

Reflections on Red Delicious: methods and forms in thinking human and literary experience.

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The play *Red Delicious*, *Reflections* and subsequently *A Venture beyond the Script* (in that chronological order) formed the second field in my preliminary doctoral examination at the department of comparative literature, University of Montreal in the summer of 2004.

The play *Red Delicious* came as a response to a question raised by professor Terry Cochran during the obligatory seminar for graduate students in comparative literature in spring 2003. The question was: what remains of literature today?

My first reaction popped up numerous other questions, such as: what is the nature of this literature with which we are here so concerned? What has been its experience that caused us to doubt whether it remains with us or not? How - if - did it transform? and so forth. Subsequent reflection on the question made me also question the definitions at stake and what these definitions supposedly defined.

Being spontaneous and suffering from fits of vivid imagination, and before having solved any methodological puzzles as to how to proceed to answering the question, characters invaded me; they acted, spoke, screamed, suffered, lived... I wrote them down and then looked at what emerged, which, in fact, was yet another question, a supposition, perhaps a hypothesis: what if by having accepted our Myth of Creation we have created our own epistemology. What if, the epistemology of the human experience is in fact literary, not because we have invented literature as a genre, but because literature is our nature and essence; in other words we are literature?

Some might accuse me of begging the question here. However, this begging is our inevitable state of affairs - we can never escape it because we can never really know whether first came the chicken or the egg.

The important aspect of any experience is that consciousness and intelligence (and I do not believe that they are exclusively human 1

traits; I'd even say, seeing the state of the world, humans might have less of those than most other species) affect our world and our nature because inadvertently we act upon the world in a specific manner and our interaction causes us and our world to transform in certain ways.

This transformation however may be only related to our own experience and it would be therefore too farfetched to claim any specific knowledge of our beyond. That is why the character Kalina questions our principles in mathematics, biology, physiology, medicine, etc. for we can imagine and write whatever we wish and we shall even abide by our script (as the self-fulfilling nature of the statistics prophesy indicates), but we can not know for certain what is in the beyond. Paradoxically though, we can feel it.

In this way, our experience itself is literary and that is why literature cannot "really" disappear. With our first abstraction we have bound ourselves with this genre. It may take various forms: cinematographic, theatrical, documentary, literary, mathematical, astrological, etc. but it cannot escape its literary form: i.e. ourselves.

The credibility or plausibility of this seemingly mad play lies in the fact that with our intelligence (which includes its conscious and unconscious counterparts as well as feelings and emotions) we not only metaphorically or euphemistically create our experience, we actually live and influence our physiological and biological development or evolution. Hence, we write our scripts, our myths, our meaning our codes. Whereas our most amazing literary and artistic creation is that we create our lives and experience. We programme ourselves and it becomes extremely difficult to escape the vicious cycle.

In other words, the epistemology of our literary imaginary comes back to our own biological, moral, existential experience which translates into our literary texts but also into our literary lives.

After I have written the play, I came across the fascinating Japanese novel by Koji Suzuki, which eerily and auspiciously turned into a film: *Ringu (The Ring)*. In this book/film, the video-tape becomes the virus that kills because a person chooses to watch that video tape. The audience allows itself to be penetrated by the total horror of what we have concocted for our lives. The fear and the visual reception of this type of information dictates our script, which is that of death. In this way, I can see that the film does not replace the role of literature, but rather confirms it and takes its place next to it.

In this sense then, literature cannot disappear unless we disappear, since we are literature and literary characters and their creators at the same time. Having ventured into the world of abstractions we became abstract.

Yet, paradoxically, since we are also ground in nature, this abstraction became real. And so did death and oblivion, which some of the characters in the play obsessively re-enact while others question the inevitability of the script.

The fact that they are "literary" or "imaginary" characters does not make them any less "real" or "scientific". Our imaginary is solidly ground in our experience and our experience depends on our imaginary. Even if we consider them as contradictory, the two together form us, our nature and point to where and how we came from: the choice of death in the Garden of Eden, and our continual reconfirmation of this choice through murder by the fundamental institutions of our civilization.

The characters in this play, just like our worldly characters, take us to our origins. They, in the best of Freudian traditions, turn to destroy what we believe to be the parent of our civilization: Mesopotamia. This act, I read as the ultimate confirmation of self destruction. In this way, science and art, i.e. the mundane and the imaginary are both as exact and real as they are evasive and illusory.

The method of approaching the study of our truth requires the ability to switch off from facts and to tune in to the feelings and emotions evoked by the larger than ourselves perspective.

However, the rigid academic rules with regard to the method and form of inquiry (called scientific) attempt to convince us with an essentially self-contradictory picture in which it is the "real", "measurable" facts that are allowed to illustrate our reality, yet at the same time we pride ourselves with our ability to think and function abstractly. Such methods leave little unexplored territory for a truly new and different outlook, not as an entertainment genre of science fiction, but as a scientific method in itself.

This play, hence, is about the method in literary studies, which is a philosophical branch in the tradition of occidental "science". Method, I believe, engenders both form and meaning. In other words, this work is about the experience of culture, civilization, life, and the place of literary inquiry itself. My own background in literary and anthropological studies and my recent feeling of suffocation within disciplines and within the space of "inter-disciplinary" work which also uses strict disciplinarian criteria and rarely questions the premises and definitions, even if in shuffled and ruffled modes called for a new experimental approach. The characters called themselves into being - all I had to do was explore the new possibilities which a theatrical work can illuminate as an academic and theoretical exercise.

From the beginning of my academic career in the humanities and social sciences, I was haunted by the questions: 1) what purpose do these

disciplines fulfill and 2) what does my own search and research contribute and to what?

After years of academic and field work, I recalled the old maxim in which "deeds mean more than words" and saw that it applied equally well to science. In fact, in any discipline, the method counts more than the words, because meaning is derived not from the understanding of the terms themselves, but from the basic drive present within us and which impels us to assign and derive specific meaning from a variety of concepts and phenomena.

In addition, I can say that intuitively (or even at the level of my basic instinct which comes from the memory of the flesh of all the generations' experience before us, i.e. our *habitus*¹), the dramaturgical format serves better purposes here than a "classical" essay because it offers the possibility to radically overturn the presuppositions and values of our academic tradition. Such play with the established concepts helps to expose the drive of our Civilization and therefore of science, which is at the basis of this institution. It allows to see literature and philosophy as real life and real life as a philosophical inquiry. In other words, by trading places, and abandoning the demands of scientific *apriorii*, we can see other possibilities that the scientific method due to its rigidity and demands to adhere to "facts", i.e. to those aspects of experience that human beings can perceive (prove, measure, expose) are biased and limiting in themselves because since we are the products of our history (see Bourdieu and Douglas among others) and products of our physicality and physiology (the limitations imposed by experiencing the world and life as specific physical constructs and the limitations of our senses that in themselves limit our knowledge) we are trained to perceive and to re-enact our institutions all the while tending to their (the institutions') interests².

In addition, the academic method inevitably reproduces itself, unless there is radical change and break with tradition. That is why, I believe that in contemporary times, such writers as Stanislaw Lem or the brothers Strugatsie³ bring radically new insights into philosophy with which the philosophical texts written in a classical format and using classical methods face difficulty.

¹ See Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

² See Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*.

³ Stanislaw Lem is the author of such books as *Solaris*, *Eden*, *The Astronauts*, *The Chain of Chance*, etc.. The Strugatsys wrote *It is difficult to be God*, *Monday begins on Saturday*, *Beetle in an Anthill*, the collection of *Stalkers of the Infinite*.

Red Delicious exposes the drive at the basis of human civilization: it comes forth as the instinct⁴ of accumulation (the characters in the play refer to it as the forces of greed). In this case, the methods in themselves, even before the texts, become the objects of accumulation and which concurrently perpetuate the Civilization machine that needs human beings as the reproductive receptacles of this institution⁵. Tin Schnitt's and other professors' proposals are part of this method of the machine to accumulate. The professors themselves most often believe that they're doing something different, something of their own, or even not doing anything at all. However, it is the constant reconfirmation of the method itself that counts. That is why they get funded. The way in which the Institution accumulates its "method" lies in the nature and purpose of the proposals themselves - a proposal, we all know is written in order to describe the methods to be employed in the proposed topic of study and to an extent introduce the proposed study (i.e. in light of the method).

Tin Schnitt demonstrates that the Self itself dissolves in the method (in the proposal writing) and that in fact the "self" is an illusion, for, ever since the Fall⁶, the myth of the existence of Self perpetuates the drive for accumulation, i.e. it perpetuates the instinct of greed and therefore of death. In this respect, literature as a methodical and at the same time methodological exercise of accumulation is the script that the characters follow. The characters at this point can be "real" people, members of our society. The Self in this script is a derivative of what Mary Douglas refers to as the Institution and Bourdieu as *habitus*, for in the words of both of these thinkers, the individual behaves according to a historical programme, acting on behalf and in the interest of the Institution.

In this respect, our (monotheistic) rendition of our creation and demise offers an epistemological reading to how we understand ourselves. When Humanity chose to pick the apple from the tree and not pick the one that had already fallen⁷, it has achieved and created several aspects of what we study in literature: 1. linear movement within the dimension of time (from urge or desire to the satisfaction of that urge or desire); 2. space; 3. plot; 4. abstract thinking which led to theoretical thinking and compelled

⁴ By 'instinct', I mean the impulses that prompt specific actions and reactions and which are not due to some natural causes, but have been socially instilled in people in early childhood, i.e something closer to Bourdieu's *habitus* than to Freud's impulses.

⁵ Bourdieu's concept of non-material capital in *Distinction*.

⁶ I take this as my point of departure because in our Christian Western culture (see Derrida and others on this topic) the biblical rendition of our creation and fall is taken as the pivotal moment of reference for Christian/Judao/Islamic history and the argument (for the logical existence and reasoning (justification?).

⁷ I am not concerned here with historical accuracy but with the choice of representation of choice.

people to act according to prescribed linear and spatial notions. It is in this sense that the couple in the Garden of Eternity have exchanged real existence to a literal mode of subsistence. In our literality, we constantly move in and according to a plot becoming more and more like theoretical abstractions.

The war in Iraq, which figures in the play itself, is a perfect illustration of the above deliberations. First, the importance of the method of thinking and arguing about the events of the war proved to be more important than the actual events themselves. That is, the fact of winning this war was first methodically presented in the "propaganda" script. The war was first announced on all Western media as won and as ended. Then, the concerned actors, including real and fictional allies and foes, terrorists and friends, followed the script in terms of producing literary and factual experiences and information⁸. This is the prelude to belief, to faith.

AlJazeera offered its own version of the script, but this fact does not change the script for the Americans and other Occidentals since in the final score, the American script responds to "Occidental" interests and the whole array of fictional and real characters from the UN, the European Union, NATO, etc. who will also get their pie and dramaturgical premieres. The Arab script seems to write differently the private lives and there will be yet others depending on their degree of participation. But I wonder if in the end their script is not the same, since the representation of historical choice and the drive are the same.

Furthermore, in this war we are told that the New World took a stand against Old Europe and attacked the Ancient Cradle of Civilization in order to win its title for world hegemony. However, there is something deeper than such categories. The drive that prompts collective action and cultural production in the New World is the same that pushed the ancient Babylonians, Sumarians and Mesopotamians to invent agriculture and thus the modern social system. The New World is the logical development of the impatience and the desire to accumulate and to possess that marked the drive of the Old World.

Impatience is the symptom of awareness of time. Impatience creates the time dimension. Agriculture is the symptom of awareness of space and is responsible for that dimension. The drive to control these dimensions inevitably generates war (the drive of death). In this respect, the current war in Iraq is not only driven by a materialistic need to control oil and geopolitics (which is true), but is also a symbolic self-hatred, hatred of the mirrored

⁸ Prolific writers provided endless scenarios of terrorism, beheading, capturing villains, murdering them, reprimanding them, trying in various real or mock courts, and constantly writing, discussing, thinking, and feeling in specific ways.

Other⁹- who is in fact the Self - the desire to destroy the symbol and the source of the Western sinister sense, while paradoxically screaming for its preservation.

In all respects, the "script" of war is also the "script" of "science" and "academia" because these attempt to generate "knowledge" of how to better satisfy the basic urge. The impatience to snatch the red and delicious apple from the tree is an act of murder within the framework of dimensions. The scheme to plant more apple trees together - the principle of agriculture - disregards the natural need of the earth for balance and variety. The farmer eliminates the "pests" which can be weeds, beasts, or humans. In other words the principle of agriculture is the same in business and the same in war: kill competition.

Further, the aim in agriculture is to plant as much of the same species with the least possible effort in the least possible time so as to have as much as possible profit. The result is the creation of mega-farms that destroy natural fauna while overcrowding the land with the same kind against nature's need for balance and variety, often resorting to genetic engineering of species introducing the "self-destructive gene"¹⁰ – a real reflection and metaphor of our own choice of death.

Overcrowding any living species - even plants - results in stressful conditions, unhappiness, and suffering - not only of the species, but also of those who consume these hormones of pain and sadness. In this sense, the core of our civilization is suffering, torture, and murder: we breed them and eat them. Symbolically, our first act of violence that ruptured eternity into the dimensions of time and space: i.e. Creating the possibility to control space and to profit from time points to cultivation as a step towards the realization of the instinct of greed. The character Kalina says that she refused to follow the script and returns to the extra-dimensional life-style of picking only what the earth is ready to give. In this way, both Kalina and Tin Schnitt question the inevitability of following the Script.

Advocates of Civilization and Culture (and most people are their advocates) argue that Culture and Civilization sprung from the attempt of human beings to protect themselves from hunger, carnivorous beasts, natural cataclysms and others. If we take the historical sources at face value, it becomes obvious that the thousands of years of culture have not achieved its goal, rather the contrary: those in the "Economically Developed" countries neither stopped dying nor are dying less frequently. Moreover, due to over-eating the "developed" worlders are developing

⁹ See Edward Said's work on *Orientalism*.

¹⁰ For example see the documentary *The Corporation* written by Joel Bakan and Harold Crooks and directed by Jennifer Abbott and Mark Achbar: 2003.

more illnesses, deformities and handicaps. The medicine creates more powerful bacteria that destroy living organisms from within and the availability and "indispensable" access to media continues to dictate the script of fear: SARS, cancer, Aids, the Nile Virus, etc. These are today's mammoths and dinosaurs - only from within us. They are confirmed, reconfirmed, and reinforced by science, literature (arts), media and academia.

Hence, the scientific method is crucial to Civilization because it legitimizes beliefs and values that ensure the transmission of the drive to accumulate and to fear. The liberation of thought from science and its application opens horizons to infinite imagination and possibilities. The study of the "exact" and the "accurate", in this respect, can be only some of the methods in cultural production, but not the Method.

This is how the play connects academic ruminations on the nature of culture and civilization with the examination of what does TEXT say about us.

My point is that Text does not begin with the first written or drawn representation of thought - it becomes with abstraction itself, with thought about the world. This thought is tightly connected with the forces behind our impulses and motivations. The first text of our abstraction, the Fall, is the subtraction of the human being from the imagined state of satisfaction to a state of constant pursuit of happiness (i.e. subtraction of happiness) i.e. of dissatisfaction. The academic culture has developed in such a way as to permit only the questioning that would further build on the body of science and civilization already cultivated in the initial plot. Red Delicious, in the context of this academic culture, tests the method and dares an answer: as long as we chose this type of life and death, so long shall literature be.