

SUMMER 2018

# TANGENTS

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

IN THIS ISSUE...

*Essays by* Rachelle Burnside, Cassy Christianson,  
Parker Monroe, Gene Slater

*Poems by* Martha McDaniel, Prabhu Palani,  
Mason Tobak

*Short Memoir by* Cheri Block Sabraw

## PUBLISHING NOTES

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VOLUME 17

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## A GRATEFUL FARE WELL

Since the spring of 2000, Stanford's MLA Program has supported – and been enlightened, uplifted, and entertained by – the yearly publication of *Tangents: The Journal of the Master of Liberal Arts Program at Stanford University*. You are holding in your hand the seventeenth issue of the journal. That's seventeen issues, 141 published pieces, 588 pages of carefully edited and thoughtfully presented writing. And for seventeen years, every single word, every single verse, every single photograph, every single essay has passed through Oscar Firschein's hands and has undergone his careful scrutiny. We've come to expect intelligent opinion, elegant writing, and beautiful design that showcases the work our students are doing and that our alumni continue to pursue. It all looks so easy, and Oscar has made it seem so.

Let me take this bittersweet opportunity to offer the entire program's profound gratitude, and to wish Oscar and Theda a well-deserved retirement from the pressures and deadlines, from the decision-making and proofreading, and from the endless cycle of editorship. We hope that you remember only the joys of the final, beautiful product, *Tangents* itself; without you, Oscar, it would never have taken flight nor soared so high.



## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present this issue of *Tangents*, the journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For the seventeenth volume, we have chosen this diverse group of works by students and alumni, which include four essays, four poems and a short memoir.



We greet the arrival of a new editor, Candy Carter, a graduate of the MLA program, who has previously published articles in *Tangents*.

The editors of *Tangents* would like to pay special tribute to our gifted co-editor Roxanne Enman, who is taking a break from participation in *Tangents* this year. We look forward to her return to our staff in future issues of the magazine.

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.



The editors would appreciate any feedback on the contents of this issue. Send an email to [oscarf1@earthlink.net](mailto:oscarf1@earthlink.net) and [candycarter@alumni.stanford.edu](mailto:candycarter@alumni.stanford.edu)

Candy Carter

Oscar Firschein, Editors.

# WANDA HICKEY AND THE FROG POND

by Cheri Block Sabraw



May and June signal prom time in American high schools. You know, the *Junior Prom* and the *Senior Ball*, lavish dress-up galas where fully blossomed women wear tiny satin purple dresses and stiletto pumps and boys, who look five years younger than the girls, dressed in patent leather dress shoes and purple paisley cummerbunds, bring their dates purple orchid corsages that need a sharp pin with a fake pearl on the end just to stay on a spaghetti strap or no strap at all.

Have you ever walked by an old pond full of algae and listened to melodious croaking as male frogs

compete for female attention?

Prom season is much like a frog pond.

I had the distinct privilege of being a witness to this scene as a high school teacher for at least twenty years, as juniors and seniors (and some lucky sophomores) vied for the *best dates*. Because the boys viewed the women with the hottest bodies and most sordid reputations as the *best dates*, and because so few women in high school at that time met such description, the ratio of hot dates to awkward boys was small. Most boys ended up taking very sweet women.

Granted, things have changed since I left teaching in public school in 1998. The dresses, shoes, tattoos, and after-prom activities still come to mind, but one thing rarely changes: the angst that male frogs go through in making the right connection. You know, the fear of rejection and the worry that their date might drop them when a better request comes in, one that now (I understand from my nieces and nephews), arrives sometimes via text. Boo! How unromantic!

During those hot and frenzied pond-days in my former classroom, when the din reached orgasmic proportions, many of the guys and the girls sought out my advice, privately, of course.

What I heard and what I said in response to OMG, what I heard, will remain confidential, in case any of my former students, who are now in their mid-forties, happen to read this story.

During class time, especially for those in 5th or 6th period, a time in the afternoon when blood sugar dropped and the smell of freshly cut lawn wafted into Room N-9, I resorted to a different lesson plan. To soothe the ache and quell the urge, I used a strategy once employed by my own 4th grade teacher, who used to read us *Charlotte's Web* after lunch to calm us down: I would read a story to my high schoolers—one of the funniest stories on the planet—for the three days leading up to the prom.

You have to understand that for an academic slave driver like me (who rarely showed a movie and whose students had to cover 150 pages of a classic novel a week) to read aloud for *three straight days* was not only shocking, but odd. My students tilted their heads and murmured how juvenile this activity seemed. That is, until the story got going...

I read them *Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories* by Jean Shepherd<sup>1</sup>, the tale of three awkward young men in a frog pond, so to speak. This story I read to my students for over twenty years, in five increments a day, for three days and it never got old for me.

On Monday after the Prom, for those who showed up and weren't nursing a hangover, I feasted my eyes on some of the most exhausted green faces I had ever seen. But hey! It's a Monday.

"How was your weekend? Did you all do your homework? Did you read those 150 pages of *The Winter of Our Discontent*? Or were you kissing your Frog Prince over the weekend?"

I almost *croaked* laughing.

## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> Jean Shepherd was a nightly fixture in New York talk radio starting in the 1950's. The humorous stories in "*Wanda Hickey's...*" appeared in magazines in the 1960s and '70s.

# MORE THAN A LOVE LETTER: ON WOODY ALLEN'S *MIDNIGHT IN PARIS*

by Parker Monroe



In a scene from Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, Scott Fitzgerald pours champagne for the bullfighter Manolete. Scott is seated next to Cole Porter (with cigarette). Seated below them are Zelda Fitzgerald, time traveler Gil Pender, the film's main character, and Linda Lee Thomas, wife of Porter.

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*Midnight in Paris* (2011) is Woody Allen's love letter to a city he has visited throughout his life, much as his earlier film, *Manhattan*, (1979) was to his home, New York City. Both films show the cities at their most romantic, beautiful and exciting. *Midnight in Paris* was a box office hit, with international sales of over \$151 million dollars (Evanier 120), a comparative rarity in the 82-year-old writer-director's career. It won the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay and the Golden Globe Award for Best Screenplay, and was nominated for three additional Academy Awards. *Midnight in Paris* is also the first Woody Allen movie filmed exclusively in Paris. Two of Allen's earlier films, *Love and Death* (1975) and *Everyone Says I Love You* (1996) have Paris as only one of their settings.

Throughout a career that spans forty-eight films he has written and directed, Allen has several themes that he has frequently addressed. In *Midnight in Paris*, Allen explores and interweaves three of these themes with grace and seeming effortless, making the film among the leading works in his oeuvre. Together, these ideas make up the intellectual skeleton of the film.

First, *Midnight in Paris* is an exploration of nostalgia. This material defines the story, dramatic conflict, and the way the protagonist changes or grows. Allen's own bent toward nostalgia is well known, and his treatment of the topic here is both tender and starkly realistic. Second, the film is a philosophical consideration of the essential role the arts play in our culture and humanity, depicted via lavish recreations of live performances and spoken text by famous artists of the 1920s and 1890s. Allen is stating that the arts are among the best markers a culture or civilization leaves in history, and that they are arguably the ideal way to transcend time. Third, *Midnight in Paris* is a work of *post-modern* cinema, in which Allen's protagonist omnisciently moves through time, and though historical artistic moments, including the Belle Époque (1871-1914) and the Jazz Age. Allen's setting the film in multiple eras forces the viewer to observe its action at a critical remove and to see the film

as a manifestation of the creative process. Part of this process reflects Allen's own development by celebrating the rich film history of Paris through visual references to the work of great French filmmakers. In that sense, *Midnight in Paris* is an exercise in *meta-cinema*, a mode of filmmaking in which the film informs the audience that they are watching a work of fiction.

Thus, while a Parisian love letter on the surface, *Midnight in Paris* is also a sophisticated exploration of aesthetics, and shows us one of America's most important filmmakers at the height of his creative powers.



The extended opening montage, set to Sidney Bechet's (1897-1959) French tune *Si tu vois ma mere*, operates on multiple levels to create the nostalgic tone for the rest of the film. Featuring sixty-one contemporary views of the city's most beloved buildings, squares, bridges and historical settings in both day and night, sunshine and rain, Allen paints a picture of urban beauty without rough edges. By its gently rocking rhythm and beguiling tune, Bechet's music, written in Paris in the 1950s and of a sound-world that clearly marks its historical moment, makes clear that this urban portrait of past and present will be affectionate.

In contrast to Allen's *Manhattan*, with its black and white montage of a highly energized, fast-paced New York set to George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the opening of *Midnight in Paris* has a highly dynamic, but slower, gentler feeling, setting the stage for the action that follows. The stunning settings that enhance the nostalgic feeling continue throughout the film. The most significant is the midnight location from which Gil Pender (Owen Wilson), Allen's protagonist, escapes twenty-first century Paris for that of the 1920s: set on the steps of the Church of St. Etienne du Mont, rue de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève. This is the magical center of the film – the locus of the time travel – and it is probably not coincidental that Allen selected the location because Sainte Geneviève is the patron saint of Paris. The place is quintessentially Parisian: the church holds the tombs of Blaise Pascal and Jean Racine; Marat is buried in the adjacent cemetery.

## THE TENSION BETWEEN THE LURE OF NOSTALGIA AND LIVING LIFE IN THE PRESENT IS THE FILM'S CENTRAL CONFLICT.

The tension between the lure of nostalgia and living life in the present is the film's central conflict. *Midnight in Paris* is the story of a writer, Gil Pender, who comes to Paris with his fiancée, Inez (Rachel McAdams), accompanying her parents on their business trip. Gil writes for Hollywood and has had some success, but is really working on a novel about a nostalgia shop. Gil's own nostalgic personality is delineated early in the film. He is trapped in the past. In fact, his last name, Pender, derives from the Olde English "pyndan," meaning "to shut up or enclose." His novel shares its title *Out of the Past* with the 1947 Jacques Tourneur film noir with Robert Mitchum and Kirk Douglas.

Throughout, Gil travels back and forth between the 2010s and 1920s. The film's time-travel element is marvelous fantasy and a perfect platform for much of the humor that runs through the movie (Nostalgia and aesthetic themes notwithstanding, it should be noted that *Midnight in Paris* is also a comedy).

During his nighttime visits to the wild Paris of the *années folles* (crazy years), the decade of the 1920s, Gil meets many of the artists and writers about whom he has fantasized, including Picasso, Matisse, Dalí, Buñuel, Man Ray, Josephine Baker, Cole Porter, Hemingway, Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein. He dances with Djuna Barnes.

While in the 1920s, Gil also develops a romantic attachment to Adriana (Marion Cotillard), who has been the mistress of Picasso, and before that, of Braque and Modigliani. From her, Gil learns about the nostalgia among Parisians for the city in the 1890s, the Belle Époque. By making this second transition to an even earlier era, Gil grows and changes as a character. In travelling to the 1890s with Adriana, the time period in which she would (and ultimately does) choose to live, Gil realizes that the nostalgic world in which he has been living, both in



his fiction and everyday life, is unsustainable. While in Belle Époque Paris, Gil and Adriana visit Maxim's, where they encounter Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, and Gauguin. In this meeting, Adrianna learns of a costume design position at the Ballet, and she then elects to remain in the earlier era. Gil realizes during this trip that living in an idealized past of artists and writers, however exciting and romantic, is an unsustainable fantasy. By doing so, he ignores being truly alive in the present.

Nostalgia has provided Woody Allen a rich vein of inspiration throughout his career. In one of his earliest films, *Sleeper* (1973), the protagonist, Miles Monroe, is a health food store employee and clarinetist, who is cryogenically frozen and brought back to life two hundred years later in a dystopian America. Trapped in the future, he longs for the 1970s (though often through humor and sarcasm). During a highly creative period in the 1980s, Allen took viewers on warm-hearted trips to the 1930s and 1940s in *Zelig* (1983), and to the 1940s in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1984), and *Radio Days* (1987). Allen's own childhood in the 1930s and 1940s was difficult, and his family dysfunctional (his parents would often not speak to each other for months at a time). He escaped that difficult reality by practicing magic tricks, playing clarinet, and by writing jokes for newspaper columnists. By the time he was in his late teens, he was working full-time as a comedy writer and was the bread-winner for his family, earning \$1,600 per week (Evanier 90), the equivalent \$14,000 in 2017.

Allen has been quoted as being both less romantic and more practical about the nostalgia of *Midnight ...* than one might conclude from the preceding analysis:

"I just wanted to put people in the mood of Paris... There's always a sense that if you could have lived in a different time, things would have been more pleasant. One thinks back, for instance to *Gigi*, and you think, well, this is Belle Époque Paris; they have horses and carriages and gas lamps and everything is beautiful. Then you start to realize that if you went to the dentist, there was no Novocain, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Women die in childbirth – there were all kinds of terrible problems. If you were an aristocratic gentile living in Paris at the time, that was a step forward. If you were not upper class, or you were Jewish, it would not have been such a dream existence. But you block that out." (Shone 256)

In the end, Gil walks happily away across the Pont Alexandre III with Gabrielle (Léa Seydoux), a Parisian woman he met in the market, herself both a twenty-first century beauty and a lover of nostalgia. After two unsuccessful attempts with Inez and Adriana, he has found love in the here and now with Gabrielle.



## LIVE PERFORMANCE AS HUMAN AFFIRMATION

Among the distinctive aspects of Woody Allen's oeuvre is that a majority of the films of his maturity (after the early joke-based movies) include an element of live performance. Not to be confused with soundtrack music, these brief performances serve momentarily as both the visual and sound action of the film. In *Husbands and Wives* (1992), Mia Farrow and Liam Neeson attend a performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 at the New York Philharmonic. In *Sweet and Lowdown* (1999), Sean Penn performs the intricate guitar solos created by his character, based on Django Reinhardt. In *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, (1985), Mia Farrow performs on ukulele and sings *Alabama Bound* with Jeff Daniels. In *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995), a Greek chorus comments on the dramatic action and performs a song and dance number to close the film. Giuseppe Verdi's late masterwork *Otello* plays a central role in *Match Point* (2005). In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), Michael Caine recites part of an e. e. cummings poem.

Allen includes this material to make the point that in a world without God, the arts (and in his case, particularly music) are one of the essential things that make life not only bearable, but worth living. Gertrude Stein (Kathy Bates) advises Pender in *Midnight in Paris*, "the role of the artist is not to give in to despair, but to inspire." Allen is an active musician, and has performed as a clarinetist in a Dixieland jazz band for decades. Second, these fleeting moments of poetry and music make the viewer aware these interludes are performances within a performance. Because *Midnight* is operating on more than one aesthetic level, it needs to be viewed

with heightened discernment. It is as though the filmmaker is saying to his audiences: “Pay attention. These are things I truly treasure. You might love them, too.”

## ...IN A WORLD WITHOUT GOD, THE ARTS (AND IN HIS CASE, PARTICULARLY MUSIC) ARE ONE OF THE ESSENTIAL THINGS THAT MAKE LIFE NOT ONLY BEARABLE, BUT WORTH LIVING.

Allen explores live performance, and performance-within-performance, most powerfully in *Midnight in Paris*. Here, Allen’s time-travelling writer Gil, freshly arrived in the 1920s, observes with disbelief, Cole Porter (an Allen idol) across the room performing *Let’s Do It (Let’s Fall in Love)* at a dinner party. Moments later, he is transfixed, as Josephine Baker performs *La Conga Blicoti* at Bricktop’s legendary nightclub. On a subsequent trip backward in time, Gil is joined by his 20s-era muse Adriana, when they travel by horse-drawn carriage in the Belle Époque to Maxim’s. They hear violinists perform the Barcarolle from Jacques Offenbach’s *The Tales of Hoffman*, and then visit the Folies Bergère to watch the rollicking Can-Can from *Orpheus in the Underworld*. The performances highlight many of the things that are most warmly remembered about their eras. The 1920s music brings wit and sophistication from Porter, raw sexual energy from Baker, and alcohol-infused euphoria throughout. The Belle Époque musical performances of Jacques Offenbach bring out the sense of mystery and fantasy about the opera’s main character, Hoffman, who appears in four different incarnations throughout the opera, as well as expressing the sexual energy of the Can-Can.

In *Midnight in Paris*, Allen finds a brilliant way to take the performance elements used in many of his previous films to a higher level with loving and historically accurate recreations. When the film is over, we remember Hemingway and Cole Porter as much as we do Gil Pender.

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### POST-MODERN PERSPECTIVE

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Allen accomplishes something unusual with these historical performances: he shows us what it was like to be at a 1920s era party and to hear Cole Porter (Conal Fowkes) perform. Cole Porter sings and plays the piano for dozens of sophisticated guests in an elegant apartment. Allen films the scene dynamically, moving the camera through the room to give a sense of the energy of the time and the place, with the star songwriter at its center. And in fact, Cole Porter, Ernest Hemingway, Salvador Dalí and the other artists featured in Gil’s time travelling are the stars of *Midnight in Paris*. By creating roles in the film for these historical giants, Allen takes them from history and brings them, and the creative process, to the forefront.



Allen does this not only to remind us that the arts – particularly by these artists in a time and place he clearly loves – are some of what make human existence beautiful, and “inspiring,” as Gertrude Stein said. In *Midnight in Paris*, he is also creating a light-hearted but nonetheless involving post-modern study of the creative process. The protagonist Gil Pender works on his novel, *Out of the Past*, throughout the film, and it isn’t always clear where Gil’s novel ends and the film in which he is a character begins.

*Midnight in Paris* pays homage to other films set in the city, and in that sense, is also a work of meta-cinema. Occasionally, it also takes advantage of its time-travel to play with film history. At a 1920s party with Adriana, Gil sees Spanish filmmaker Luis Buñuel (Adrien Brody). Gil playfully suggests to Buñuel the plot to his 1962 masterwork *The Exterminating Angel*. It being an Allen film, the scene is turned into a joke, with the filmmaker asking the very questions his future audiences would ask in the 1960s about a scene in which the guests are trapped at a dinner party. The irony of the moment is both funny and touching, as a man from 2010 advises a young director in the 1920s about a masterpiece film he will make in the 1960s.

*Midnight in Paris* uses historic Parisian scene locations to make reference and pay homage to other famous films set in the city, a common technique for directors of films to honor one another and great films of the past. In the opening montage, we see the Left Bank shops on rue Galande that are also seen in Richard Linklater's *Before Sunset* (2004); the avenue des Camoens's view of the Eiffel Tower is also seen in Truffaut's *Le Dernier Metro* (1980); the columns of Parc Monceau are in a view like that in Vincente Minnelli's *Gigi* (1958); and the double-decker Pont Bir Hakeim is seen in both Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1972), and later, in Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010).

It has been observed about the ending of *Midnight in Paris*:

By the film's close, Gil has grown up; on a bridge at night, he meets a real and contemporary young French woman who sells old records. And she likes to walk in the rain, so off they go onto the dark, charmed streets, perhaps no longer needing to leave the present. The film's ending on a Paris bridge is not only specific to the city but suggestive of what makes Paris so cinematically rich. (Annette Insdorf, quoted in Block 120)

A matured Gil Pender has found connection, and perhaps true love with Gabrielle on the Pont Alexandre III. That the person with whom Gil connects is herself a lover of memories and Cole Porter means she is a much better fit for Gil than the materialistic Californian, Inez, or the Belle Époque's Adriana.

Woody Allen has been quoted as saying that if he was unable to live in New York, he would move to Paris. In Allen's familiar world without God or other organizing moral order, he offers an opinion about what makes life beautiful and worth living. Allen states that love and the arts – music especially, but also literature, theater, and dance – can serve to distract us for a while from our certain end, and from nothingness.

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# THE EYE OF LEO DIES FOR LOVE

by Mason Tobak



Artist: Alexander Jamieson (1822)

The circuitry that sparks love's meaning  
 Is powered by a wayward solar gust,  
 From desperate pinioned stars, crosscut to dust  
 And banished, in some myth, for too much preening.  
 The passion we think real alchemist gold  
 Is disembodied hubris from the stars' demise,  
 Slung like twisters through purely random skies,  
 Spinning formless all around, as love's blindfold.  
 So do not be bitter that his lies beguiled,  
 For he is just a speck in gales from space,  
 Bewitched to poach slyly in forged embrace,  
 And hating him would be hating an enemy's child.  
 The scorched earth we love on has no avatar;  
 The tortured dead stars don't care who we are.

# JOSEPH CONRAD'S *THE SECRET AGENT*:

# EXPLORING THE LOSS OF PLACE

by Gene Slater

*In the fusion of place and soul, the soul is as much of a container of place as place is a container of soul, both are susceptible to the same forces of destruction.* Robert Pogue Harrison (Malpas, *Intelligence* 135)

Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* has come of age in the 21st century. After September 11, his 1907 novel based on an actual terrorist incident in London became the most cited work of prose in the media and called "the classic novel for the post-9/11 age," the first great novel of global terrorism and the herald of contemporary terrorism (Feldman; Miller; Reiss). In fact, the novel, with Conrad's usual oblique angle on his subject, is about a world in which governments exploit the fear of terrorism. The bomb plot at the center of the novel is in fact not the work of anarchists who are blamed for it, but concocted by a representative of a czarist Russian-like eastern power to show England how vulnerable it is to attack. The aim is to convince the English public and its government to give up its precious liberty for safety, and join in a common repressive campaign against dissidents. The novel in this sense may strike prophetic chords, but Conrad's purpose in the novel was not political, and he described the story as that of its most apolitical character. A novel that has become topical because of politics is concerned not with particular views or societal solutions, but with something common to all such views. What Conrad reveals throughout the novel is the danger of abstract thinking about society and ordinary people, whether by police superintendents, gentle or deadly anarchists, society matrons or leaders of parliament. As Judith Shulevitz astutely observes, the idea Conrad

sets out to undermine in *The Secret Agent* is the "sin of thinking abstractly about moral and human affairs—scientifically, impersonally and instrumentally" (Shulevitz). Conrad uses the bomb plot to explode our common assumptions.

## THE FIRST GREAT NOVEL OF GLOBAL TERRORISM AND THE HERALD OF CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM

The novel shows that the consequence of abstract thinking, not caring about the specifics and the complexity of ordinary life is fragmentation: of individuals and of society. This happens to the novel's hapless slow-witted boy carrying the bomb and stumbling against a tree root. Many critics have noted the way that Conrad fragments time in this early modernist novel, almost 20 years before Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. But *The Secret Agent* also fragments place in a way few novels have ever attempted.

Rather than build a sense of place in which the characters and thus the reader connect to their surroundings, Conrad explores what it means to no longer be connected to one's environment. What

happens when we lose our sense of linkage to the world around us and it becomes empty of meaning? Such an exploration was an extraordinary ambition and, more than its terrorist plot, makes *The Secret Agent* seem peculiarly relevant to the deliberately placeless settings where much of modern life is lived. Conrad, renowned for his evocative settings in distant continents, is one of the great guides to *place* and *placelessness* in ordinary life.

## WHAT IS PLACE?

Conrad was a pioneer in thinking about place. A century ago, few thinkers had tried to systematically understand this type of experience. Looking at more recent philosophical and psychological studies together with *The Secret Agent* gives us a deeper understanding of a central feature of our lives that Western culture rarely trains us to analyze or recognize.

Place is often perceived as having only a peripheral role in our lives. It is usually trivialized as either “a mere backdrop for concrete actions or thoughts” (Casey, *Getting* xiii) or an occasional, semi-mysterious influence that affects us in particular locations (especially extraordinary, highly imageable settings which we visit for this very purpose, such as Venice (Lynch 12), Machu Picchu, the Taj Mahal).

Neither the functional or romanticized view helps us to systematically understand the role of “ordinary places that are embedded in our lives and in which our lives are ... embedded because they are indeed so much a part of us and we so much a part of them” (Malpas, *Intelligence* 69). This mutual embedding is precisely the nature of place in *The Secret Agent*. Place is a specific and crucial dimension of experience, a fundamental aspect of our being in the world. Decades of philosophical, literary and urban thinking suggest that Place is *the key link in the relationship between self and world*. Place is how the self and world are connected.

We can now begin to understand the importance of place and therefore placelessness. The experience of place is focused on “a special kind of object,” a “center of value,” outside the self (Tuan 11, 17) that creates a meaningful “link between individuals and their surroundings” (Auge 94). The Greek root for place, in fact, is a ‘broad way’ or ‘opening’ that makes us pause. This is the opposite of space, whose Greek root is a measure of distance, and which we simply go through (O.E.D.) Place is thus the “site where

[we] experience [our] being” (Finch 31), where we experience our self as connected to the world and not merely passing through it.

When we ask what is it about *particular* locations that create this link with the self, four essential attributes of place stand out.

First is the interiority of place, for unlike space that we pass by, place allows us to enter inside it, physically or, especially, imaginatively (Malpas “Singularity” 78). Place allows us to experience our self “in a larger world in miniature.” A room with deep meaning to us, a set of church spires that beckon Proust’s Marcel: each opens a “burgeoning world” (Casey, *Fate* 194). Each promises a way of being for the self.

Second is the interiority of self. Finding ourselves has a second meaning, of course. Strange as it seems, our experience of place—of something outside us—opens up a region *within* the self. “To know a place is to find one’s own interiority, one’s own self, as given, even if only partially, within that place” (Malpas, *Intelligence* 79). An exchange takes place. To inhabit a room that deeply affects us “*is for it to be in us*” (Casey, *Fate* 293). This experience is so much part of the daily fabric of our lives that we often take it for granted. A specific location seems to embody, to be the outward expression of, a particular part of our self. And this part of our self seems to be the inward expression of that setting. A winding, narrow lane seems to embody our mood. And that mood, when we later experience it, seems to reflect this one lane. This exchange of the outer and inner, the objective and subjective, is well-known: much of literature is its depiction. But what this exchange tells us about the nature of the self has rarely been systematically pursued.

A third key dimension of place is the *singularity* of our experience there. The uniqueness of place is its essential quality, but what makes it unique is its connection to the self. “What is singular about ... place—the character that belongs to that place alone—is the character” of what it opens inside us (Malpas, “Singularity” 65, 79). A specific part of our self is bound up with that spot.

Finally, place is how we situate our self in a world of meaning. “Place’s power “helps” direct and stabilize us, ... memorialize and identify us, ... tell us who and what we are in terms of *where* we are” (Casey, *Getting* 66). Because of its deep connection to the self, place helps orient us and give us direction. Our identity is thus rooted in our experience of place.

## PLACE AND IDENTITY IN THE SECRET AGENT

This connection of place to identity—and what happens when this connection is broken—is especially crucial in *The Secret Agent*. Casey might be describing many of its scenes: “To lack a primal space is to be ‘homeless’ . . . without any effective means of orientation in a complex and confusing world” (Casey, *Getting* xv). What place means and the need for place are at the heart of the novel. We see characters from the inside struggling to externally confirm their inner selves in the outer world, that is, through the experience of place.

**THIS CONNECTION  
OF PLACE TO  
IDENTITY—AND WHAT  
HAPPENS WHEN THIS  
CONNECTION IS  
BROKEN—IS ESPECIALLY  
CRUCIAL IN *THE SECRET  
AGENT*.**

At the center of this novel rooted in the tension between place and placelessness are two characters, Mr. and Mrs. Verloc, whom we are introduced to in one of the most extraordinary openings of any modernist novel. We see each of them, one at a time, standing behind the counter of a seedy Soho shop that sells French pornographic postcards. As befits proprietors of such a shop, each deliberately looks as blank as possible. Mr. Verloc offers a “firm, steady eyed impudence which seemed to hold back the threat of some abominable menace” (4).<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Verloc, “steady eyed like her husband, . . . preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter” (5). The Verlocs are as closed to their surroundings, their faces as immobile, as we will later find them when they lose their source of identity in the outside world.

As the story unfolds, we learn what each of this husband and wife have never told each other. We discover what place means to each of them, and then what happens when it seems to dissolve. At the center of Mr. Verloc’s life is his secret connection to a foreign embassy which pays him to host anarchists

and keep tabs on their doings. The story proper begins with Verloc, called to the embassy, contentedly striding past Hyde Park, fully participating in and enjoying all the qualities of place. He and his environment seem to become part of each other. As he gazes at the polished horsemen and women of London’s elite, Verloc too seems newly polished. His “whole person exhaled the charm of almost dewy freshness.” The mild sun might be part of him. Its “punctual and benign vigilance” mirrors his own “glances of comparative alertness.” “The red, coppery gleams” of the houses, carriages and horses inflect the “black of Mr. Verloc’s overcoat” (10). These surroundings inhabit Verloc as much as he inhabits them.

This fusion of self and surroundings is the essence of place. Our surroundings seem to become part of us and we project part of our self onto our surroundings (Pallasmaa 134-135). This process occurs in a simple but remarkable way. We project the qualities that we feel “on things, on persons, on the world” and “the self is inwardly affected” by the embracing place (Tuan 9). Verloc projects his indolence onto the pleasant luxury of Hyde Park, and internalizes the indolence he sees around him. This identification with his surroundings confirms how he sees himself.

But told at the embassy that he must arrange a bombing of Greenwich Observatory to destroy English complacency, he loses his own. Verloc, frightened and overwhelmed, retraces his steps, but the Hyde Park of opulence, luxury and indolence no longer exists for him. His “detachment from the material world was . . . complete” (11). Finally reaching home, he seeks relief from this isolation by looking out his bedroom window. But all he feels is the “latent unfriendliness of all out of doors” (46), as if he and the world are entirely separate.

His wife, Winnie Verloc goes through a far deeper experience of loss of place. Her connection to the world, it becomes clear, is to her younger brother, Stevie; she had married her husband only to enable her to take care of Stevie. If the idea that another human being embodies place seems surprising, Yi-Fu Tuan reminds us of our first connection to the outside world.

How does a young child understand place? If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the mother is the child’s primary place . . . the first and enduring and independent object in the infant’s world (Tuan 29).



Although we think of place as something that is essentially stable, the mother, although mobile, represents for the child “stability and permanence” (Tuan 29). In a similar way, Winnie’s connection to Stevie is her touchstone in the world. What is permanent about her brother for Winnie is her concern for him. He embodies for her a central part of her self: her devotion and caring. This is one of the strongest forces in creating place: “cultivation for place *localizes caring . . . caring belongs to places*” (Casey, *Getting* 175). Stevie is thus Winnie’s primary place in the world: her identity is fused with her desire to protect him. Through Stevie the world is made real to her. The house she has lived in all these years has no meaning to her without him.

She glanced all round the parlor . . . it was in all essentials of domestic propriety and domestic comfort a respectable home. Her devoted affection missed out of it her brother Stevie . . . She missed him poignantly, with all the force of her protecting passion. This was the boy’s home too . . . On this thought Mrs. Verloc rose (159).

This moment is charged with dramatic irony for the reader. Winnie still believes her brother is safe. Nothing suggests more powerfully what it will mean to her connection with the world to learn that her husband in his cowardice gave Stevie a bomb to carry and that not even Stevie’s body exists. When she learns this he has been blown to bits, Winnie’s features become set “into a frozen contemplative immobility addressed to a whitewashed wall with no writing on it” (198).

A similar sense of loss occurs to characters in painful and powerful ways throughout the novel. They experience a sudden disconnection from the place that normally supports their identity. By the novel’s end, London no longer exists for the anarchist Ossipon. He walks directionless, “feeling nothing, seeing nothing” (253). Few novels, modernist or otherwise, focus so pervasively, across so many characters, on the loss of place.

When we look at *The Secret Agent* through the lens of loss of place, aspects of the novel that may seem puzzling or extraneous become central. Indeed, characters’ placeness helps explain why a novel about an anarchist bombing contains so many characters’ experience of London as an aqueous abyss, and why the novel’s hard-earned psychological realism is so infused with the strange and surreal,

with scenes of a carriage pulled by an “infirm horse . . . dancing mincingly on his toes with infinite patience” (129). The reason in both cases is the same: they are how the world appears without the structure of place. Conrad deliberately fragments the reader’s sense of time, creating slippages of time by setting earlier events after later ones so that the reader experiences the disorientation that the characters feel from slippage of place. The reader, like key characters, doesn’t know where he is.

A final, much-debated issue about the book takes on new meaning if we focus on loss of place. What is the novel’s underlying political vision (or anti-vision)? Why are the ideas of naïve anarchists, violent revolutionaries, foreign authoritarians, the British police and high officials *all* depicted so ironically and negatively?

the great institutions that comprise official London—The House, the Home Office, Scotland Yard, the Greenwich Observatory, the Russian Embassy, even the soirees of the lady patroness of Michaelis—are left undisturbed by the fundamental questions or by bombs, a taint of fraudulence clinging to them as it does the discussions of the anarchists. (Epstein 193)

What drives the satire of all these views, and why are all the political views relevant enough to be depicted at length if this is ultimately Mrs. Verloc’s story? Their significance becomes clearer when we think about the value and role of place for Conrad. In *The Secret Agent*, any social or political view which *ignores* the specific, complex, singular connection of each individual with the world around her, with what for her makes the world a place, is inherently flawed. Reductionist, generalized visions ignore the peculiar personal connection to place. Such grand visions stumble against the complexities of the world, as Winnie’s brother, about to plant the bomb, stumbles against a tree root. Moreover, when the connection to place is discounted, the world outside becomes blurred, amorphous and unreal, a “slimy, deep trench” in which we are lost and drown (208). For “place brings with it the very elements sheared off” by visions of uniformity: “identity, character, nuance, history” (Casey, *Fate* xiii). These are the elements Conrad insists on, as stubborn and particular as the tree root or Winnie’s silent determination. He shows what happens when they are ignored. The novel focuses on the details that are overlooked.

The anarchist Michaelis's view is thus that of the book as a whole: life is based in the particular. "... All idealization makes life poorer... to take away its character of complexity - ... is to destroy it." For "history is made by men but they do not make it in their heads" (34). They make it in the concreteness of their interaction with what is around them. The most fundamental fact of life is a simple one. "No one lives in the world in general" (Relph 188). History is made, life is lived, not in the abstraction of space but in the specific— what Aristotle saw as the influence of place. This power, of our connection to place, can have positive and negative effects. "There is no being except being in place. Put the other way around, there is no utterly placeless existing, even if there are beings deeply alienated in and from place who suffer from the dire state of being out of their native places" (Casey, *Getting* 313). This sudden placelessness is what Conrad explores in *The Secret Agent*. He makes its effects and causes real and haunting to us.

### THE NEED FOR PLACE

From this survey of place in the novel, we can now address two fundamental and related questions. What drives the need for place? And what, in a rigorous sense, is place? What stands out as we look at what place means for each of the characters is that the *particular* place (or places) that matters most for each character varies enormously. But the *importance* of place for each person is similar. This suggests that place itself meets some underlying, fundamental need. Edward Casey calls this emplacement (*Fate* 233), the most basic sense that we are connected to and exist in the world. But we are not emplaced in the world in general. We can only be emplaced by being connected to a specific place or places. This is why place is so important. We can now define place directly, not only by describing its attributes, in a way that I have not found so far in the scholarly literature. Place is where we directly experience our self as being embodied in the world. The experience of place, the exchange that we feel, is the recognition of self in the outside world. The implication is clear. The effect of loss of place in *The Secret Agent* is not simply a character's disconnection to a particular place but to anywhere at all.

The novel begins with each character's attachment to place intact. All the developments of the plot threaten or erode these attachments. This is part of what makes *The Secret Agent* exceptional. In

most novels, space becomes place by gradually accruing meaning for the characters and the reader. In *The Secret Agent*, place becomes space. By the end, London returns to what it would be without meaning: empty, geometrical space (Burden 55). London becomes, in turn, "the darkness of solitude..., in which all sounds of life seemed lost" (225), the sinister river of "black silence" and the "streets without life and sound... [outside] the stream of life" (244-245). Place itself disappears, together with the directionality and dimensionality (Casey, *Getting* 50), the "exactness, force, intelligibility," that place gives to the world (Relph 188). What's left when place is lost is void.

## WHAT DRIVES THE NEED FOR PLACE? AND WHAT, IN A RIGOROUS SENSE, IS PLACE?

### WHAT THE VOID TELLS US ABOUT PLACE

This experience of void is the natural culmination of the book. There can be no more eloquent description of void than Conrad's of Mrs. Verloc. She

"gazed at ... a blank wall—perfectly blank. Mrs. Verloc... kept still as the population of half the globe would keep still in astonishment and despair were the sun suddenly put out." "When she steps outside, London too becomes a void." "The whole town ... with its maze of streets ... was sunk in a hopeless night, rested at the bottom of a black abyss..." (200). The reader then "shares ... a void barely sketched in by [the city's] geometry... emptied of... particulars" (Epstein 178).

But what exactly is the void? The void is not simply empty space, but rather space from which place has been removed. "Even the strictest void is not unrelated to place" (ibid), for the void is the experience of the world without the possibility of emplacement. The void, like place, is thus a form of experience: "the existential predicament of place-bereft individuals ... [the] depression or terror at... the experience of... an utter no-place" (ibid 5). Void is not a condition of the external world but of how we experience it. The London that Winnie or Ossipon walk out into at the end of the novel has not itself

changed, but the individual's relationship to it has altered as dramatically as if "the sun had... been put out." The void is not an emptiness or absence in the city itself, but in their being.

Void, like place, thus does not exist separate from or outside us. Rather, void is a particular experience of self. Void is the feeling that something is missing from our being. It is the perceived absence *within the self* of any connection to the world. Place is the perceived *presence* within the self of our connection to the world.

How can place exist *within* the self? The idea seems strange only because we commonly picture the self as being located inside the individual, within a body which itself is separate from the outside world. This is Augustine's and Descartes' picture of the self, or the soul. Place in this view is assumed to be *outside* the self in a world we are separate from ( Fig. 1). An alternative model is to see the self not as an internal controller or actor, but as a representation (Dennett 38). What it represents is our connection to, our overlap, with what we value outside us (Fig. 2). The self in Fig. 2 is how we perceive and represent *this overlap* as who we are. The self in this sense is a representation of our interaction with the world, created from perceptions and memories of emotionally-laden connections significant to our identity.

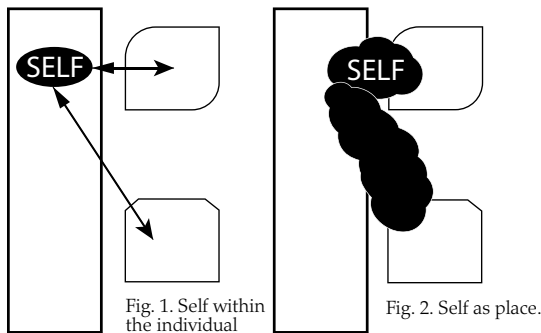


Fig. 1. Self within the individual

Fig. 2. Self as place.

If we think of the self in this way, then the power of place, the way it affects us, makes powerful sense. That outside objects and settings seem to be part of us is neither strange nor random. Place is not a backdrop or an odd feeling in exotic locations. Place, instead, is the recognition of the embodied self in the world. Place is what composes the self.

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## ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited, all references are to *The Secret Agent*, Modern Library, 2004.

# SEA SENSE

*by Martha McDaniel*

Lacy edges tease participation,  
slurring songs burble, and lure complacency,  
wavy surrealistic planes of liquidity beg surrender.  
Greedy lungs breathe salty seaweed scents,  
drawing deeper, deeper — deeper still,  
merging cells, souls, and cellophane membranes,  
till streams rush in my corporeal main.  
The great aqueous body shifts iridescent droplets  
through misty transference of its self to mine.  
Wanting more, wanting it to never end.

Oceanic companion transposes,  
escaping rhythmic depths to rest on human surface.  
Knowing it's there, separate yet one,  
it arrives without consciousness, in union,  
lying on me as an intimate provocateur  
slipping benign fingers, silent and invisible,  
languishing with explicit permission.  
The shimmering blending of me and place  
leaves me sated, and begets unsated yearning.  
Wanting more, wanting it to never end.

Undulating bodies dance in darkness;  
is this heaven, or death as a vision most magnanimous?  
Beneath my resting lids, synchronic cerulean blues  
call me closer to whisper cold barbarities  
of a world where fish eat fish eat fish.  
Its tempest rises, pulses, disintegrates, regenerates  
in a swirling eddy of primal distillation,  
whirling, drifting, folding round and round  
the en chambered life within.  
Wanting more, wanting it to never end.



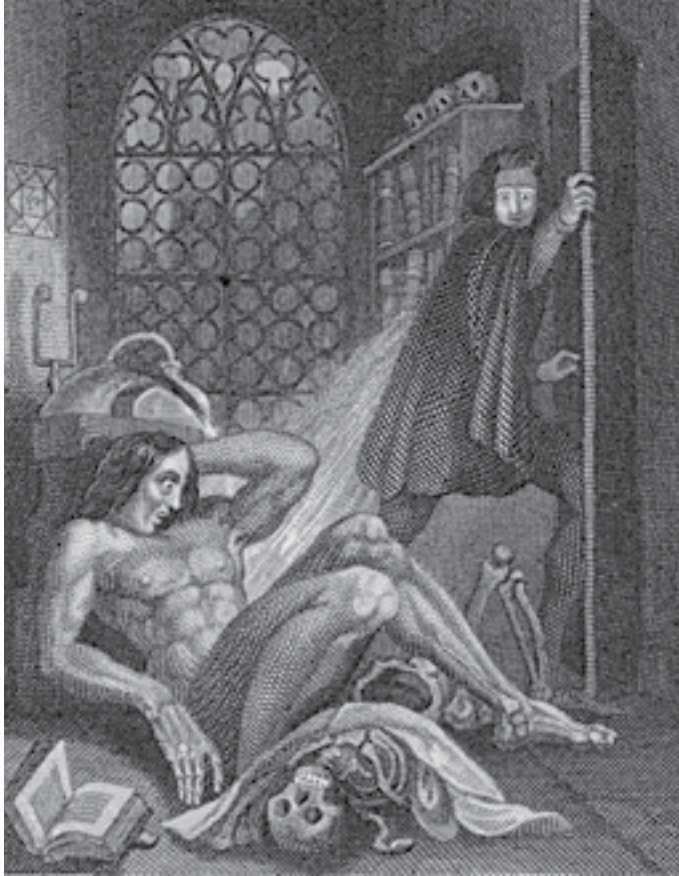
Black depths issue sinuous ruby arms  
licentiously wrapped round my goose bumped leg.  
No Astroturf skin to shed its predatory grasp, tightening,  
raising blood bruises under circular touch.  
Pulling me down, down, silently chilling my life  
till breath ceases without room for another.  
Tyrian pain sears through limb and lung,  
and then—suspended, I'm alone again,  
between nowhere and a lost marked page.  
Never wanting it to end.

Sadness drapes my brow with a sea-grass arc,  
veiled in echoes of time and piteous cries of future debris.  
Where will we be when our beloved sickens?  
Who will tickle our toes and bathe our faces  
as we close our eyes to an unknown ending,  
to a continuum of its own accord?  
Wrapped in a sea-foam shroud,  
cast adrift into the last ultramarine,  
I give myself to its currents and credence.  
Wanting it forever more, willing it to never end.



©Martha McDaniel, *Sea Sense, A Visual Interpretation*, July 2017  
Mixed media, 23 ½" x 10"  
<https://www.marthamcdaniel.com/work/#/gallery/>

This poem and its visual interpretation were inspired by two consecutive weekends in Monterey in the early summer of 2017. With kindred spirits I walked the dunes, listened to the ocean, felt and smelled the salty ocean air, and observed the rhythms and dramas of the shoreline. These experiences stirred a deep longing for the sea and its eternal power.



Artist: Theodore Von Holst (1831)





# PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, *FRANKENSTEIN* AND THE ARCHETYPAL MALE ROMANTIC

by Rachele Burnside

In 1818, eighteen-year-old Mary Shelley responded to the challenge proposed by her husband and his friend Lord Byron to write a supernatural story. The result, the novel *Frankenstein*, tells of the creation of a Monster by Victor Frankenstein, and its subsequent behavior. These two poets and their impact on Mary Shelley's life also shaped the characterization of Victor Frankenstein, the Monster's creator.

The first edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* includes an epigraph from Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which the fallen Adam reminds God that he never asked to be created. The reader is meant to remember these lines later in the novel when the Creature confronts Victor Frankenstein for creating, then abandoning him because of the Creature's monstrosity. Just as God created Adam in his own image, the reader must question the extent to which the Creature is a reflection of Victor himself, and the extent to which the novel Mary Shelley called her "hideous progeny" is a reflection of herself as a creator. Are we to see her reflected in Victor, whom she sets up as an exemplar of the heroic Romantic artist/creator, yet who is utterly incapable of empathizing with the 'child' he creates? Or is she more akin to the Monster, filled with anxiety and rage at being created, then abandoned, by that creator? Given the degree with which she and Percy Shelley intellectually influenced one another and her close interactions with other important male Romantic writers of her time, the distinctions between the creator and the created may not be so easily delineated. Instead, like her novel's titular character, Mary Shelley took pieces of her personal experience and imagination to stitch together a vision of the archetypal male Romantic to construct the character of Victor Frankenstein, who seeks to create a world in which his own brilliance is reflected and amplified.

Victor Frankenstein demonstrates characteristics and patterns of behavior that critics have identified as being typical of Mary Shelley's male Romantic contemporaries: an acute emotional and aesthetic sensibility, a yearning to become godlike, an intense self-absorption and narcissism, and a disturbing propensity to efface women. Having formed her opinions of the male Romantics first-hand, Mary Shelley would not have had to stretch her imagination too far in creating this portrait. The intellectual world that the author inhabited was predominantly male. Her mother Mary Wollstonecraft famously died eleven days after Mary's birth, leaving the young Mary to be raised by her father William Godwin. Godwin's habit of reading his correspondence aloud to his children exposed Mary to the ideas of male writers such as Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and of course, Percy Bysshe Shelley. Percy Shelley's entrance into Mary's life also put her in contact with the core group of male poets that would continue the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

As with all women writers of her time, Mary Shelley would find ways to assert her voice in the male-centric

literary world in which she lived. Constantly pregnant or nursing, always living under the threat of Percy Shelley's creditors, and frequently traveling the European continent, she was nevertheless surrounded by literary geniuses like her husband and Lord Byron. One wonders how she was able to find that voice at all. Mary Shelley hints at how she was able to do so, writing that "invention... does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded: it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself" ("Preface to *Frankenstein*" 167). For the reader of *Frankenstein*, the question then becomes what "shapeless substances" did Mary Shelley pull from the chaos of her life in order to give the novel its form?

**CONSTANTLY PREGNANT OR  
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THE THREAT OF PERCY SHELLEY'S  
CREDITORS, AND FREQUENTLY  
TRAVELING THE EUROPEAN  
CONTINENT, SHE WAS NEVERTHELESS  
SURROUNDED BY LITERARY GENIUSES  
LIKE HER HUSBAND AND LORD  
BYRON. ONE WONDERS HOW SHE WAS  
ABLE TO FIND THAT VOICE AT ALL.**



The fictional Victor Frankenstein is linked to Percy Shelley through a shared interest in scientific experimentation. At Eton, where he earned the nickname "Mad Shelley," Percy electrified the doorknob of his room and blew up a tree with gun powder (Bieri 86). While at Oxford, his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg noted that Percy would become so absorbed in his scientific experiments that he was oblivious to the physical damage they wreaked on the furniture and floors (Crompton 30). Mary Shelley's sister Claire Clairmont, who lived with the couple, also noted Percy's penchant for "chemical experiments" in her journal (47). Mary Shelley notes that a conversation between Percy and Lord Byron about the "principle of life," the experiments of Erasmus Darwin, and the potential of galvanism to reanimate life served as the catalyst for the vision that inspired the novel ("Preface to *Frankenstein*" 168).

Both the fictional character and his real-life counterpart also embody the Romantic archetype of the aesthetic Man of Feeling, whom Peter L. Thorslev describes as "quite well educated... and... never robust; usually he is pale and inclined to fevers, especially 'brain fevers' brought about by fits of melancholy. Sometimes he is distinctly effeminate" and isolated because he is a captive to aesthetics and his sensibilities (39). Though he had fared poorly at both Eton and Oxford, where he left without finishing a university degree, Percy Shelley was undoubtedly brilliant and well-read, as is Victor Frankenstein. Descriptions of Percy Shelley often note the effeminacy of his features, and he was teased at Eton for his high-pitched voice (Gilmour 96-97). And though Percy never succumbed to months-long "brain fevers" like those Victor suffers in the novel, he was prone to sleepwalking, hallucinations, depression, and violent mood swings.

Rather than devoting his sentiments and feelings to something outside himself, Victor reveals his essential narcissism when describing his decision to create the Creature. Although he pays lip service to having noble aims to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world, A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (33).

Victor desires godlike-adoration from his creation, yet he repeatedly turns away from that which he has created. Like the aesthetic Man of Feeling, Victor lapses into "brain fever" whenever he is faced with extreme





## A NEW SPECIES WOULD BLESS ME AS ITS CREATOR AND SOURCE; MANY HAPPY AND EXCELLENT NATURES WOULD OWE THEIR BEING TO ME.

stress or melancholy, allowing him to deflect accountability for his actions: when first creating the Creature, after being accused of Clerval's murder, and after the death of both his wife and his father. Victor relates to Captain Walton, the explorer who finds Victor wandering in the arctic, that at the onset of his first illness, he felt taken over by the excess of sensibility characteristic of the esthetic Man of Feeling, his "flesh tingl[ing] with excess of sensitiveness," [his] pulse beat[ing] rapidly," and letting loose a "loud, unrestrained, heartless laughter" that concerns and terrifies his friend Clerval (39). While the fever does result from an excess of sensibility, it is not until Clerval probes Victor to explain the cause of his strange behavior that Frankenstein collapses in a "nervous fever" that lasts several months, effectively deflecting Clerval's questions.

The desire to become godlike further links Victor to the vision and purposes of the male Romantic poets in general, and Percy Shelley in particular. As Anne Mellor argues, "Victor Frankenstein's goal can be identified with the radical desire that energized some of the best known English Romantic poems, the desire to elevate human beings into living gods" ("Promethean Politics" 70-71). Poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge saw poetry and the poetic imagination as a reflection of the divine within the human, and even though Percy Shelley was a notorious atheist, he believed in the perfectibility of human beings ("Promethean Politics" 70).

While Victor's path to human improvement was through scientific experimentation, Percy Shelley believed he could create "a policy of human betterment by his own reasoning" (Crompton 35). Essential to that quest was "self-transcendence" (Bonca 3), the ability to move beyond one's own egotism. In a letter written to his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg on January 1, 1811, Percy Shelley writes, "I am sick to Death at the name of *self*" (*Letters* Vol. 1 34). He argues, instead, that "Love! Dear love" (34) is the only path to happiness and transformation.

In his essay "On Love," Percy Shelley writes that "we are born into the world and there is something within us which from the instant that we live and move thirsts after its likeness" (504). He described love as the recognition of one's own likeness in another, "that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's... that another's nerves should vibrate to our own" ("On Love" 503). His definition of love was not the unity of two separate souls, but rather finding a second-self—or *epipsyche*, as it later came to be known—that "reflects only the forms of purity and brightness: a soul within our soul" ("On Love" 503).

This longing for a second self is evident from the very beginning of the novel when Captain Walton writes his sister that "I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own" (10). Upon meeting Victor Frankenstein, Walton almost immediately sees in Victor a kindred spirit and writes that he "begins to love him as a brother" (16). Key to Walton's attraction to Victor is the way in which Walton sees himself reflected in the other man. The two share an interest in scientific knowledge for its own sake, a thirst for glory, and a conception of the scientist as potential hero. The reader is left with the impression that Walton's love for Victor is, in many ways, narcissistic. As Victor lays dying, Walton writes his sister that he has "sought one who would sympathize with and love me. Behold on these desert seas I have found such a one" (152).

The relationship between these two characters illustrates one of the primary critiques of Shelley's concept of the *epipsyche*. As Bonca points out, the second-self of the *epipsyche* should, in theory, only exist in the absence of a first self, indicating that the lover has banished his own ego (47). However, Percy Shelley's critics have argued that Shelley's *epipsyche* relationships—all of which were with young women he placed in the role of acolyte—were less a means of transcending the Self than of gratifying the poet's ego. Ian Gilmour argues that in these relationships, the poet "sought not harmony but narcissistic union" (290) with a series of women he temporarily held up as the feminine ideal, only to reject them later when they proved human.

Margaret Homans claims that these women, including young Mary Godwin, were put in a position to fail not

...THESE WOMEN, INCLUDING YOUNG MARY GODWIN, WERE PUT IN A POSITION TO FAIL NOT JUST BY THEIR CHOICE OF ROMANTIC PARTNER, BUT BY THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT ITSELF.



just by their choice of romantic partner, but by the Romantic movement itself. While a feminine ideal is difficult to live up to in any era, Homans argues that in the Romantic era, it was absolutely impossible to achieve because embodiment itself negates its idealism. Male Romantics weren't actually interested in the reality of the feminine. They were interested, as she puts it, in living "in a world of mirrors that reflect a comforting illusion of the male self's independent wholeness" (106).

In *Frankenstein*, Victor, in the role of the archetypal male Romantic, pushes the edge of male independence to the point of making the female presence obsolete. Victor succeeds in his Romantic project by becoming godlike through his creation of a new species. By setting himself up as a solitary male Creator-God, Victor is, of course, mirroring the *Genesis* creation story, in which there is no mention of a female creative force. Gilbert and Gubar see a further allusion to Genesis in the relationship between Victor and his fiancée Elizabeth, in which "Elizabeth is Victor's pretty plaything, the image of an angelic soul or 'epipsyche' created from his own soul just as Eve is created from Adam's rib" (229).

However, Margaret Homans argues that Mary Shelley has actually rewritten the creation story in *Frankenstein*, with the male Creature taking the place not of Adam, but of Eve, which she argues is further proof of the male Romantics desire to eliminate the female presence entirely (106). Lending weight to Homans's argument is an allusion to the scene in *Paradise Lost* during which Eve first catches sight of her own reflection. In Mary Shelley's version, the Creature sees himself in a pool of water. He tells Victor that, "At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the Monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification" (78-79). If the Creature is meant to represent the feminine in the novel, then the feminine is irrevocably linked with the grotesque in this moment.

Gilbert and Gubar point out that the Creature's acknowledgement of his own monstrosity when he first

"AT FIRST I STARTED BACK, UNABLE TO BELIEVE THAT IT WAS INDEED I WHO WAS REFLECTED IN THE MIRROR ..."



catches sight of himself is a corrective to Milton's blindness, as they term it, in his depiction of Eve as narcissistic in *Paradise Lost*, enraptured by her own beauty (240). But what if the Creature's acknowledgement of his monstrosity is not just a rebuke of Milton's blindness toward Eve, but of Victor's blindness toward his own Monster and his own monstrosity? Involved in a semi-incestuous relationship with his cousin who has been raised alongside him as a foster sister—an echo of Percy Shelley's own relationship with Harriet Grove, his first cousin who bore a striking physical resemblance to Percy himself (Crompton 3)—the relationship between Victor and Elizabeth can be read as a narcissistic desire to achieve union with himself. When Victor can't immediately consummate that union, he seeks to remove the female altogether and create a man in his own image—the ultimate Romantic mirror. The Creature is not the narcissist in this situation; it's Victor, and thus the male Romantic.

Victor's blindness extends beyond a lack of self-awareness to an inability to understand his own motives for rejecting his creation. In his narrative, Victor claims that he "had selected its features to be beautiful" (35) and he only discovered its hideousness when it opened its "watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set" (35). However, the Creature confronts Victor with his own scientific notes, which sketch a picture of the Monster's "odious and loathsome person... in language which painted [Victor's] own horrors..." (91). Victor clearly is aware of the monstrosity of his creation before the Creature is conscious. However, as Victor himself tells Walton, once he finished, "the beauty of the dream vanished" (36). Once the Creature is embodied, Victor's ideal vision is negated, and so like his real-life male Romantic counterparts, Victor rejects what he originally idealized.

Does the rejection of the Creature reflect Mary Shelley's fear that her embodied self would negate Percy Shelley's idealized vision of her? If she feared she would become another in a line of voiceless second-selves for Percy Shelley, those fears were to some degree realized. He famously wrote the original introduction to *Frankenstein* in his wife's name, essentially usurping her authentic voice to argue that his wife's purpose in writing was to advocate for the "domestic affection and the excellence of universal virtue" (*Frankenstein* 6). Barbara Johnson sees Percy's seizure of his wife's name and authorial voice as an act of violence on par with Victor's destruction of the female Creature. Johnson also sees a parallel between Percy Shelley's conception of the relationship between men and women and his vision of the poet as the Aeolian harp through which imagination is filtered (87). Like the harp, the female epipsyche is an instrument to be acted on rather than an autonomous being with her own voice. The reader must question whether the novelist herself felt that on some level she was engaged in a one-sided dialogue with an archetypal Romantic male like Walton, or his mirror, Victor, in which she felt that her own voice was played upon or overpowered.

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# MIND'S CHATTER

*by Prabhu Palani*

so when you  
pass on,  
all those  
unexpressed  
thoughts and ideas  
brilliant  
useful  
useless  
become  
nothingness.  
at least  
the grooves  
on the vinyl  
now in  
landfill  
were once  
heard.  
perhaps  
the lines  
will reappear  
recorded karma  
for another  
age



# POETRY

*by Prabhu Palani*



they told me  
that poetry was a vice  
words strung together  
to please Mughal kings  
the pastime of emperors  
who praised their loves  
or even saints  
who praised the Gods  
decadence  
like dark chocolate  
rich, satiating  
senseless  
not salt of the earth  
or sweat of the brow.  
Inconsequential.  
but they know not  
that poetry is  
a venture  
of the brave  
into strange lands  
uncharted, slippery  
more perilous  
than the half dome.  
a rich journey  
into penury  
a mirror  
into the souls  
of lost men  
at unease  
with the  
order, rules  
even of words.  
the anti-algorithm  
a hint  
into the possibilities  
of human  
existence.



# FINDING LOST MEMORIES THROUGH

This essay was written to accompany an art book project and explain my motivation to create a memorial book to my mother-in-law's family. Names in this work have been changed to protect family privacy and the authentic history of individual members.

How do we memorialize someone we barely remember? This question was my point of departure for creating a memorial, in the form of a virtual scrapbook, to the life my *belle-mère*, Anne, never had. As I engaged in this process, new questions arose that I am still striving to understand. In its final form, my project is a remembering, or a stitching back together of the fragments of a family torn apart.

## HOW DO WE MEMORIALIZE SOMEONE WE BARELY REMEMBER?

I am no longer surprised when Anne mistakenly refers to my son by her son's name or asks what will be served for lunch today an hour after finishing lunch. But when she tells her son that her parents came from the Ukraine, I feel a pit form in my stomach. Now she is forgetting her own life story: the one thing that was consistently clear in her memory despite Alzheimer's disease. Remembering has long been a hardship for my *belle-mère*. Orphaned at nearly age three, Anne barely has memories of her parents who were stolen away from her during the Holocaust. Her parents, Joseph, a successful engineer, and his wife, Rebecca, immigrated from Lithuania to France and had two daughters before he was transported on the first, and she was transported on the thirty-third French convoy to the concentration camp in Auschwitz where they lost their lives. Anne survived the war, hidden by acquaintances of her parents, by nuns in a convent, and in a boarding school. Because of her youth or reluctance to remember, she does not recollect much of this period. This part of her



Laying out the scrapbook pages.

# A VIRTUAL SCRAPBOOK

by Cassy Christianson

childhood is a void in her mind. Her sister was eventually adopted by the acquaintances of their parents and maintained a relationship with Anne although they lived apart. I started this project for Anne, moved by her struggles with both repression and remembrance.

This work's title, "Stolen Memories," refers to the effects both of the Nazi regime and of Alzheimer's disease on Anne's life. When the Nazis took away her parents, they stole Anne's opportunity to create memories of a life with her family. Alzheimer's is now stealing my *belle-mère's* memories of the life she actually did live. The disease has also robbed Anne of her lucidity and independence. Previously an eloquent woman of intellectual curiosity, Alzheimer's has left my *belle-mère* confused, and much of her communication is devoid of meaning. Anne's memory is no longer sufficient to allow her to leave the house alone, cook a meal, or be relied upon to take her medications.

As I gathered together copies of the few traces Anne has of her parents, certain documentation redirected my focus. I found Joseph's name listed in one of the volumes of *Sterbebücher von Auschwitz: Fragmente (Death Books of Auschwitz Concentration Camp Prisoners: Remnants)*. The Gestapo recorded the names of nearly 69,000 registered camp prisoners who died in Auschwitz between July 29, 1941 and December 31, 1943 in these *Sterbebücher*. Joseph's name appears on page 374; he died April 10, 1942<sup>i</sup>. The Nazis destroyed most of the documents they created. With more than four hundred thousand prisoners registered in the camp, these *Sterbebücher* lists, as the book's title states, are only incomplete fragments of the lists of names of all Auschwitz victims.<sup>ii</sup> Rebecca's name has not been found among those listed, but her name does appear on official Nazi transportation records from Drancy on September 16, 1942. She died five days after her arrival.

Name, date and place of birth, date of death, prisoner number, and year of arrival at Auschwitz, the Nazi regime memorialized their atrocities in the *Sterbebücher* with those few facts about their victims. As I thought about other past ways of memorializing, I envisioned the *libri vitae* which were compilations of names in books of liturgical commemoration from the Middle Ages. The Nazi *Sterbebücher* juxtaposed with *libri vitae* delineates



two types of memorial books with antithetical values in their content, structure, and usage. The names of those deemed worthy of spiritual intercession through fellowship with a religious community were inscribed in *libri vitae* or books of life; the names of those condemned in the Holocaust concentration camps were listed in the Nazi *Sterbebücher*, or Death Books. Public readings of the names in *libri vitae* called for prayers and remembrance—the preservation in memory—of the members and friends of a religious community. Public commemorations to Holocaust victims often include reciting the names of the dead. I grappled with whether or not to include these Nazi documents in my memorial. I wanted my memorial to be a refusal of the *Sterbebücher*, but in a world where Death Books exist, is it ever possible to return to a *libri vitae*? A desire to resist perpetuating memories about this tragedy compelled me to commemorate Anne's parents in another way: through the prism of her life.

## A DESIRE TO RESIST PERPETUATING MEMORIES ABOUT THIS TRAGEDY COMPELLED ME TO COMMEMORATE ANNE'S PARENTS IN ANOTHER WAY: THROUGH THE PRISM OF HER LIFE.

I call this photobookwork a *virtual* scrapbook. Virtual, in that the images memorialize the essence, or potentiality, of a family. The photographs depict a hybrid of actual and supposed or imagined life events. The original photographs come from an album Anne assembled of snapshots from her sister's adoptive mother, from the schools she attended, and from an uncle and cousins she was reunited with after the war. These photos depict Anne after the war at various stages of her schooling, with her sister in their hometown or on outings, and among cousins or friends. Anne no longer remembers the exact origins of the three photographs



of her mother and nine photographs of her father, but these pre-war pictures likely came from her now-deceased uncle. As with many Holocaust survivors of her generation, Anne rarely spoke about her experience during the war. She told her children very little about her past and now her memory impairment leaves her unable to recount any details with accuracy if she wanted to share her story.

## I CALL THIS PHOTOBOOKWORK A *VIRTUAL* SCRAPBOOK. VIRTUAL, IN THAT THE IMAGES MEMORIALIZE THE ESSENCE, OR POTENTIALITY, OF A FAMILY.

The themes of memorialization, recollection, and fragmentation impelled this work. Anne has no photographs of her family together. Working with the handful of extant photographs of separate members of the family, I used photomontage to piece fragments of an incomplete family together again as a whole. Whereas Anne grew up in isolation, detached from her parents, this virtual scrapbook seeks to preserve the wholeness of her family while suggesting the life they should have lived. How did these ideas of memorialization and fragmentation influence the form and substance of this project?

Embedded in the materials of this book is a nostalgic quality evoking another era. Certain archival-type bookwork's auratic quality stems from the "faithfulness of the reproductions—each element in the archive feels real, seems authentic, appears original."<sup>iii</sup> In an endeavor to appear real, I constructed this virtual scrapbook on a sourced authentic 1940-50's photo album. The reminiscence evoked by black-and-white photographs and faux-'aged documents attempts to charge this work with a sense of perpetuated memory. For the laborious work of creating photomontages, a photographer helped with access to Photoshop tools. Translated copies of two original letters, written by Rebecca to the acquaintance that helped hide her daughters, are attached to the back of this book on translucent paper. Moved by these heart-rending letters, this Lithuanian woman eventually adopted Anne's sister and acted as an unofficial adoptive mother to Anne on weekends, vacations from her boarding school, and throughout her life. While these letters are part of Anne's true life journey, they exist apart from the life depicted in this virtual scrapbook. I built a hand-made cork box to house the photo album and to invest the work with an archival quality. In this work, cork symbolizes preserving and prolonging. The harvesting of cork, by stripping only the bark of the plant, does not harm the tree. Stripped of her parents, Anne continues to live and this virtual scrapbook prolongs the life of her parents by preserving their presence in her own history.

This bookwork imagines Anne's parents present in her life after the war through to her marriage; the reader may be curious about Anne's actual life experience. Despite her traumatic history, Anne created a path forward. As an academically-gifted student, she succeeded in her studies. When her high school offered a prize trip to London to the highest achieving student in English language classes, Anne was selected. With no parents or funds of her own, this was an achievement Anne could not have imagined. She also excelled in sciences, eventually earning her university diploma in chemistry at a prestigious engineering school in Paris. She married a doctoral student, eleven years her senior, and together they had four children. Anne pursued a career



My mother-in-law, Anne. (1958)

in teaching, thus imbuing many students with her enthusiasm for knowledge. Her family has now grown to include eleven grandchildren spread among four different countries. Anne's life accomplishments and devotion to her family demonstrate her resilience, yet her frequent tears at the mention of the war betray the pain she still harbors.

A formidable body of research on the psychological effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their offspring reveals themes such as anger, guilt, regret, loneliness, vulnerability, and mistrust. Survivors and their children reference the continued dread that everything could be lost or taken away tomorrow, and often maintain an acute awareness of the dangers in life<sup>iv</sup>. Little habits, such as panicking because she has left her house without her identification card, lead me to believe that Anne still has no sense of security in life. Does Anne fear that everything could be taken away, that her family life could be stolen, and cease to exist? This bookwork offers the reader an alternative to that internal message by inviting the reader to imagine family members present in their life in some fashion. The Nazi Death Books must not be the last words written about this family. Might the reader regain a momentary sense of security or control that had been stolen along with the Nazi's deplorable acts against humanity?

## THIS VIRTUAL SCRAPBOOK EVOKES AN IMAGINARY PAST TO RECALL, PERPETUATE AND PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF A FAMILY THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN.

This virtual scrapbook evokes an imaginary past to recall, perpetuate and preserve the memory of a family that should have been. What is worthy of attention in this virtual scrapbook are the problems it provokes. The effect of seeing a photograph of Anne's parents at her wedding pulls the viewer in different directions. A wedding is a time when the loss of parents is felt so strongly that it seems necessary to imagine them there; yet, the photo-interpretation of her life, with her missing parents reinserted, produces a disturbing impact. A central message of Holocaust histories and remembrances is that it is the duty of every generation to ensure that the stories live on and must never be forgotten. This work is in no way meant to diminish or deny the horrors of the Holocaust but rather to encourage memory of the lives lost. What are the consequences of sharing with Anne this alternate version of her life and risking disruption of actual, albeit painful, memories? I do not know if I will show this book to Anne, but I assert that aesthetic expressions, imbued with personal meaning, have a place in addressing traumatic experiences.

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau, eds. *Death Books from Auschwitz: Remnants*, (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1995), 374.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Drucker, Johanna, *The Century of Artists' Books*. (New York: Granary Books, 1995), 101.

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