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We 're All Me-ists Now

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our ability to wander in **Garcia-Marquez's** surreal world.

Future columns will also introduce both **Ivo Andrić**, born in Travnik Bosnia in 1892 and who won the **Nobel Prize** in 1961, and **André Gide**, born in Paris France in 1869 and who won the **Nobel Prize** in 1947. The two books that I have added to my small but growing **Nobel Literature Library** are *The Bridge on the Drina* and *The Immoralist*, respectively. Both books have Notes or Forwards by the translators that give us a peek into their mindset.

Lovett Edwards writes in the Translator's Forward of **Ivo Andrić's** *The Bridge on the Drina*: "It is always an invidious task for the translator to comment on an author's style. It should be — and I hope it is — evident in the translation. **Andrić's** style has the sweep and surge of the sea, slow and yet profound, with occasional flashes of wit and irony. One subtlety cannot, however, be conveyed in translation: his use of varying dialects and localisms. I have conveyed then in the best manner I could, since a literal use of dialect would, even were it possible, be pedantic, dull, and cumbersome."

Dorothy Bussy first translated **André Gide's** *The Immoralist* to English in 1930. In 1970 **Richard Howard** offered a new translation and writes in the Translator's Note of the book: "For forty years we have had a fair sense of this famous recital, why not now

a fairer still?" "My effort, then, is to persist even further in the letter of the work itself. For **Gide** belongs, we now see — and happy the prospect would have made him — to that company of authors with whom we cannot be satisfied. We keep turning them over in our minds, returning to them: all translation date, certain works never do." Almost 40 years later I read these words and marvel at the insight of how the right word conveys the perfect meaning, concept, idea of the story. And yet this is still a difficult feat when cultures, dialects, and languages collide.

More Internet sleuthing provided another glance at the relationship between the author, **Orhan Pamuk** and **Guneli Gun**, the translator of **Pamuk's** book, *The New Life*. Interestingly, **Gun** is of Turkish descent and she writes fiction in English. **Patrick T. Reardon**, of the *Chicago Tribune*, recounts the "doozy" of the exchange between **Pamuk** and **Gun** over the use of the word "doozies." "The Turkish word [used by **Pamuk**] can be translated 'strange' or 'odd,' but 'doozy' is such a vibrant word. And the Turkish word had a kind of colloquial sound to it."

The subject of **Nobel Laureates** in Literature is obviously a passion and whenever I find a good opportunity I find a way to get the conversation going on this matter. **Avondale Wine and Cheese** located on Savannah Highway in the **Avondale Business District** is a funky foodie boutique shop where you can enjoy a glass of wine, unique handcrafted cheeses, and conversation with a variety of fun people that pass through the door. One Monday evening,

I met **Bill** and his wife **Ava** at **Avondale Wine and Cheese**. **Bill Lavery** is a retired Professor of Russian and Eastern European History from **Furman University**. We were enjoying our wine, cheese and conversation when the subject of novels and translators was soon on the plate. **Bill** gave me numerous suggestions of translators to research and related fun stories of his travels in both Russia and Eastern Europe. Ultimately he shared this personal story with me. Before **Bill** became a retired Professor of Russian and Eastern European History he was a student of **Walter Arndt** at the **University of North Carolina**. **Walter Arndt** is currently Professor Emeritus at **Dartmouth** and is a noted translator. His translation of **Alexander Puskin's** *Eugene Onegin* won the **Bollingen Poetry Translation Prize** in 1962. **Puskin** is considered the pinnacle writer for the Russian people and the difficulty in translating his works is in the conveying of the "Russian soul." **Arndt's** translations were more literal, and academic as compared to **Vladimir Nabokov's** translations that were more colloquial and loose. According to **Bill's** story, the two "vied, sparred and spate at one another" about their disparate approaches. So **Bill** finds himself studying Russian from **Arndt**. "**Arndt** used to send us (seven Russian lit types and me, a, pardon the word, mere historian) to the board with a quatrain, drawn by chance, chalk and a dictionary." We worked, I sweated, and he reviewed the work. Gazing at mine, **Arndt** said, "**Mr. Lavery?**" "Sir," I said. "You have the soul of an ox." "Yes, sir," I said. "End of the story." 🌸

Little Red Herrings — We're All Me-ists Now.

by **Mark Y. Herring** (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

In a widely and rightly reviled movie, *Wall Street*, **Michael Douglas** plays a sinister character by the name of **Gordon Gekko**. The movie is hardly subtle (get it? Gecko, evil, lizard-like? This was before the Geico commercials made them lovable) and is silly in the extreme. But in one particularly ham-fisted scene, the reptilian Gecko proclaims to a bunch of servile wannabes that "Greed is Good." The scene is supposed to send theatergoers running from the movie screaming, and if shown following the current economic meltdown, might well end in a melee. **Madoff** notwithstanding, today's culture is worse. As I contemplate the "Decade of Greed" as the eighties is called, I find myself longing wistfully for them if today's "Digital Me Decade" is the replacement.

How can that possibly be, you ask? The rapid and furious demise of so many national newspapers set me to thinking about all of this (or as some of you are muttering, set me off). One by one, some of this country's greatest newspapers are going the way of all flesh, or the way of all pulp, or whatever you want to call it: they're going the way of the dustbin, and I for one am crying in my beer (actually it's a glass of Chateau Lafite Rothschild,



but beer, not wine, made the metaphor). We're losing, and have lost, vast numbers of newspapers, and we're all going to be the worse for it. What's replacing them is what some blithely refer to as "a different medium, the Web" but what **Nicholas Negroponte** has more accurately called the "Daily Me." The Daily Me is a series of RSS feeds (perhaps that first "s" stands for "stupid" and not "simple") that literally "feed" our biases. We're all me-ists now.

I find the loss of papers and their ersatz digital replacements very troubling and began digging about for research when I ran across **Nicholas Kristof's** *New York Times*' op-ed, "The Daily Me" (March 19, 2009). **Kristof** and I are on the same page. Newspapers are dying, reporters are losing their jobs, and we, the public, are losing something very valuable: balance, thought, mental challenge. In place of all that, we're getting a confirmation of our most brittle myopias.

You can read **Kristof's** op-ed, so I won't repeat it here. What I suspected and feared, **Kristof** confirmed. People who surf the Web for news are really looking for something with which they agree, not something to stretch their minds or cause them to reconsider long held and possibly erroneous views. It's hard to

avoid if you read a newspaper. Whether you're conservative, liberal, Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Independent, apolitical, religious, atheist or what-have-you, you're going to be confronted with a different view in a good newspaper.

Please note the modifier. I know only too well that newspapers across the country ride their own ideological hobbyhorses. But even in the most slanted of them, you're going to find something that makes you pause and think again. In today's sound bite, eye-byte, twitting [sic] world, that's about all we can hope for. And it isn't a bad thing, either. It's never too late to reconsider your views, whatever they are, if only to be confirmed that you're holding them in the brightest possible illumination of mind that you can. **Owen Barfield**, an Inkling and a close friend of **C. S. Lewis**, contended that once you think you have all the faith-belief stuff down pat and are pretty certain of where you stand and what you think, that's a good time to throw it all away and start over again. This is not a bad view for the most tightly held of ideals. It's fine if you end right back there, and chances are you will if it's one of life's verities. But human frailty and endless penchant for error can never be underestimated.

continued on page 65

Little Red Herrings from page 64

We don't like to be, or have our views, undermined. In fact, we avoid it at all cost. But on the Web, it's all we do (**Kristof** calls this, ironically enough, "truth-seeking"). In fact, on the Web it's all we *can* do because the search engines, all of them, look for materials the way we structure the searches: according to our prejudices.

I believe it was **Blake** who said "opposition is true friendship." I've always thought that, even while I've been ready to tear into an opponent who held a view antipodean to my own. My fear is that with the loss of all these newspapers (and if newspapers are gone, will magazines soon follow?) we'll all lose any chance to challenge ourselves. We'll fall into our hidebound intellectual silos and never be able to get out again, nor will we want to. Once there, we'll think the world is all about us, agrees with us, holds the same opinions as we do. Where else will you get the chance to be intellectually challenged on what you hold dear if not in a daily read that isn't about you? You'll not likely find it at your favorite bar, your workplace, your church or civic group because we choose those things precisely because they make us feel comfortable. With the loss of newspapers, what's left to challenge us? And this doesn't begin to touch the loss of truly investigative reporting that uncovers something important, like a **Madoff** or a **Monica**.

It's not just the loss of newspapers, that I worry about losing. It's the loss of really engaged, daily reading. Hardly anyone does that any more. We all read in bits and pieces. In starts and stops. In snatches and grabs. On the Internet. And for most of us, being able to really concentrate for hours on end is slowly slipping away with each page refresh. Try this the next time you're around a teenager, Hand out *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*. But get ready to run. If caught, you'll probably be arrested for child abuse.

I'm not saying that people do not read on the Web. Those who always have are now reading and will likely continue to do so. But even these folks, I fear, will read more and more only those things with which they agree if our only medium is the Web. If we think securing the peace in the Middle East is hard, wait a decade and try to find it in your own neighborhood, assuming anyone there is talking to anyone else. **Kristof** calls newspaper reading a "daily workout" as if at the gym. And he's right. The trouble is that failing to do it is like letting that treadmill become a wardrobe. Pretty soon, you get short of breath and there's only one thing worse:

Being short of thought.

If there's any bailout money left, newspapers might be a good place to start. I've gotten more out of them than I ever did GM.

I know **Gordon Gekko** was a terrible stereotype, and I really don't favor greed. But I do favor one thing that sounds a bit like his famous line:

Read. Read is Good. 

Against the Grain / June 2009



The AEA is launching four new peer-reviewed journals in 2009:

- **AEJ: Applied Economics** (January): Focuses on empirical micro issues
- **AEJ: Economic Policy** (February): Examines economic policy's role in economic outcomes
- **AEJ: Macroeconomics** (January): Studies economic fluctuations and growth
- **AEJ: Microeconomics** (February): Covers microeconomic theory, industrial organization, and aspects of international trade, political economy, and finance

Tables of Contents and Abstracts are available at:

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Rumors from page 54

And, coming up in July is the **11th Fiesole Collection Development Retreat**. This time in Glasgow, Scotland. And, **Derek Law** tells us, one of the speakers, **Malcolm Read**, has been awarded an **OBE** in Queen Elizabeth II's Birthday honours. **OBE** stands for **Order of the British Empire** and gives recognition for work well done. digital.casalini.it/retreat/

And heard recently that the bearded **Ken Robichaux** was featured in an article in the **Charleston Post & Courier** (6-11-09) about the **Picture Show Man Website** which he

created several years ago and which covers the **history of American film** from its birth through 1960. Y'all will remember that **Anne** (**Ken's** wife) **Kabler Robichaux** used to be Assistant Director of the **Medical University of South Carolina Library** and **Ken** used to work for **J.A. Majors**. No moss is growing under their feet! See — "**Picture Show Man director takes film history personally,**" by **Jessica Johnson**.

www.postandcourier.com/news/2009/jun/11/picture_show_man_director_takes_film_his85497/

www.postandcourier.com/news/2009/jun/11/searching_america_s_past_on_silver_screes85524/

continued on page 78

<<http://www.against-the-grain.com>> 65