been humiliated—no, I humiliated *myself*, with some fellows I'd known from school. And I took it out on her. Not only during—during, of course—but after. Especially after. Lying there naked beside me, and I lectured her. Imagine! A client lecturing a prostitute on morality! I even brought tears to her eyes, she was new to it still, she'd only started out. (*winces*) She was trembling, her whole body, her lips. I became so carried away, I, I gave her my card. Ridiculously. Like I was some rich nobleman, some savior. Out of some book.

IVAN: She came to see you—

STRANGER: Just what I was most afraid of. She'd see what a poor contemptible wretch I was. So I shouted at her. Told her I'd just been toying with her for my own amusement. Then, for no reason, I broke down in tears. She rushed over to me. Don't you see? She'd come to be rescued, and she felt sorry for me! Tried to comfort me! 'They won't let me be good', I yelled at her. And then, after—after I took her, I put the rubles down on the table. When I looked up, she'd gone—left the money behind. That, that's when I felt the second shame. (*Looks away*) I rushed after her, to get down on my knees, in the wet snow. But she was nowhere.

IVAN: You knew where you could find her ...

STRANGER: She was better off without me, I told myself. Better off remembering how she'd paid off that scoundrel.

IVAN *nods, recognizing STRANGER's pain.*

STRANGER: This shame I still feel, not because she was above me—but *below* me. (*silence*)

IVAN: What did you mean when you pushed her away: 'They won't let me—I can't be good.'

STRANGER: Perhaps there's no *they*. Just to blame someone else for who I am.

IVAN (*ponders*): Was it just her you were ashamed before?

STRANGER: I told you! No one else was there!

IVAN: No. No, you were ashamed before—

STRANGER: Before God, you mean! Even if I don't believe in Him? Before this, this 'quiet' what, 'voice' of yours? This inner self? But how's that any different? That's simply being ashamed before God, or your conscience. Whatever you call it.

IVAN: No. This voice—it didn't judge me. There was no judgment in it. This voice, it's everything God's not. (*softly*) No commands. No shoulds. No telling you what to do. The opposite of God. (*aloud*) The second shame, you think it's shame before your deepest self. But, but—shame isn't what it wants, the voice. It wants, it wants—. It's not a theater!

STRANGER (*jumps up, agitated, looks around*): What, what's not a theater?

IVAN: Everything—what if it's not all here for us to be judged—

STRANGER: The Final Judgment? Who believes that anymore? As the purpose of the world? Only children, peasants!

IVAN (*nods*): Now, we just choose our own theater, our circus tent. To prove I'm brilliant, I'm nobler, I'm right—to prove I deserve, I'll be entitled—

STRANGER: Entitled? To what?

IVAN: (*realizing*): To, to not deserve pain. That's what our little internal theater's for. To control life. To not deserve pain. Not deserve death.

STRANGER: What—what do you know of any of this? You were always above everyone, you were the one judging.

IVAN: (*softly*): My younger brother created this little theater when he was a boy. It was made of paper, you know: the walls, even this little roof over the stage. In case it rained. So the actors wouldn't get wet. Oh, Pasha. And the seats, rows and rows—he painted them dark red. Draped this black cloth behind so that's all you'd see. He'd make up these little plays.

STRANGER (*sits, softer*): What happened to this, this theater of his?

IVAN: Oh, when he was in third form, my father smashed it, 'This is what you do instead of your studies? You think the world owes you a living? I'm decommissioning your theater.' ... I wasn't going to be like my brother. I would do what was expected, be responsible, fit in, be respected.

STRANGER: You became a judge. What else could you have been.

IVAN: But I created my own theater, don't you see? Nothing was real. If other people existed, it was to be my audience, to impress them. Witnesses, lawyers, jurors, my colleagues. My family, my family, too. I wanted everyone to say, 'look at this Ivan Ilyich, isn't he so—'

STRANGER: That's no different than anyone. Some are much better at it than others.

IVAN: Other people existed only so I could picture what they thought.

STRANGER: But what does this have to do with Liza? With why I came here?

IVAN: You said she didn't go along with your play? Rushed toward you, embraced you. Put your rubles back. That's what upset you.

STRANGER: Yes, I told you! I was ashamed in front of her.

IVAN: No, she was real. That's what upset you. You weren't in control. It became real—you had to prevent that—it was too dangerous—

STRANGER: And that, that's what I punished her for.

IVAN: Punished yourself.

STRANGER: Myself? She, she—pitied me. She was beneath me, and she pitied me! It felt like a crime to—

IVAN: It wasn't her being beneath you. What you couldn't forgive was her destroying the play you had to be in—

STRANGER: In which I pitied Liza. In which she existed for me to pity, to lecture, to make her ashamed? (*considers*) No, no, that's not it—she's not the one I can't forgive. ... If only, if only I'd believed in, (*grimaces, half-embarrassed*) in God. I felt like one of the centurions. I attacked her *because* she forgave me. I made her love sinful *because* it was innocent, don't you see. I had to make it sinful—because I was. Sin—that's what it was, deep down, the second shame. I've never said this to anyone, not to myself. Doesn't matter I didn't believe in sin, in God—

IVAN: It wasn't sin—You came here to be judged, that's—

STRANGER (*ignoring*): I was always too *clever* to believe. I knew, even as a boy, my little inner judge I'd made up: that's all God was, nothing else. Don't you see, I dug out a hole in myself. Where God would have been. To fill that hole, I either had to be God, be cleverer than anyone, just in my daydreams, of course—or be this miserable, loathsome scoundrel, who deserved to be detested.

IVAN: There was no one you'd let forgive you—

STRANGER: Exactly. Because I wanted to make myself God.

IVAN: But why, why did you *need* to be God?

STRANGER (*shrugs, angrily*): What difference does that—

IVAN: Because you wanted to be loved.

STRANGER: To be loved? That's absurd. Why'd I punish Liza, then, drive her away in the snow? Makes no sense!

IVAN: Because you had to be perfect. That's the only way you'd deserve to be loved. To be loved without being proud or special, that could only be pity. She wasn't following your rules. You couldn't let yourself be loved. That wasn't allowed—

STRANGER: But that doesn't explain—

IVAN: Your second shame? It's not shame, not sin, not judgment. ... (*face tightens*) The pain you still feel—I know it, the emptiness of turning away from what you really want. The hole you wanted to put God in—that hole isn't the lack of God. That's not why you suffered, I suffered ... I, I made the world unreal, other people, myself. Oh, oh—

STRANGER: What is it? Are you—

IVAN (*realizing*): You know, you know why I did this? I thought I had to have a purpose for being here, because of death. To justify having lived. But—(*weaker voice*) death doesn't exist.

STRANGER (*agitated*): How can death not exist? Death is—is everything.

IVAN (*astonishing himself*): No. Death only exists because we struggle against it. It's not a thing. We make it a thing.

STRANGER: Look at yourself! We don't die?

IVAN: Of course. But dying's not the opposite of living. There's not some difference, they're the same. (*nods toward candle*) Like the candle. It only gives light because it's burning down. Every moment you're living, you're dying. But where's death, the opposite of living? What is it? We've made it up. It's an idea. We invented it.

STRANGER: For what reason? It makes no sense.

IVAN: *They, they*—I understand who *they* are.

STRANGER *stares at him.*

IVAN: *They*, all the rules inside you, they won't let you be anything—except who they tell you to be. *They* used to be God, but without God, *they* still exist—all the reasons we can't just be alive. *They* tell us it's all a theater—if you aren't being judged, you'll have no reason for being, you won't exist. *They* make us believe in death. That except inside this theater, there's nothing, only death. (*softer*) This black cloth—

STRANGER: But if there's no theater, no audience, then ... who am I—

IVAN: That's it. There's no *I*. *It's* just to answer death. We make them up together. Death and I—it's one idea. Death seems terrible because it'll destroy *this I* we've made up, *this I* we cling to.

STRANGER: What? You're grimacing.

IVAN: What if the theater's not just based on death—what if it's to hide, to cover over something, someone? What if it's—

STRANGER: A grave? Over what?

IVAN: Over the part you can't let inside the theater—the part you've rejected to be *this I* you think you have to be.

STRANGER (*sarcastic*): And who did I have to not be? Who did I have to kill?

IVAN (*studies him*): You had to—to not be ordinary. (*mutual silence*) Do you know what made you give her your card?

STRANGER: I told you! To look nobler, make myself look grander—

IVAN: No, that's how you slipped it by them, how *they* let it pass.

STRANGER: Let it pass? What—

IVAN: You wanted to be rescued from your loneliness, from the barriers you'd created.

STRANGER: That's why I broke down crying when she came?

IVAN: You weren't afraid of her, of her coming. You were afraid *they'd* stop you, punish you.

STRANGER (*jumping up, angry*): And you, Ivan Ilyich? Who did you have to kill?

IVAN: I had to, I had to not be my brother.

STRANGER: Ah... But you're leaving out one thing. The most important thing. If there's no *they*, no God, no judgment, if we don't *believe* we're going to be judged, then everything's permitted.

IVAN: No, that's what *they* tell us—to protect themselves. If everything's real, if we don't make the world a theater, it's the opposite: Only one thing's permitted—

STRANGER: No, no—I've wrestled with this for years.

IVAN: The simplest thing. In every case. To see everything, everyone as real.

STRANGER: That's ridiculous. It's too simple! That'll tell you what to do in each situation? Have you ever done this? Has anyone?

IVAN: No. (*shakes head*) Only tonight, at the end. With my son. And this, this conversation with you.

STRANGER: A morality based on what, on nothing—

IVAN: On your not being here to justify anything, to prove anything, to perform. ... We imagine the world exists for this theater, for my little play to be acted out, that's why it's here—

STRANGER (*laughs bitterly*): Not the scientists, not the materialists.

IVAN: They only make it clearer. If the world's not here for this theater, it must be an accident, a chemical reaction— isn't that your science? Or if there *is* a reason, the only possible reason we can imagine is us, the universe exists for *us*. But what if neither's true?

STRANGER: Neither! Then why do we exist? If it's not because of science, not because of God? What else is there?

IVAN: What if it exists for itself? To be alive. Without making it into a theater.

STRANGER: (*smiles bitterly*): Your father did your brother a favor, then, throwing away his theater, smashing it to bits.

IVAN: My father. He was in a theater of his own, who a father was "supposed to be." Nothing else was real to him... We weren't real to him. But none of us, none of us was real to ourselves. ... (*to himself, staring off*) When I looked at my son, at the end, I knew I had touched him inside, that he was real, *inside*. That I wasn't the only one who could be touched. Death's not real. This was real.

Lights dim, room fades.

IVAN (*to himself*): Is this why it had to be this **STRANGER** who came, why it had to be him? But how can I explain this—if we're all in our separate theaters, how can you explain anything... to anyone (*deciding, aloud into the growing gloom*) Pasha. My brother.

Blackness

SCENE 6

Candles burn. PYOTR and GERASIM enter from hall doorway. They lift the body from the bed. It seems to weigh very little. The small oak chair is empty. GERASIM returns, picks it up to carry to other room.

GERASIM (*speaks to chair in his arms almost affectionately, as if it was a person*):
You're not needed in here anymore.

THE END

CONTRIBUTORS

JENNIFER SWANTON BROWN (Poem: *Winter Fish*) published her first poem in the *Palo Alto Times* when she was in the fifth grade. She has degrees in Linguistics and Nursing, and completed her Master of Liberal Arts at Stanford University in 2012, with a thesis titled *The Domestic Poetry of Eavan Boland, Image and Form*. She has been a poet/teacher with California Poets in the Schools (CPits) since 2001 and joined their Board of Directors in March 2013. Her poems have been published in multiple local journals and anthologies, including *Caesura*, *The Sand Hill Review*, and *The DQM Review*. In October 2013, Jennifer became the second Poet Laureate of Cupertino. Currently the CPitS Area Coordinator for Santa Clara County, and an occasional working poet/teacher, Jennifer also manages regulatory education for clinical researchers at the Stanford School of Medicine.

CANDY CARTER (*Fashion and Gender Debates Early 17th Century British Fashion*) is a fourth generation Californian, a sixth generation teacher, and a 2014 MLA graduate. She received her BA at Stanford (English/Psych) as part of the (in)famous Class of 1969, so she now gets two reunion invitations every five years. She and her husband of 45 years (and counting) live in an old fruit packing plant in beautiful downtown San José. Having finished the MLA program, she has returned to reading books for pure pleasure. She also enjoys Stanford football and the theater. She loves visiting London and tries to get there every year...somehow.

ANDY GROSE (Story: *Carp Lake*) is a 2001 graduate of the MLA program and a retired physician. His prior contributions to *Tangents* have included poems and short stories. His poems have appeared in *Shaman* and *The Journal of Graduate Liberal Studies*. Areas of special interest are the creative aspect of memory and the collaborative nature of storytelling.

LAURA MOORE (*The Play's the Thing ...*) Laura Moore's love of Shakespeare began in 8th grade, with *Romeo and Juliet*, and continued through years of studying and teaching English. She completed the MLA program in 2014 with a thesis on the final poems of Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen. After a lifetime in the Bay Area, last year she moved to a farm in Oregon, where she happily tends chickens, cows, sheep, and a sweet Maine Coone cat. She's currently scheming to procure a couple of pigs.

FAISAL NSOUR (Poem: *Hooked*) became a lover of literature during the MLA program when, to his surprise, he found himself drawn to the literature seminars. He concluded the program in 2014 with a thesis exploring forms of ignorance in William Faulkner's novel *Absalom, Absalom!* Having found many surprising similarities and provocative contrasts between his work as a software developer and the experience of reading good books, he is currently writing an essay on why programmers should read literature. He lives in Fremont with his wife and three children (who are often astounded by his unflinching command of ignorance).

SIDDHARTA SHOME (*Lifelike Machines and the Key Ingredient of Life*) is a third-year MLA student with a long-standing interest in the interaction between science and technology, and social, cultural and philosophical ideas. Born and raised in India, he came to the United States in 1993, initially to pursue graduate studies in engineering. He has a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from the University of Iowa, and works as a developer of mechanical design and simulation software. He lives in Fremont with his wife and daughter.

GENE SLATER (Play: *Twilight in St. Petersburg*) is a current MLA student. From Brooklyn, he received his BA in Government from Columbia, Masters in City Planning from MIT, fellowship to the London School of Economics, and mid-career Loeb Fellowship from Harvard. He helped found, and chairs, the leading financial advisory in the country for affordable housing financing and major public-private projects. Gene has been fascinated by Dostoevsky's characters for many years and is working on a film script about the informer in the Zebra killings in San Francisco in the early 1970s. He's happy his sons, both schoolteachers, enjoy his becoming a student again!

LARRY ZAROFF (Personal Essay: *Pacemaker Ironies*) spent twenty-nine years as a cardiac surgeon, including a stint as director of Harvard University's cardiac surgical research laboratory. During the next ten years he concentrated on climbing, including a first ascent of Chulu West, a 22,000-foot peak. He received a Stanford Ph.D. in 2000 and taught courses in medical humanities. Zaroff has written for the *New York Times*, *Pharos*, *Pulse*, *Atrium*, and other publications. His awards include Outstanding Faculty Advisor for the Human Biology Program, and Stanford's Teacher of the Year.

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