

PARTICLE

UNM'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Roots

ISSUE 11 | AUTUMN 2018

The background is a solid yellow color. It is decorated with numerous white, hand-drawn, wavy lines of varying thicknesses. These lines are scattered across the page, with some forming loops and others being more fluid, sweeping strokes. They are most concentrated on the left side and bottom, with fewer lines on the right side.

PARTICLE

UNM'S LITERARY MAGAZINE

Particle is an online literary magazine run by the students of the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

Established in 2013, Particle publishes biannually, committed to providing a platform to amplify the voices of both emerging and established writers and artists.

The work contained in this magazine does not necessarily represent the opinions and views held by the Particle staff or any member of the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

Note: This issue has been recompiled from its original.

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Masthead

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DISCLAIMER NOTE:

We, the Co-Editors in Chief for Particle Magazine's 21/22 term, would love to give you our biggest thanks for being here with us. This disclaimer is meant to highlight the pre-existence of this issue. All works that have been curated and edited within this issue were done by the magazine's previous teams. Although it was previously lost in an unfortunate incident, we managed to recover this issue, and a few others—deciding to republish them. We tried to maintain the novelty of this issue, and sincerely apologise for any errors, omissions, missing works and/or authors, that might have occurred.

Thank you.

Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

In this semester's issue of Particle, themed "Roots", the works we have carefully selected challenge several fictions. Among them is the idea that roots, so closely associated with the concept of home, are inherently benign. "The cancer has taken root," is a death knell one would hope never to hear in an oncologist's office. "Money is the root of all evil," declares a verse from the Bible. And one short story submitted to this issue of Particle snarls defiantly, "I was the better survivor in this field, and so I have dominated the landscape."

But we have also strived in this issue to consider the axiom that to have roots must necessarily mean to remain rooted, to stay in one place. In one poem submitted to this issue, the narrator says wistfully, "We're masters of the to and fro... We're masters of the come and go." Perhaps it would be prudent to remember that in the end, we are not plants but people – we are not so constrained. We can put down roots in more than one place. We can uproot ourselves. We do this again and again.

"We must know where we come from to know where we are going," says one common maxim. As we enter, go through, and eventually leave university, this is the message Particle wishes to encapsulate in this autumn's issue – that roots do not only point us from whence we came, but also to the journey that lies before us. We are all going forward. None of us are going back.

Love,

Atia Hanna, Eugenie Tan Ee Ming, Swetha Siva and Nadiah Zakaria
Fiction and Creative Non-Fiction Student Editors

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Banana Roots

Olivia Kristina | Poetry

How to spot a banana?
Yellow on the outside,
maybe speckled brown,
white on the inside.

Is it in the way
I speak English?
Is it in the way
my parents speak Bahasa?

But how to trace
the roots of a banana?

Is it in the way
my grandparents spoke Javanese?
Is it in the way
my great-grandparents spoke Dutch?

Is it my English name?
Or how Lim Yoe Hok became Yudi Halim?
Is it how we spoke our tongues in hiding?
Is it how we celebrated our traditions in secret?

But what does it really mean
to be yellow?
They reject it,
try to snatch it,

ship us back to the motherland,
choke the life out of it,
stab, kill, burn, rape.
They tried everything.

But the departed are dismantled,
to return essences of life
back into the molding clay,
giving way for new roots.

Their soil is filled with yellow
and I can assure you,
we are still firmly
planted
here.

On Work and Flourishing

Teoh Sing Fei | Essay

"We are unknown," we enslaved peasants of thought, "ourselves to ourselves." Enslaved are those sheep in the classroom, embellished with the toxic benevolence of vernacularism, but equally filthy of mechanical curriculum and infested with the oxymoronic smell of 'creative obedience'. Peasants are we to the self-contradictory continuation of the colonial legacy by the ruling moralists, with all their 'selective permission', 'enforced love', 'meaningful order'—or 'regulated deregulation', attacks forth with Professor Zaharom, with the radical fervour of the last few soldiers standing. Anticipated is when our thought achieves greater height: excellence and flourishing amidst the cathartic waving of Jalur Gemilang—which is the only way the flag should be waved, with the anger of a hungry child. Partisan loyalty has failed. Divine slavery has failed. Keyboard heroism has failed. An age-old vacuum of culture—however cunning and 'clever' the effort of we peasants of thought—rejects every attempt of entry: Your system of thought appears closer to decay and more precarious than the egg at the edge of a mountain. How could this void of the flourishing of our cultural life, be filled by the bourgeois mediocrity of the declining generation, when Malaysians are at the point of an urgent need for true warriors of culture? Come the morality of mutual respect. The even more ridiculous 'courtesy' in the battlefield of thought—pure disgust, did they actually just say, 'courtesy' in war! Or the poisonous ideal of 'guided patriotism'—oh, for the sake of Malaysia, love her with your power, not with the weekly singing of Negaraku in the great hall at school... or so suggests Foucault astutely: Is it surprising that prisons resemble schools, which resemble prisons? "Future leaders"—Ha!

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock: "Dong!" Eight, eight, eight. Twenty-four; seven. Five, two. The public, the private. The workplace, the bedroom. Workdays, weekend. Freedom, control. Liberation, domination. Leisure, restoration, labour: the aesthetics of postcolonial urban modernity. The cyclical organisation of time and space mirrors the hierarchy of our daily desires. Modern sickness? The diminishment of experience and sensuality. The impossible conception of freedom beyond that conformist *épistémè* of 'happiness'. The trap of pleasure—in the psychedelic narcotic of capitalism, one indulges in the alcoholic purple and forgets the historical grey. Only with the 'moment' of Lefebvre, the 'hammer' of Nietzsche, the 'sickle' of Marx, and the 'anti-Freudianism' of Foucault punching... slaying us in the blushed cheeks, do we burst beyond the layers of bourgeois wet dream. Then we de-alienate ourselves back into our 'labour'. We pop the bubble of power/pleasure to see, beyond the suspended air, an anti-happiness Commander of life, war, and history. Fiercely, faraway nonetheless, commander Dionya declares: "Henceforth, our work speaks of the overcoming of any dogmatic slumber; our work lives by the military slogan of strength and life; our work and our bodies merge beyond the logic of scientific Enlightenment and divine trinity; our work is hitherto to release, to rule, to love, to feel, to forever and evermore cultivate the tragic melodies of Homeric catharsis! March on, real workers of the future—to the extinction of Socratic nihilism!" She takes off, as we wake up.

Above the tower of the future, she vaguely hears everyone below asks herself to herself: "What does Commander Dionya mean by work, exactly?" First, our work is something that disrupts a dogmatic slumber—it excites, it charges, it pivots. Second, our work embodies the virtuous electric of strength and life—it is ceaselessly hungry, it is insatiable, it strives for enemy and the festivities of victory. Third, our work and our bodies share one inexplicable origin—what we do is what we are; what we are scatters, dribbles, deforms, and reshapes simply alongside what we do. Fourth, our work is our readiness to die, and perish, and create, and 'become'—it defies the 'reactive' biology of evolution, for it embodies an 'active' quest for power. "Is not work, therefore, precisely power?" Right after the twilight of sickness and morality, the warriors of culture halt the machines of 'memorising textbooks and S.P.M. HOTS'. They finally begin—in the light of a surge of will—drawing, writing, filming, acting, scripting, playing, flourishing... "Holy, holy, a colossal holy yes! Is not work, after all, precisely meaning-making without morality, value-creation without guidance, character without scriptures, life without those self-help books of the weaklings, culture without reactive law, power without preachers and moralists of the herd?" Dionya the Commander could not hesitate to recall: "I asked myself what my work has always meant to me at a deadly point of crisis—then I heard Virginia Woolf, then I heard Friedrich Nietzsche. I blossomed, the hard way. Though what I learned always already killed me, death precedes flourishing."

What, really, is work? No longer, wages. No longer, purpose. No longer, livelihood. No longer, 'entrepreneurship'. No longer, international peacekeeping. No longer, necessity. No longer, utilitarianism and deontology. The camel of work "is dead"—and "we have killed" her, quite literally in the factory! Burn we bridges and mediocrity; anticipate we the ejaculation of the Greek tragedy. Now, an urge overpowers the 'need'. Now, values overpower purposes. Now, action overpowers reaction. Now, war overpowers self-deception. Now, life rejuvenates you couch potatoes. Now, a mobile field of force relations charges an impulse like a radical activity of the heart against the working of our entire capillary system: the flowing, the rushing, the flourishing, the creative stream of a blood power animates a new civilisation: the death of 'wishes', the birth of 'hopes'! Emerging are no longer those enslaved wage-earners of a capitalist 'Asian Tiger', but the creative workers and brave warriors of a flourishing culture... a perpetual phantasmagoria of our work, our Will to Power! Sing the Warriors, this time, blood without 'soul': "Negaraku, Tanah Tumpahnya Darahku, Rakyat Hidup, Bersatu dan Maju!"

Work, at this point, appears wonderful but questionable—for being power, work “is everywhere.” Peeing is work. Dating is work. Cooking is work. Reading is work. Not that work is bad. But not questioning the nature, or natures, of work, is dangerous. Why work? Work for whom? How to work? Where to work? When to work? Work can be wonderful because it makes non-existent things happen: urine and release, sperm and orgasm, food and faeces, or knowledge and power. Work becomes questionable when it obeys a code of routine: sometimes we work no longer because it should be done, but because it has always been done. On the one hand, work creates life. On the other hand, work is alienated from that initial splendour of productive power: the magical elements of life disappear and the rest flows by some unconscious theorem. It is beyond great to work; but when it degrades into the questionable (because unquestionable) terrain, work is detached from the human will. Work can be wonderful, insofar as the exercise of power is coupled with a simultaneous ejaculatory freedom. Work must be criticised, insofar as work is imbued with a growing scheme of conduct: the very possibility of ‘Why’ (especially during its very impossibility) is the beginning of the end of life. Work is not only about power. Work is precisely the activity of power to overcome illness, reveals Foucault by Nietzsche’s genealogist hammer.

Virginia Woolf’s ruthless attack on the ‘Middlebrow’ manifests an attention to the nature of work. She loves the Highbrow who lives in Bloomsbury: Highbrow writers think well, create High Culture, document the bloody physics of British industrialism, educate the working-class what their struggling life looks like through screen capital. She equally loves the Lowbrow who lives in Chelsea: Lowbrow women and men are the capable, the know-how fighters, the interesting, the living, the bleeding, the historical. Woolf says the Highbrow needs the Lowbrow; she also says the Lowbrow needs the Highbrow. Yet, beside mutual cultural benefits, the Highbrow and the Lowbrow have a common enemy: they must now form a military alliance against the growing disease of the Middlebrow. In her vitriolic assault, Woolf is inciting a war by the radical “blood brotherhood against the bloodless and pernicious pest who comes between.” For Woolf, the Middlebrow steals a bit here, and steals a bit there, for status and for wealth: Middlebrow pests are those who gather things, some from the Highbrow and some from the Lowbrow, for the sake of simple survival and superficial ‘face’. Their work is not even for their satiation, and not for the perpetual battle for cultural creation: “The middlebrow is the man, or woman, of middlebred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige.” Notice and amplify the meta-distinction between the blood brotherhood’s healthy ‘power’ and the Middlebrow’s unhealthy ‘power’: we are hungry for strong creation; they speak of comfort and ‘forever’.

Friedrich Nietzsche's attack on the 'philosophical workers' in *Beyond Good and Evil* reads sometimes metaphorical and sometimes literal. For Nietzsche, there are two types of being who reside in the realm of philosophical labour. The first type, the 'philosophical workers'; the second type, the 'real philosophers'. The difference is not technical, but metaphysical: he did not insist on the split between these two types by virtue of the technical quality of their written products. Nietzsche, as a virtue ethicist, stems from the ground of character elevation. Beyond becoming who we are, we must become who we are yet. For a long time, as Nietzsche diagnoses, philosophical workers valorise the value of history in the dream of 'truth': the obsession and occupation with truth drags these workers in a dying past, in a nostalgia for an impossible redemption. Nietzsche, the philosopher with a hammer, however demands a new species of philosophers: a type that perhaps has never yet existed. The 'real philosophers' of Nietzsche possess the primary instinct "to create values." These 'real philosophers' see the 'hieroglyphics' of past cultures, not as a 'truth' to be unveiled, but as "a means, an instrument, and a hammer" to rule, to create, to strengthen. Soon the delicate difference divorcing 'philosophical workers' from the 'real philosopher' develops by the relationship between the worker and her work. Some think to excuse some mistakes and the remnants of a pristine dream, while some think to transform mistakes into future power. Some discuss mistakes and condemn power, while some drive their mistakes and their power, as themselves, into the future. The former: servants to the object of memory. The latter: commander of memory, and the ruler of the future. The philosophical worker works to survive the violence of memory. The real philosopher—for Nietzsche—works through memory to see herself parish... and self-overcome!

Work versus dishonesty, hammer versus money, blood brotherhood versus plagiarism, values versus morality, virtue education versus vernacular schools, cultural flourishing versus bourgeois civility—through and through. Do not ask me to prophesise the future of our civilisation—Do not ask me to reveal the 'truth' about life and work—Do not ask me to resolve the uncertainty of this modern illness, or the prevailing illness of modernity—Do not ask me what I expect, what my morality is, what should our normative ethics henceforth be, what the culture industry should look like in my view, and the slavish return to calculation therein imbued and entailed—Do not ask the real philosopher where God is—Do not ask the real philosopher to be God! My hammer and I—we crave to parish very soon. Allow us a few more final words... but look above, Dionysia is back! Out loud she cries: We are witnessing the perpetual antagonism between the true work of a flourishing civilisation and the unhealthy work of the deadening cult. Who cares of heartbreaks, if pain brings more power—Who wants comfort, when only the very existence of war ensures the possibility of victory—Which warrior of culture would say 'No' to creation, flourishing, power?

Growing in The tropics

Josette Alexandra Larue | Poetry

I am

The afternoons spent on my father's farm
with beads of sweat cascading down my face,
neck, and chest.

Me, the wandering islander,
the tropical disaster,
body crouched over (as though in prayer),
ankles deep into the soggy soil,
plucking weeds,
mud crusted fingernails
sowing the seeds of tomorrow's harvest.

I am


the 3 am insomniac,
Back arched against the wall,
Knees and arms cocooned into my chest
Like an armadillo
retreating into its shell.
My thoughts an oversized grey sweatshirt
wearing me,
But then, slowly,
I am distracted by the rising chorus of croaks,
Those brown pond frogs
as wide awake as me.

For a long time,

fresh air was the scent of rotted cow manure
And freshly cut grass in the morning,
Or the whiff of the salty sea breeze,
Rising up my nostrils
Erecting miniscule mounds on my skin.

I am

The caramel mermaid
sitting at the edge of the shore
wearing the ocean's turquoise gown.
Cheeks tinged with pink
like a blush,
Grains of sand scattered
like freckles on my skin,
The waves a child's lullaby,
Its memory
Cradling me to sleep
when the rumbling of
The city gets too loud.



I am
The sweaty hikes,
the morning jogs to Intendance Beach,
The pink frangipani flower tucked behind my ear,
Or braided into my curly locks
The bleeding sunsets,
The artist not the art,
Dousing the coconut trees in holy colours,
Our skin and your hair
rich and golden,
like the treasures spun by Rumpelstiltskin.

My roots are vines of
Ivy wrapped around my ankles,
And every now and then,
when I venture too far from home
I feel its tug,
reminding me of where I come from.



Bleedin' Green

Namita Suberi | Poetry

When I was born, a haze of memory
I dreamt of the sky, with cotton clouds
I grew wings, a thousand gems sparkling
Like the water during a sun spray

I walked, they swept me from the blues
Hovering, from one coffee spoon to the next
They gathered dust akin to an unopened book
leaning by my nightstand.
In a craze of duplicity, they were clipped with envy

My feet were watered, in a hope for tubers,
My longing stamped like the spider in my room
As they grew roots, I grew tears, I collected them
In the palm of my hands, one drop to the next.

I grew, and the roots too, embedding my pages
under the crumpled dew, sorrow latched
Like a leech on to the skin, sucking hope,
one shade of red to the next, one to the next

Waiting gave in to despair, and then to courage
As dusk faded to dark and then the dawn
I tore my foot from the bog, only one for now
And watched it bleeding green,

I limp with this mutilated story,
and one limping foot
The Pharaoh of my one pyramid
Vined Crown and broken mind

Uprooted, I wait.

SUPERNATURAL HITS A NEW MILESTONE

Nethmi Dimbulana | Non-fiction

Contains spoilers for the 300th Supernatural episode and the entire show

Supernatural celebrated its 300th episode on the 8th of February 2019 and what a momentous moment it was. Supernatural (originally created by Eric Kripke) is the longest running Sci-Fi show on their network, the CW, which has been going strong since 2005. Beloved characters Sam Winchester (Jared Padalecki) and his brother, Dean Winchester (Jensen Ackles) started the show hunting your everyday ghost, wendigo and all the other monsters that cower under your bed. However, over the 14 seasons (and counting), they have dealt with far worse evils in the world than anyone can even begin to imagine.

The 300th episode showcases the ongoing theme of family as Sam, Dean and Mary Winchester (Samantha Smith) reunite with their long-lost father and husband John Winchester (Jeffrey Dean Morgan). This episode brings back fandom favourites such as Castiel (Misha Collins), and Zachariah (Kurt Fuller) from season 4. After investigating the death of a hunter friend, they uncover the Chinese pearl that grants the holder's ultimate wish- their heart's greatest desire. Dean attempts to use the pearl to eliminate the archangel Michael, but instead summons their father John Winchester from the year 2005. This in turn alters their timeline into a different reality, one where Sam is internet famous and Dean is a serial killer on the run. Meanwhile Castiel (never having met the Winchesters in this timeline) is an obedient soldier of Heaven following Zachariah's orders. After a turn of unexpected events, the Winchesters decide to destroy the pearl to set the timeline back to its natural order. Although 300 is a very heavy and emotional episode, there is still an essence of the light-hearted meta madness that is Supernatural. Although this episode felt slightly rushed and had potential to do better I won't lie, it was still an incredible episode commemorating hitting the 300th mark on Supernatural that many shows don't get the chance to experience.

This episode showcases John Winchester's relationship with his sons which has been a debated topic since his death in 2006. After the death of his wife, Mary Winchester, John became hell bent (pun intended) on hunting the demon that killed his wife all the while teaching his sons how to become hunters. With their father coming back from 2005 to present day 2019 you would expect the hunter to be overwhelmed when hearing that his sons not only defeated the Darkness (God's sister), met the big man upstairs and is now best friends with an angel, but John seemed to take things all too well which appeared fabricated and unrealistic.

This episode allows character development for both Sam and Dean Winchester as they get to talk to their long-lost father to receive the closure they needed to move on. For example, the heartfelt moment between Sam and John is a fan favourite which is a result of Jared Padalecki's impeccable acting, as Sam talks about how he never got to say goodbye to his father. As classic Supernatural fans would know, Sam never wanted to lead the hunter's life and would get into several rows with his father. Sam never got to complete his conversation with his father before John dropped dead on the hospital floor and he never got the closure he needed until now.

While Sam and John's conversation went fairly well, I wish I could say the same for Dean. Many fans including myself, felt that Dean's conversation with his father was falsified. It is known that John Winchester pushed and possibly abused his son Dean and this issue was not addressed in the 300th episode as it should have been. With no mother and an absent father, Dean had to look after his younger brother on his own- being a parent and a brother at the same time. This episode could have been much improved had they spoken out about the pressure John Winchester put on his children, especially Dean. With that being said, Jensen Ackles' acting blew away the audience as he is always able to express his emotions incredibly well through his facial expressions.

Supernatural is also commonly known for its queerbaiting between characters Dean Winchester and the angel Castiel. Castiel (portrayed by Misha Collins) first entered the show with a smashing entrance in season 4 and has remained a fan favourite ever since. The past 10 years have allowed Dean and Castiel's relationship to nurture and grow into friends and then into family. However it is quite evident that their connection is much deeper and meaningful than simply being friends. Had Dean and Castiel become lovers, not only would the internet implode but this would allow the show to explore a side to each character that we have never seen before.

This episode shows us a Castiel that has never met the Winchesters and therefore has never become their friend. When Castiel first met Dean he was a loyal servant of heaven but as they became friends, not only did he fall, but he learned the true meaning of friendship, freedom and freewill. In this episode we see a throwback of Castiel's initial entrance to the show (4.01 Lazarus Rising), and other episodes such as Goodbye Stranger (8.17) where Dean was able to break Castiel from his mind-controlled state by stating how much he needed him. 300 takes a similar approach where Dean is desperately trying to reach out to Castiel but the angel has no recollection of Dean in this new timeline. Fans, including myself, believe it is well beyond time for Dean and Castiel to take the next steps in their relationship, yet this issue is not up to the fans but rests upon the hands of the writers of Supernatural, and the writers alone. But then again it is imperative to remember, representation is important especially in television.

Supernatural has always been a show about family, finding strength in yourself and fighting back your greatest demons. Throughout the seasons, we have seen our treasured boys fighting their very own set of demons (figuratively and quite literally sometimes)- we have seen Dean become a demon, Sam's never-ending battle with the devil himself, Lucifer, and Castiel dealing with the struggles of becoming human. We have seen these characters grow, mature, win and lose which is why it was refreshing to hear Dean talk about how he is happy with the people he and Sam have become.

Needless to say, Supernatural will probably carry on for another few years and its dedicated fanbase will continue to evolve and grow with the show. From demons to angels to monstrous creatures and God himself, Supernatural has surprised us in ways we didn't think was even possible and I have no doubt it will continue to do so in the upcoming years ahead. No matter what evils Sam and Dean Winchester face, let it be known they will always face it together. Because if there's anything this show has taught us is that family has each other's backs and this show, this fandom, it's a massive family in itself.

East-India's Lost Orphan

A. A. Kamalov | Poetry

Admirable, respectable, Elegant and
impeccable, the Essence of the English
gentleman; Pinnacle of success, his home an Empire.

Suit and tie, timeless and classy European fashion –
leaves quite an impression. A stickler for manners
and passive- Aggressiveness; I could never fully

Comprehend, but how must I emulate, To
metamorphosise! I must be more than this
uncultured Coal-faced Cooley, worthless
wog.

Cast aside this repulsive appearance, O
God! I don't want this malicious Melanin on
this skin, the trashy tan – It's not fair! Think
of all the privileges

I am missing out. All that is good Is white, as I
generously apply copious Blobs of lotion,
guaranteed to whitewash All my insecurities to
oblivion. I curse

The Sun, the circumstances that beget me,
Scorched and stranded in the eastern shores
Britannia herself had forsaken. After all, Her Majesty
only cares for her London jewels.

Centuries of stealing, of pillaging, O British
buccaneer. Yet I admire your
Adventurousness, unrivalled bravery No wonder
the sun never sets on you.

Your colonialism: blessing in disguise; Civilising
my jungle savagery With science, sanitation,
schools... In short, You weren't cruel, I thank you
for that.
And by Jove! Such eloquent language Even the
crudest-sounding Expletives sound inexplicably
superior To my tropical tongue. It lacks any
prestige,

It's painfully pitiful. Purge it all! This
peasant-like speech impediment –
Ignoramus's plague. Thank God, I am better
than that!

So abduct me, far from these shores, For I
cannot accept a broken Nation you
fashioned with your Divide and rule, chaos
ensues

Thanks to you. A destitute paddy-pauper, Yet
my wealth an Asian diligence, Guaranteed to
astound and amaze As I outperform you in
your own system.

I offer myself to your full custody – Your
golden opportunity for me To become
you, it's twisted; I already killed myself
for you.

Alien

Celine Wu | Fiction & Non Fiction

What is a plant to do, I think, when it no longer wants to remain in the soil in which it grows? Would the earth feel sad, for having forsaken a child of its flesh?

My roots, long and thin, reach underneath the ground. They seek out water from the pockets near the surface and far into the depths, all to keep my veins pumping. The sunlight is watery, its rays coming to me as if through a filter. My leaves, as always, are stretched open as much they can, to absorb the life-giving energy from above. Ever onwards, I grow.

For me, things have always been this way.

I feel a chill in the air, and I know that autumn is fast approaching. If I could shiver, I would, but instead I just sway. Soon, my leaves will unmoor from their tethers, to litter the soil on which I stand. It is a loss, but it is also for the better, so that I can better withstand the coming ice of winter. Deep in my heart, or perhaps my chlorophyll, I know that this cold is unnatural, that my ancestors had never encountered it. Summer is my season. The heat at its peak may smother some, withering them down to nothing, but it makes me work faster and spread further. It is when I feel most myself though I'm most alone.

I am an outsider here.

Growing up, I learned of the trees and other entities around me. Though, they did not know me when I sprouted up, they heeded me more as I lingered on. It is hard to say what these trees think of me. They are distant creatures, hard to reach. Built on strongly intertwined connections below the surface, they seem like majestic pillars towering high above. The herbs and shrubs and grass, those others of my size, they boil my blood.

They loathe me for my differences, from the way my flowers are shaped to the number of seeds I produce. They have no sympathy for someone like me, for all that I am like them, just trying to learn, to grow, to survive. Who are they to begrudge me a place on this land, to live just like everyone else? Though we are different, don't we all just want to reach the same goal?

And so, ruthlessly, I push them out.

I am no stranger to competition. After all, that is life. It is a cruel world indeed. Eat or be eaten; kill or be killed. Those who would belittle me and step on me, I would have them perish.

All the characteristics used to mock me were the exact ones that made me the stronger candidate in this race. My roots claimed all the nutrients I needed, sucking dry the moisture from the earth. My many seeds gave me many children, letting them take over and colonize the land on which the others stood. Soon enough my children dwarfed the others. Like me, my seedlings were strong and hardy. I was the better survivor in this field, and so I have dominated the landscape. In my pride and in my spite, I have made this home a solitary one. If they would not be benevolent, why should I be?

It is not as if I wanted to be this way. My brutality and efficiency are less a function of what I am than where and with whom I am. This place is as unused to me as I am to it. While the inhabitants here should very well do better than me, they have not evolved as I have; their unchanging existence has given them the luxury to be complacent. And now their complacency brings their downfall.

My parents were brought to this foreign land by the design of humans who thought that we held value. Perhaps they only wanted us for our exotic beauty; perhaps they thought we could work to bring them more riches. Either way, we were brought here against our will. I feel like the world should know that.

Thrown into an environment far different from our native lands, one would expect us to flounder and just barely cling to survival. The situation was forbidding at the start. For a while, it seemed like the conditions would simply wipe us out. But with the humans tenderly nurturing us, helping along our assimilation, we managed to establish ourselves here. Once that was done, we flourished.

It is not our fault that we are resilient. We cannot be blamed for being able to thrive wherever we are. We were just doing all that we could to live on.

What foolish creatures humans were, thinking that they could exert their influence over the forces of nature. "Weeds," they spat at us, when we expanded past where they wanted to find us. "Invasive" was the next label they pinned on us, like a sentencing of crime.

They were hypocrites anyway, these humans. They were the ones who brought us here in the first place, though our freedom was not by their design. This was how the circle of life spun; it wasn't something to be controlled.

When I was young, I was separated from my family. This was once again something that was out of my control and was another mistake committed by the humans. Or perhaps it was fate? Surely it didn't matter in the end. It was how I had come to this field, slowly choking out the other plants, shading them from the sun and stealing their water and nutrients.

I remember the other plants begging me to stop my dominion. "You're killing us," they hissed. "What did we ever do to you?" others asked. They, like the humans, hadn't known what they were in for when I came here. Once the others were pushed out, this land resembled those monocultures the humans planted, but I was no crop to be eaten. More fool them.

They think me heartless, so cold and competitive, to be taking over the landscape. The humans use ever more pesticides in an effort to kill us off, thinking that the original biodiversity can be restored here. But every time they try to beat us, cut us down, we come back. The other plants, so unused to the changed conditions, have no chance of returning. I am crowned a monster for my resilience and adaptability.

There is no doubt about it: I am cosmopolitan, but the truth is that I want to go home. Being here has changed me. For the better or for the worse, I do not know. Some of my brethren have hybridized with some of the native plants, giving them even more of an advantage here.

This land has been, at turns, both good and bad to me. I may not be who or what I should be, perhaps, but I am still me. Maybe things would be better if I could just live on my own terms.

And so I wonder, what is a plant to do, when it no longer wants to remain in the soil in which it grows?

The light around me grows dimmer before being cut off completely. I feel the jostle of rough movement and gruff voices as the box I'm in is put into the cargo hold.

The moment Ai Ling steps out of the airport, the weight pulling down her shoulders evaporates, like the exhalation of leaves under the sun. Now that she is here, she no longer feels plagued by doubts. This is where I belong, she thinks. She steps forward, taking in a large breath of unfamiliar air.

Ai Ling is ready to put down her roots here, in a homeland she has never seen.

Ashes

Jo-yen Wong | Poetry

i.

she said, when i am dead
let them burn me and not bury me
throw me into the sea lest
like the tide i pull them back
let them be free
to leave and need not return
every chengbeng or deathday
just face the east and pray
and besides i wouldn't want to wait
in an empty grave

ii.

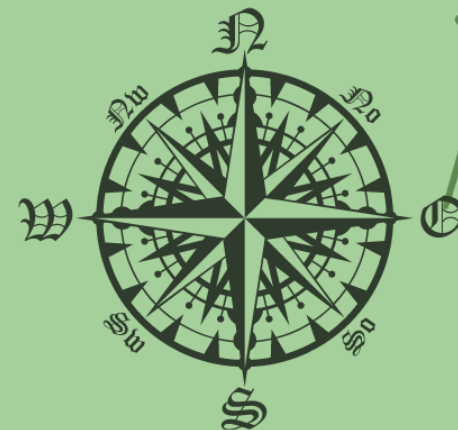
i remember
my greatgranduncle whose
ashes washed away. he came
to his daughter in her dreams
drowning in death, gasping for ghostly breath
unanchored
his feet, he cried
could no longer touch the ground



Misled

Lilian Angelia | Poetry

Pater fader fæder father
Mater mōdēr modor mother
gnasci nationem antecessor fore-goer
hiwscipe hjon Boii boia heim hamleas
gelangian iyarti oriri originem fitja especial
similaire similis civilis primitivus
differens ferre færan far far Gefahr!
La via, de via, des veloper, unwrap, unveil;
undo, undo, undo, O strai...
undo!
Compare, contrast, camouflage
Trace thy treasure, analyse all
There is to life, isn't it?



Baby Dorian Gray and The Oedipus Complex

Shizen Wong Jing-Ee | Essay

*Warning: Spoilers of The Picture of Dorian Gray ahead.

Has anyone considered that an alternative reading to the Picture of Dorian Gray through the lens of Freud's structural theory of the mind, could perhaps be that the infamous Dorian Gray was a baby going through the Oedipus Complex?

Too far-fetched? Maybe not.

*

It was during the Victorian era, when men (and women) breathed morality and gentlemanliness into their conduct. Furthermore, it was also during the Victorian era, when decadence, duality, and our intrinsic but bestial desires were being explored in literature and psychology.

It is funny how irony works.

However, it helps to understand why concepts concerning the unconscious mind proposed by Freud or showcased in novels such as Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde or Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, reasonably came as a shock to the 19th century society. One might have called these claims farcical, fictional, and absolutely ridiculous and people might have been shocked. Whichever way they reacted; these claims had definitely provided us with a new perspective of the human mind.

It should be noted that though Freud's psychoanalysis theory both contributed and proved to be the cornerstone of modern psychology, most of his arguments have been rebutted and countered. Nonetheless, it is still interesting to use his works to analyse characters of literary fiction, especially one that was published during the Victorian period. In this essay, I will be using Freud's theory to look at The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde.

*

Freud's structural theory of the mind postulates that the human psyche can be divided into three parts: the id, the ego and the superego. The conflict between these fundamental parts make up our personality. I watched a YouTube video once and I found that it summarised the basis of Freud's theory in the simplest manner possible. Imagine the cartoons you have watched; the characters have an angel sitting on one shoulder and a devil on another. The devil is essentially the id, the angel the superego, and the character—choosing between the tempting whispers of both the devil (“what pleasure you may enjoy if you punch him in the face!”) and the angel (“be the bigger person!”)—is the ego.

Upon reading this, the verdict is simple as the common interpretation of the Picture of Dorian Gray goes: Lord Henry Wotton (Harry) represents the id in Dorian's life, whereas the painter Basil Hallward can be distinguished as the embodiment of the superego. It is true that Harry had filled Dorian's perception with pleasure-seeking ideas and corrupting thoughts. Moreover, throughout the book, we could also see Harry propagating his hedonistic ideals that very much echo the pleasure principle:

“Pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about.”

Basil, on the other hand, assumed the rectitude role and was seen to be in constant disagreement with Harry's 'ideals.' One could also argue that Basil's gift to Dorian—the painting of Dorian himself—acted as a reflection of the main character's conscience, just like the superego.

This analysis is plausible and straightforward, with ample in-text evidence to back up this claim. However, a more in-depth understanding of Freud's theory can bring us into an alternative interpretation of the text.

According to Freud, the id is “totally non-moral”; it is driven by the pleasure principle which encourages an individual to indulge in their instinctual and animalistic needs. The id is the initial root in the human psyche and the first to exist. That is why a baby, unaware of social norms, cries when their needs are not fulfilled. The ego develops later due to the contact with the external world and is led by the reality principle. Tasked with the responsibility of self-preservation, the ego has to discharge the id in a reasonable and sensible way. The last to form is the superego, otherwise known as the ‘ego ideal’. The superego is formed in the process of the Oedipal situation. For example, a male child, libidinally drawn to the parent of the opposite sex, would “desire to possess” the mother and hope to supersede the father. The superego develops when the child is faced with the threat of castration (or in other words, the child is afraid that he would lose his penis). The threat of castration here refers to the father, as the child realises that the father holds more power. The child's libidinal desires are then repressed by intensely identifying with the father. This process alters the ego and develops ‘the ideal’ (the superego), serving as one's conscience and creating demands to achieve idealistic goals. The ego now has to serve to balance the instinctual needs of the id and the moralistic goals of the superego in accordance with the sanction of reality.

Being the ego is, in fact, super exhausting.

After delving deeper to understand the formation and nature of these psyche, I would like to suggest this seemingly absurd reading: throughout the book, Dorian Gray was premature and going through the Oedipal stage.

As this novel includes magical elements (eternal youth, magical portrait?), the idea that Dorian Gray was going through the Oedipal stage in his twenties might not be as far-fetched. The element of magic in this novel comes in the form of influence. There are many instances where influences were being exercised, as pointed out by Harry:

“...to influence a person is to give him one's own soul.”

Now, think back to the novel. We see Dorian's deeds influencing the state of the painting after he bargained for eternal youth by exchanging his soul. The painter, Basil, who was enamoured by Dorian's purity, conceded that Dorian had a great (and somewhat magical) effect on him and his painting. Since the painting reflected the “ideal” state—the state of Dorian's ephemeral beauty—and was regarded as “the visible emblem of conscience”, it could be assumed that the “soul” that Dorian had given up was his superego. This is why his misdeeds could impact the state of the painting, morphing it beyond recognition. The most vital influence on Dorian throughout the book is that of Harry; even at surface level, we can see Harry reshaping Dorian's ideologies by filling his mind with decadence. Harry himself recognised his effect on Dorian, claiming that:

“To a large extent the lad was his own creation.”

In addition to this, he was also aware of his influence when he alleged that he “made [Dorian] premature”. Dorian, having given up his superego and under extreme pressure by Harry, regressed to a premature state; his thoughts and action driven only by his ego and id.

I am confident that you have heard of the term “big baby”, and Dorian Gray is the epitome of it.

Dorian’s regression to prematurity was illustrated in two ways: his narcissistic nature and his demand for sensual pleasures. Dorian’s narcissism sprouted when Harry inspired him with his talk of youth being the only thing worth having, and beauty being “a form of Genius”. Freud noted, “The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility...” During the Oedipal stage, a child would cathect his libidinal attachment towards an object, or as Freud suggested ‘a mother’. However, we could see that Dorian’s libidinal attachment was to himself (ego-libido). The earliest sign of this was when he rejected Sybil Vane as he believed she made him look like a fool in front of Harry and Basil. His words to her were revolving only around the pleasure and the needs he thought he deserved. It proceeded to unveil that Dorian grew increasingly conscious and contented about his good looks. For instance, Dorian, “enamoured by his own beauty”, took pleasure in seeing the picture morph hideously while he remained unscathed by his sins. In summary, Dorian’s personality was motivated by his id’s narcissistic needs and desire for pleasure. These inclinations were fulfilled by people he could charm, similar to how children were pampered by their parents.

Quickly adopting Harry’s perspective relating to pleasures, Dorian— similar to a child that indulges in sensual pleasure deriving from maternal caressing — was driven by his id to pursue multiple forms of sensual pleasures. It did not help that Harry was a corrupting presence like a catalyst whispering words of encouragement to Dorian’s hedonistic desires. Being premature, Dorian was easily swayed. One of Dorian’s more ethical “worship of the senses” was done by pursuing aesthetic experiences such as studying perfume and playing music. In contrast, his immoral pleasures were only hinted by Wilde:

“There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of beautiful.”

Through Wilde’s description of the decaying beauty of the painting, the unnamed affairs and the distancing of his friends such as Alan Campbell, it could be assumed that his sensual life had expanded to a more unjustified direction than just passions in aesthetic pleasures.

All was good and well for Dorian Gray, and being young and beautiful had never sounded more appealing. But babies grow up, and so did he.

The threat of castration that endangers the superego emerged alongside the two sins, or two deaths to be exact: the rejection of Sybil that led her to her suicide and the murder of Basil. Dorian’s ego was not lost in the soul transaction with the picture. This can be proven by Harry’s thoughts about Dorian,

Yes, the lad was premature [...] but he was becoming self-conscious.”

Dorian's ego was also shown after he murdered Basil; knowing that murder was not conventionally accepted by society, he was anxious to erase his trace. Moreover, his self-preserving ego also understood that the only evidence to his affairs was the picture which was safely hidden. Having both the id and the ego, the superego was the only one left to be developed (or rather, re-developed) under the influence of the Oedipus complex.

The threat of castration came in the form of James Vane, and the legal authority.

The ego tasked with self-preservation now faced anxiety. The first threat was knowing the legal authorities had the power to charge him with murder. The second threat was knowing the murderous intent of Sybil's avenger, James Vane. Similar to the terror of a boy losing his penis through castration, Dorian feared the loss of his precious life as he told Harry; "It is the coming of Death that terrifies me."

It was only until after James Vane was killed that Dorian was able to overcome his anxiety of the threat. He also came to recognise his prematurity:

"But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire. I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me."

After the elimination of the threat, James Vane, Dorian decided to repress his immoral needs and become a good boy by identifying with the power that was still in charge— the legal authorities.

He started to have "wild longing for the unstained purity of his boyhood." Even Harry had to admit that Dorian "[was] really beginning to moralize." The presence of the superego was restored and can be seen when Dorian thought, "there was a purification in punishment." The last act of him "killing" the painting of himself can then be interpreted as the aggressive chastise of his past sins by his superego, seeking purification.

*

Maybe it is too far-fetched, but at least we get to appreciate the growth that Dorian made throughout the novel. Because character development is what we live for, am I right?

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The Betrayal of Roots

Shafiqah Alliah Razman | Poetry

I remember her,
One of the most bewitching flowers
The Calla Lily bathed in pure colours
Her seed gripped the fantasy soil
Effortlessly leaving the stain of awe!

I see her,
Now, the dolorous dregs of her kind
Her petals besmirched with hideous scar
The scar of hopelessness and frailty
From the shock of learning the language of dubiety
Her core essence was in ambivalent.

I feel her,
She thought her root was striking
That the germ of her fanciful self was eternally calling
But now she's floating
Asking Grief to hold her hands
As she belongs to no land....


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