

Nearly 50 years after writing these Short Stories/Vignettes (1970-71) , Johanna and I re-read them (2018). Here are some of our comments

EnTrance

Johanna comments 2018: Entrance is full of sensuality in a spiritually seeking context. It has some really good lines; "she is only a sound on the way to the pure note." "...they felt themselves stumble into the picture." Sex as a "falling bird's wing." (I wasn't quite sure how to interpret the line "Your vision has already exiled you" but I liked it!). As writing, it's really excellent. Quite powerful. Creates an amazing mood. And the craft of the piece, form, formlessness, multi-cultural, is extraordinary.

NAKED AND WET

Johanna comments 2018 This is a really good story. Marianne comes across as kind of childlike, but perhaps this is only how Peter needs to see her. It is well-crafted, and jumps back and forth between the two perspectives well. I like the way his own impossibly high, naïve standards for her (he doesn't even think of what he might do to make the relationship work!) destroy the relationship. You both dislike and feel sad for him

LIMB BOW

Johanna comments 2018 I like the additions to Limb Bow - good catch about the literal bowing of his limbs; as well as adding an image of smoke rising into the limbo of the sky. And I agree - the character is in limbo - so including a reference is important, but you don't want it too obvious. I like the way you've done it.

CHANGE

Johanna comments 2018 This is an intriguing piece, and I like both the debate between the two aristocratic women about whether empathy or money matters most; and the fact that the beggar sees they are discussing him, but can't hear what they are saying. It is well-written, lots of good imagery.

D comment: I'm thinking that there is a "trilogy" within "Seer" in terms of person outside society: Naked and Wet (leaving relationship); Limb Bow, "Change" and Numb Or

J, Yes, very nice; and I like the progression of the trilogy after Naked and Wet from trying to fit in society to begging outside (but still from) society to hiding entirely (even from nature

NUMB OR

J'S COMMENT. This is well-written, but I don't get it. Maybe it is about hiding, seeking comfort, avoiding painful reality (rain), becoming desensitized? The title seems to suggest becoming numb, but to what? What is the Or? All that happens is that it keeps raining and the narrator keeps burrowing, initially to escape and then to become comfortable, and finally to be numb. Because of the buttocks and anus, it seems sexualized, but it's unclear why. I read it a couple of times, but I couldn't really grasp the point. My feeling tone is puzzled, frustrated at not understanding what I'm reading. Why is this guy digging into the mud? Who is he? Why is it raining? Why is he naked? Why does the rain seem to love his butt?! (Freud?!?) If you understand why you wrote it, or what it's about, you might want to include for that reason (kind of historical insight).

D'S RESPONSE: Thanks for your comments on Numb Or. I think, upon reflection, it's about a being (person? Kafka like animal with consciousness) trying to hide-- and the impossibility of doing that---the best that can be obtained is a sort of pleasurable tingling, which leads to "numbness"----Numb Or seems to suggest it's not just numbness, but also includes it.

Numb Or is really totally outside of society; but no "simple answer" there is no "natural shelter; and just as society causes challenges so does nature and rain and cold.

J'S RESPONSE: I like this interpretation of Numb Or. It does have a Kafkaesque feel to it - like Metamorphosis. Maybe part of the question is - is this a man or a mole?! There is little in it to suggest that he is hiding from society - it seems more like he is hiding from the rain - but I guess I can see it as a metaphor. Society—and nature-- , then, is inescapable, and can produce a kind of pleasure, in the midst of discomfort, which in turn produces a kind of numbness. This all works

EXIT

D (2018) I get a nice "feeling tone" from the ending, but what the heck do you think it means?!?! Laugh at world's seeming duality? the machinations of the mind. !?!? If you look at all the pieces, who is the "Seer"? It seems in the vignettes, Entrance, Naked and Wet, Limb Bow, Change, Numb or, there is no real wise "Seer". All are in some ways wanting, either they realize that or self-delusional denial. But what about exit. Naciketas seems to have found peace,

but the story ends with darkness and hardened candle. Is this not really the "end, exit" but a beginning "Entrance". I once read of an author who said when he wrote a certain work, only he and God understood it. Now, years later, he hopes God at least still understands it!!? Your thoughts?

Johanna comments 2018 So, I think the story is about the cosmic chuckle. Naciketas realizes the koan of the story about the bird and the caterpillar cannot be answered by logic or analysis. Even a recognition of cosmic oneness is not enough. Only laughter and song can yield enlightenment. I'm not sure that the ending is despairing or existential either. The master and the student meditate together. The candle goes out and the wax hardens. Light fades, but in the morning there will be more light, and in the night another candle. Life is impermanent but there is always the cosmic chuckle and both the master and Naciketas get it.

I think they are the seers of the title - they see clearly, in the Buddhist sense of clear-sightedness. I don't necessarily see that Naciketas will stay in the cave, although he may re-enter the world as a bodhisattva. I think he becomes enlightened, whereas no one else (in the other stories) makes it to this level of insight (not the lovers in Entrance; not the bowing chameleon, not the guy who abandons his imperfect girl, perhaps not even the ascetic beggar ("Change" is more about the philosophical argument of the two women than about his own spiritual journey); not the human/animal buried up to his butt. So in my read, there is a final resolution in Exit, even though it may be leading to another "Entrance." ☺

Deane (to J) : Omg, you are brilliant. I bow to the real master ☺

Note to kids about Exit We recently read this last short story, Exit, at Urth during morning breakfast. I loved that we together could be reading it nearly 50 years later. What a search! As I read this, I saw the searcher; the smugness (shot down!); the layers and layers of mind; the creative writing....the loving the mind and seeing its limits; seeking wisdom, seeking belonging, seeking a home..... Ah, the journey that began so long ago. Now 50 years later, the wisdom learned was taken from the "cave" has now been lived in love and work. Mom was holding my hand in love. And yes, poppers had a few tears.

MOM: J (comment to kids) : Exit shows off the revolutions of his mind, his self-deprecating humor, and the sweetness of his heart.

Comments

You all can see that even at 23, Papa Ki Tao was DEEP! He had already studied various Eastern religions, and understood them well enough to write his own contemporary version! He was - and is - a seeker after knowledge and after meaning. What is the way out? Where is the exit in his story? From what? Buddhists teach that we seek to free ourselves from suffering, which is often caused by the permutations our minds. We gain enlightenment not from the convolutions of mental processes, but from a bolt of understanding, satori! Suddenly, we are free because we understand and see differently. What did Naciketas discover? I guess we each have to answer for ourselves. But for sure we know that the answer lay in laughter and song. Love you all, Mom/MamaJo/Jo/J/Grandma Jo p.s. Happy New Year, everyone! May this be a year of health, happiness, fulfillment, laughter, and song :-)

Oodles of love! And new beginnings.....and lots of giggles...:)

Wow. Poppers that is an extraordinary story. Quite deep, quite paradoxical, quite Zen.

Not sure I understood on all levels, but loved the poetry and metaphors of the writing. My favorite character was the caterpillar:)

And yes, many teachings, but one of the biggest for me is not to assume we know...in every moment infinite possibilities, infinite meanings, and yet the one ...OMmmmmmm

xox Shauna

-----Original Message-----

From: dhshapir [mailto:dhshapir@uci.edu]

Sent: Monday, January 01, 2018 8:27 AM

To: brett; desidoo; james; JENA; josh; Shapiro, Johanna; liam; shauna sl shapiro

Subject: happy new year and a sharing.....

Hi Precious Family,

Happy New Year!!!:) Good morning I love you!!!

Yea, another year, a fresh start....new beginnings.

I have a short short story that I wrote when I was 23, which I recently came across and would like to share with you. It's the final "vignette" in a collection called "Seer" --it's title is "Exit" and it's about a seeker after knowledge....Yes, I was seeking then, at 23...and I remember at 48, when I went to Israel, again seeking--and when Jena arrived (all of 18!) ,she said Well, Dad, have you found yourself yet! HAHAAH..Ok, now my kids are in their mid 30's--early 40's. Ha...:) Karma baby!! (Naciketas cited is from the Indian text the Upanishads). This is very short (8 pages or so). (Starts on p. 24, so scroll down..... Hope you enjoy!:) (and liam and James, it's never too early!:) :(Please share with Jackson and Nate (and skyla when as as appropriate)

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J Additional comments (2023) on re-reading:

I enjoyed reading it again. I think my original comment is pretty good (full of praise and appreciation for your Buddhist wisdom and writing). I came to the same conclusion this time around – the meaning of what happened remains obscure – is the bird happy or sad? Who is singing (are both bird and disciple singing together)? Why didn't the disciple just cut the vine to free the bird? But all of these speculations are just mind gyrations and the answers don't matter. The satori lies in the realization is that all we can do is laugh and sing in the face of mystery and even suffering. Profound, wise, and also very well-written. A beautiful story within a story.