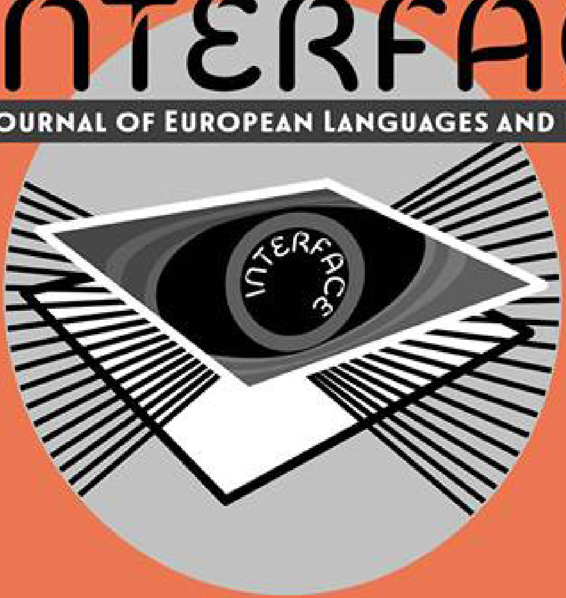
INTERFACE

–Journal of European Languages and Literatures



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Spring
2017

INTERFACE
—JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 2, Spring 2017

The Journal is published three time a year (February, June, October) by the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University.

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INTERFACE
–JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 2 (Spring 2017)

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ISSN: 2519-1268
Issue 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 1-7
DOI: 10.6667/interface.2.2017.35

EDITORIAL:

Interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary?

VASSILIS VAGIOS
National Taiwan University

Following the publication of the first issue of INTERFACE a number of colleagues got in touch with us, some to congratulate us for establishing an interdisciplinary journal, others to inquire whether we are an interdisciplinary or a multidisciplinary journal, or indeed a journal of area studies. Were the inquiries more numerous, there is no doubt that we would have faced more terms to respond to, as the proliferation of terms in this area of scholarship has resulted in "a sometimes confusing array of jargon" (Klein, 2010, p. 15). Graff, nearing a conclusion of his historical survey of interdisciplinarity, is more explicit regarding the cause of both the confusion and the profusion:

> The "name game" in which interdisciplinarity is construed by listing or denying disciplines is symptomatic of the severe problems that result from multiple, conflicting, and contradictory discourses in which dichotomies substitute for clarity. Definitions are often absent; transdisciplinarity is an especially egregious example. The endless typologies, classifications, and hierarchies of multi- , inter- , and transdisciplinarities are not helpful. Most important, we must recognize that interdisciplines could not exist without disciplines; mutually and reciprocally, they shape and reshape each other.
>
> (Graff, 2015, p. 215)

Given this state of affairs, it is imperative that INTERFACE is explicit about its editorial stance.

Superficially speaking, when INTERFACE calls for papers that deal with any aspect of any period of any European language/literature one already assumes that it is a resource available to a number of distinct disciplines. However, if the above statement by Graff is correct, then before talking about interdisciplinarity, we should talk about disciplinarity. The problem is what exactly is a “discipline” within our field of studies? If we use as a guide the way academic departments are organized, then the apparent answer would be that the disciplines are organized alongside “national” lines (i.e. French Studies. German Studies, Spanish Studies, etc.). Unfortunately, this organization has a disadvantage: it both hides real and existing divisions and creates artificial ones. So, for example, the researcher of Spanish language faces very different epistemological and conceptual issues from one’s colleague in the same department who researches Spanish literature, and at the same time shares these very issues with the person working on the other side of the wall and who researches French language.

When the resources available and the number of the practitioners are beyond a certain critical mass, then the academic world tries to resolve the problem of the conflict within the same department by creating additional departments, or divisions within existing departments. So, for example, even in the relatively minor (by international standards) field of Modern Greek Studies, Greek universities have the numbers and the resources to split their departments into Modern Greek Literature and Modern Greek Linguistics. However, for the very same field of studies this solution would not be a possibility within, say, British universities, where King’s College – London takes the opposite view: that all Greek Studies (Classical, Byzantine, Modern; both language and literature) should be packed into one unit, or be closed down.

It is beyond the scope of this editorial to trace the history of academic departmentalization.[1] Suffice it here to say that this movement started from medieval times, when law and medicine became distinct from theology and the arts. In response to calls from outside academy for more specialization for the “professional” courses, scholarly institutions

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[1] However, two very nice accounts of this history are available in Klein (1990) and Swoboda (1979).

set up a dichotomy of "theoretical" and "practical studies",[2] and as a result the professional guilds were able to influence and control the curriculum, as Swoboda (1979, p. 55) makes clear.

What both the example of the Greek departments and the "innovation" of the medieval universities make clear is that the distribution of scholars into academic departments is not being made in order to facilitate the production of knowledge per se, but in order to facilitate the production of knowledge according to the norms imposed by the power relations prevailing in particular temporal and spatial frameworks. In other words, the scholar of French Linguistics, for instance, prefers to be placed within the same department with the scholar of French Literature rather than with the practitioner of German Linguistics –not because the two of them share epistemological and methodological communalities, but because the ideology of Frenchness (or in other cases Germanness, Spanishness, and so on) has inculcated in them shared forms of consciousness, roles and norms which are tightly associated with particular regimes of power (which in this particular case arose into prominence from the late eighteenth century onwards within the context of a power struggle between the aristocrats and the burghers, as well as competing imperialisms and the reactions of the subjugated communities).

Of course, interdisciplinarity is also involved in the struggle between discourses of power. One example of this involvement can be seen in the case of the new universities established in the 1960's and 1970's in Canada:

> In many cases, the new universities were located in close proximity to long-established ones...Thus, most of them developed programs in areas that we would now consider to be interdisciplinary, either because this was considered to be the intellectually promising course to follow, or because, by being interdisciplinary, the new or refashioned universities

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[2] As Birnbaum (1969, p. 11) puts it "the medieval universities exhibited a considerable respect for the world of praxis: their faculties of law and medicine were closely tied to the actual exercise of these professions".

> could claim to be breaking new ground in comparison with the older institutions. All the Canadian universities especially known today for their interdisciplinary studies, with the possible exception of Carleton, were established or restructured in this period.
>
> (Salter and Hearn, 1997, pp. 28-29)

Similarly, the choice made by INTERFACE is also a choice motivated by questions of power (or rather, the lack thereof) that we face as scholars of European Languages and Literatures in East Asia. Firstly, as Finch (2012) stated with respect to Korea (but his insights can be generalized all over East Asia) with the exception of English all other European language programs face a situation in which the numbers of both students and researchers are diminishing. As a result, fields that were always less popular (e.g. Italian or Russian Studies) find it already difficult to form communities that will have the critical mass necessary for engaging in important projects; while even the more popular ones (e.g. French, German, Spanish Studies) are seeing their numbers dwindling and seem to be heading towards a similar fate in the near future. The solution that INTERFACE proposes is to pool the resources of these different disciplines (which as we have already seen are not as unified and as autonomous as some may claim) and to create unity in diversity. Not simply to tolerate each other, but to actively acknowledge that our diversity enriches all of us.

The first international seminar on interdisciplinarity organized by the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation in Nice in 1970 resulted in the publication of Apostel (1972), and offered definitions of the different kinds of interdisciplinarity, (although these changes have been contested from the very beginning, they nevertheless are still the most widely used definitions available). The distinctions made are between multidisciplinarity (defined as a juxtaposition of various disciplines, sometimes with no apparent connection between them), interdisciplinarity (defined as the interaction between two or more disciplines) and transdisciplinarity (defined as a process of establishing a common system of axioms for a set of disciplines). These three types of scholarship form a continuum: at the one end, different disciplines simply share the same platform, and keep their own distinct agendas and methodologies (multidisciplinarity); in the middle of the continuum, they interact with each other, inform each other, borrow from each other, while they still remain separate (interdisciplinarity); at the other end of the continuum, the distinct disciplines fuse together to create a new discipline (transdisciplinarity).

All these kinds of interdisciplinarity have already been commonplace within the departments belonging to our field. Those teaching and researching language have always been in the same departments with those teaching and researching literature, so our departments have already been multidisciplinary; and of course literary studies would occasionally be informed by linguists to formulate opinions regarding the diction of a piece of literature, so our departments have already been interdisciplinary; while stylistics created a fusion between linguistics and literary studies, so our departments have already been transdisciplinary.

What INTERFACE proposes is that we actively go beyond the national boundaries. This is not only an acknowledgement of our relatively small numbers in this part of the world; it is also an attempt to build upon what is probably our greatest strength. As I have argued in my editorial in the first issue of our journal, European cultures have been developing in close proximity with each other; each of them has developed in the context of all the others, and in its turn provides the context within which all the others develop. This contextual influence is being lost by the organization of our field in discrete “national” departments, an organization that encourages reduction and disjunction. It encourages us to reduce any problem into fundamental units of analysis and to consider everything outside this unit as epiphenomenal. However, as we are located far away from Europe, and we can appreciate more easily than those located in Europe what is common among the various European cultures, we can (or, perhaps, we should) take better account of the context. After all, as Bateson (2002, p. 14) stated:

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Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all. This is true not only of human communication in words, but also of all communication whatsoever, of all processes, of all mind.

INTERFACE aspires to be the common platform, the shared space within which all of us will co-operate to provide the context for all of the others.

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INTERFACE
—JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 9-38
DOI: 10.6667/interface.2.2017.32

Montesquieu's Political Analysis of the Woman Problem in the *Persian Letters*

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Abstract

This paper discusses why Montesquieu sees the woman problem as particularly important for political philosophy through an interpretation of significant passages in his Persian Letters. It defends two claims. First, contrary to a common view that in Montesquieu's ideal political community, men and women each perform tasks that are suitable to their natures, it shows that the true ideal pursued is a gender-free equality. Second, the optimistic picture presented of Parisian politics and mores in Montesquieu's times in the Persian Letters is not meant as an endorsement or justification of French society. Instead, they are presented positively only insofar as they are potentially transitional stages towards genuine equality. These two claims will be defended as follows. Section 1 introduces the terms by which Montesquieu understands and articulates the woman problem: nature and convention, the standard for evaluating political regimes, and what he means by the "springs" of these regimes. Section 2 turns to a close analysis of the un/equal love relations between men and women in Persia (representing despotism), Paris (monarchy), and a love story symbolizing republican regimes. In that section it becomes clear that a republic and the gender equality it entails constitute the desirable, if practically infeasible, ideal in Montesquieu's estimation. Section 3 concludes with a close reading and comparison of three letters in the novel, which suggest both Montesquieu's moderate optimisim concerning reform within monarchy and bleak prospects for improvement within despotism.

Keywords: Political/Private Parallel, 18th Century European Politics, Love, Gender, Feminism

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Montesquieu's Political Analysis of the Woman Problem in the *Persian Letters*

Equality between the sexes is nowadays by and large taken for granted as a legimitate social and political demand. But the acceptance is not universal, and even those who agree on the desirability of equality do not necessarily agree on the particulars concerning how it is to be realized. This paper will argue that Montesquieu endorses a specific kind of equality of sexes through an interpretation of key passages in his epistolary novel and seminal work on the woman problem, the Persian Letters (hereafter PL).[1] The interpretation will establish two points in particular. First, contrary to a common view which understands Montesquieu's ideal political community to have men and women performing tasks suitable to their sexes, it will argue that his ideal of equality allows for fluidity between "masculinity" and "femininity."[2] Second (both as evidence in support of the first and as a claim in its own right), Montesquieu does not idealize (and thus does not justify) the relation between men and women in Parisian society as portrayed in the PL. The praise of Parisian society made through his characters, the Persian travelers Usbek and Rica, is meant to show that Paris is more likely than Persia to potentially become a transitional stage towards the ideal equality Montesquieu envisions. The praise of Parisian society therefore cannot be seen as an endorsement of the inequality of sexes per se.

The PL on the woman problem is worth investigating first because, as

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[1] Roman numerals denote the letter number. For example, PL XXX refers to the letter numbered 30 in the novel. Quotations of the work are from Healy's translation (Montesquieu 1999).

[2] McAlpin, 2000, for example represents this common view. Recent scholarship on the woman problem in the PL also ask, Was Montesquieu a misogynist, an anti-feminist, or a (proto-)feminist? This paper takes the stand that insofar as he champions the cause of women and argues that the promotion of their status in political communities is healthy and good for the latter, he can be said to be a pioneer of feminist movements, regardless of whatever bias he has towards women. This point will be made more clearly in the main part of this paper; see also the conclusion.

will become clear below, Montesquieu presents a notion of equality that could be a useful resource in contemporary thinking concerning gender politics. But it is also interesting because for Montesquieu, the status of woman in society is not an isolated issue, but actually a key for unlocking the fundamental character of any society (see e.g. The Spirit of the Laws [hereafter SL] VII.8, XIX.6).[3] These remarks throw light on the main theme of the PL: the predominant remarks on women in the latter (even if made mostly by men) open up as important analyses of society and politics as a whole. An implication of this view is that the status of women is not merely their own problem, their own disadvantage, injustice suffered by them alone. As will be seen below, even men, who often oppress women and are initially beneficiaries of the inequality, do not end up being happy or psychologically healthy. To anticipate a main part of the argument why this is so, inequality between sexes cancel the conditions for romantic love, a relation natural to humans and constitutive of their happiness (SL I.2).[4] As far as I know, this is not adequately treated by commentators on the PL. It is with the above two issues in mind that the present study is undertaken.

In this paper, section 1 will begin by briefly explicating the notions in terms of which Montesquieu thinks and formulates the woman question: nature and convention, happiness and justice. Section 2 then turns to interpretating a number of letters in the *PL*, showing how the romantic relations between men and women illustrate the workings of the political regimes under which those relations take place. The analyses of the letters, coupled with the problematic formulated in section 1, will show that Montesquieu was an advocate of gender equality, not inequality. Finally, section 3 turns to a close reading of three letters and argues that although both Paris and Persia are riddled with various forms of inequality, the former has a better chance of realizing equality and is to that extent — but only to that extent — praiseworthy.

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[3] VII.8 means Book 7, Chapter 8). Quotations from the SL use the translation by Choler, Miller, and Stone (Montesquieu 1989).

[4] Thomas (1978, p. 44) notices this, but she restricts her observation to only despotisms (for Montesquieu's use of this term, see 2.1 below). Nor does she explicitly connect the despot's unhappiness with the suffering of women. See also McAlpin (2000, p. 54).

1 Formulating the Question

1.1 The Descriptive Study of Gender Behavior.

Montesquieu's framework for analyzing society in general, and men and women in particular, is the old dichotomy nature and convention. His use of these terms both inherits something from tradition and adds something new. "Nature," roughly speaking, refers to a stable, unchanging characteristic that marks something as what it is. In the present context, one asks: is there something like human nature? Furthermore, can we also meaningfully speak of masculine and feminine natures? Montesquieu answers yes to both: insofar as nature is concerned, there is a constellation of common and differentiating characteristics that define men as men, women as women, and both together as humans.[5] There are, generally speaking, two major differences that differentiate them. Women are physically weaker than men, but they are compensated by their beauty (PL XXXVIII). And so women tend to get what they want by their gentle charm, while men often resort to violence or force. These differences concerning beauty and strength can further bring out differences in psychology and intelligence. For example, Montesquieu believes that women are by nature sexually modest due to their less aggressive temper (which is traced to their physical weakness: SL XVI.12, cf. VII.17).

So far Montesquieu is traditional both in his conception of nature and even to a large extent in how he sees nature manifested in men and women. One new element he adds is that nature need not be restricted to classes. Not only is there a nature of humans, and natures of men and women, there might also be natures of individuals. This is especially relevant for the study of society since, while this cat right in front of me and any other cat might have few natural differences worthy of investigating, humans exhibit such a degree of variety that speaking of individual natures not only makes sense but might also be necessary. Montesquieu affirms the individuality and diversity of humans.

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[5] Nyland (1997, pp. 392-393).

According to him, this is because they have intelligence, which provides them with freedom to change and modify their surroundings in the way they see fit; and this produces diversity (*SL* I.1). Our intelligence, in other words, allows us to create conventions. “Convention” here is used as an umbrella term covering habits, mores, value judgments, laws, institutions, political arrangements, and the like. To deliberately complicate the dichotomy, it is the nature of humans to have conventions. As Nyland(1997, p. 383-387) explains, Montesquieu understands human behavior to be a joint effect of nature and conventions. While nature is that which is stable and unchanging, conventions operate as the factor of change: they emphasize or subdue what is natural. For example, one can assert that men and women are naturally different while denying that this is politically relevant. And one could go on to set up political conventions that minimize or downplay sexual difference.

The understanding that conventions can strongly modify nature without ever completely eliminating it has two implications. First, even if nowadays Montesquieu’s view of “masculine” and “feminine” natures might be labeled as sexist by many people, this does not entail that his political and social view are equally sexist. Second, insofar as conventions are capable of subduing or emphasizing different aspects of nature, a careful and judicious observation of a variety of cultures and countries — that is, the empirical study of humans — is inevitable. If we fail to do this, we might mistake a conventional difference or character for a natural one.[6] Thus the importance of studying human societies descriptively: part of the purpose is to correctly distinguish what belongs to nature and what to convention, what does not change and what is changeable.

Despite the multiplicity of conventions, political ones have special significance because they influence most strongly the behavior of individuals governed by them (SL XI.5). Presumably, this is because political arrangements are arrangements about who or what has the ultimate decisive power concerning what sorts of issues in what sorts of ways, and to the extent that this power is authoritative, it lends a unity

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[6] Cf. Kra (1984, p. 284).

or unifying chracter over its subjects. In other words, Montesquieu does not conceive of a “society,” completely separate from the “state” and autonomous with its own principles of operation, where the latter merely makes the operations of the former smoother or more difficult. Instead he sees that political power structures are strongly connected with determinate, specifiable ways of life, and that the “state” in a deep sense “shapes” the self-understanding of “society,” such that life under a despot is not simply being ruled and oppressed by that despot, but that that life itself can also somewhat be called “despotic.” And to the extent that the relationship between the sexes reflects a way of life, there are also types of relations that correlate with regimes. In other words, the descriptive question might be formulated as follows: Which kind of relationship between the sexes occur under which kind of regime? We will see, in section 2, that corresponding to the three major types of regimes, despotism, monarchy, and republic, there are also three kinds of love between men and women.

1.2 The Normative Question.

That descriptive study is meant as a necessary preparation for answering the crucial question: which regime is superior or more desirable than the other two? Evaluation presupposes standards or criteria by which regimes can be compared. Here, a second non-traditional dimension in Montesqieu’s nature-convention dichotomy seems to emerge. Traditionally, the preferable regime is deemed to be the one that is more natural or in accordance with nature. In other words, the convention that promotes human nature the most is the most desirable convention. Nature is the standard of judgment. Montesquieu, however, does not see the standard as nature simply. The standard in question is related to but not identical with nature.

To see what this means, let us turn to the story of the Troglodytes (*PL* XI-XIV), told by the more mature and married Persian Usbek, on his way to Paris. He tells the story because his friend Mirza back home asked whether “men were made happier by the pleasures and satisfactions of the sense or by the practice of virtue" (X). Usbek's story proceeds in three stages: the lawless Troglodytes, the early lawful Troglodytes, and the later lawful ones. The lawless, earliest Troglodytes had "no principle of equity or justice among them;" they followed only their "savage nature," in other words each only looked after him- or herself. This "society," if one deserving of the name at all, could not deal with natural disasters and diseases, and disputes among them could never be settled. The earlier lawful Troglodytes were markedly different. Two from the earliest generation were "just and lovers of virtue." They decided to live "in a remote part of the country" and to lead a life helping each other. They educated their children with a view to virtue. Virtue here consists in being motivated to consider the effect of one's action on the community as a whole, i.e. civic or communal virtue. This brought about peace and moderate prosperity. And despite their peaceful temperament, they could defend themselves against enemies when necessary. This was a time of happiness and virtue. However, one day they became too rich, a society that was too large and complicated. While these later Troglodytes were not lawless, they were powerless: they felt that they needed a leader to tell them what to do. They went to an elder who was known for virtue and asked him to be their king. He refused. From his point of view, their need for a king is an indication that virtue has now become a burden for the Troglodytes. Virtue without a king means that everyone needs to take up responsibility and deliberate and decide for him- or herself what the right thing to do is. The story abruptly ends at this point.

Mirza, in his request, recalls Usbek saying that "justice is innate," that is, natural, "in humans," but the story itself suggests that Mirza did not remember this very accurately. (Montesquieu uses "justice" and "virtue" interchangeably to mean civic or political virtue.) The lawless Troglodytes show a *savage* side to human nature, a side that makes social life impossible. It even suggests that justice is either not natural to humans, or that those who do not practice it self-destruct like the Troglodytes, and justice "appears" natural since only those who practice it survive.

The accidental character of justice to humanity seems further hinted at when Usbek offers no explanation of how the two virtuous Troglodytes emerged. Were they tired of fighting? Did they reflect on the long-term futility of acting selfishly? According to Usbek's narrative, it *just so happened* that two Troglodytes "naturally" desired virtue. The number "two" is noteworthy. Justice, as a relation between humans, cannot be expressed when one is alone. (Usbek, in another letter, speaks of justice in similar terms: it is "the proper relationship between two things," *PL* LXXXIII.) And even then, a place remote and free from the savage Troglodytes was needed to practice justice: without new land, they would become subject to the violence of others. Moreover, even the description of the virtue of the early, lawful Troglodytes is not unambiguous. Usbek constantly implies that self-interest is lurking behind their virtuous conduct. The founding fathers of the lawful Troglodytes had to teach their children the goodness of justice. As the story also implies, thieves, robbers, and petty informers still existed in their community (cf. also Schaub, 1997, p. 34). In other words, they are superior to their lawless ancestors because they can overcome natural disasters through cooperation, but they are still not completely free of human conflict. Finally, the increase in wealth and size seems to diminish their motivation to consider others.

The Troglodyte story, in short, shows that the question of the best regime cannot be evaluated according to the standard of nature. This is because human happiness requires justice: Usbek or Montesquieu leaves no doubt that the lawful Troglodytes are superior to the lawless ones. But justice is not natural and is even to some extent against nature: it never completely eliminates the calculations of self-interest that is also the source of savage behavior. There is a disparity, then, between human nature and the requirements of human happiness.[7] If we cannot be happy by simply following what our natures impel us to do, then in a way political community always contains an element of heteronomy,

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[7] Swaine, 2001 claims that the tension between human nature and justice is a core theme of the PL. According to him, Usbek's own contradiction, namely the fact that he is enlightened but incapable of applying his knowledge to his own life, dramatizes the very same issue. This is an important insight, and the issue of self-knowledge is clearly to some extent related to the woman question. But it is a topic in its own right and will only be briefly touched upon in the conclusion.

the idea that most people do not or cannot rely on themselves to be happy. The latest Troglodytes' request for a ruler suggests that before them, politics strictly speaking did not exist, insofar as a relationship of ruling-ruled did not exist. They demanded politics because virtue has become a burden: politics seems to be the surrogate of their agency. From Montesquieu's point of view, the question of political philosophy is then a question of how to negotiate the boundaries between leaving people to their own devices and enforcing just behavior and conduct through force. The two generations of lawful Troglodytes in this way reflect the tension between virtue and freedom.

The standard for evaluating society, then, also emerges in this tension. Human happiness, in Montesquieu's view, has two elements. The first is the non-natural component of justice, the motivation for the common good that must be instilled in one way or the other, so that living together with other humans, a necessary condition for happiness, becomes possible. But secondly, the practice of that justice must be felt psychologically as not difficult or not taking too much toil on oneself. As the founding fathers of the Troglodytes, and later the virtuous elder, put it, justice should not be "something costly to achieve nor painful to exercise." Stated differently, Montesquieu always asks: is this regime good for the community as a whole (are people practicing justice)? And second, is it good for the lives of the individuals living under it (do they feel happy)? If applied to the woman question we are concerned with here, the normative question might be formulated as follows: is the man-woman relation, to the extent that it embodies or reflects a regime type, good in the sense of these two required conditions?

Obviously a regime can fulfill one criterion while failing in the other. A hedonistic society, for example, might satisfy the second criterion and be found wanting in the first. The proper assessment of any political society dow not allow for a straightforward and easy answer.

2 Regimes, “Springs,” and Ways of Life

What lends unity to each type of regime is its principle or what Montesquieu calls its “spring” (SL Foreword and III.1). By “spring” he means that which animates the workings of that regime type and makes the presence of that regime felt throughout its members. The notion of spring provides the essential link between regime type and its corresponding way of life: it is both the abstract principle that explains the political machine and the concretely felt motivation by which individuals act, think, and talk. It therefore affords Montesquieu a mechanism to go back and forth between the individual and the collective level. So “spring” makes it possible to explain the political meaning of romantic relationships, as will be seen below.

2.1 Despotism.

The defining character of despotism is the absolute rule of a single person, that is, rule without laws (SL II.1, 5). If there are “laws” in a despotic state, they are only laws by name. In essence they reflect only the will of the despot and can be changed and abandoned by him whenever he wishes. The essence of despotism is the absence of the rule of law; but its spring, that which reverberates throughout the regime in this absence, is fear (SL III.9-10; PL CIII). The exercise of absolute power requires recognition on the part of the despot’s subjects. Effective control of the subjects’ behavior also requires that they realize the permanent possibility of losing what they possess at any moment, of being punished — in a word, it requires the threat of violence and coercion.

The vital importance of fear as the spring of despotism can be seen in Montequieu’s following remark, “In despotic states, each household is a separate empire” (IV.3). This initially looks like a contradiction: if despots wield absolute power, how can he allow his subjects to exercise absolute rule over their households? Shouldn’t he be the real person in charge, being free to take from families whatever he wants and to give them whatever he wants? However, this very contradiction or tension shows the crucial role fear plays. Fear requires ignorance to be an effective motivator of behavior. The object of fear is something uncertain, unknown, or unpredictable. Children are easier to scare than adults precisely because they do not yet know as much, are not as yet experienced with the world. Since social interaction facilitates the exchange of information and knowledge (SL IV.3, PL XXXIV), it tends to weaken fear. Therefore despotism discourages social interaction; and one way to achieve this is through the isolation of households from one another. The isolation can be achieved by making the patriarch of each household the absolute authority within his family. Two implications follow from this. First, the defining character of despotism, absolute power, cannot truly be what it is, precisely because fear, the spring that allows for the exercise of absolute power, limits absolute power to some extent. Second, if despotic states tend to produce miniature despotic states at the level of the household, then to a significant extent the analysis of households under despotism is simultaneously an analysis of the regime as such. It is in this way that Usbek's harem in the PL allows us to read it both domestically and politically (see also Robin, 2000, p. 350).

We see features of despotism in his harem in at least three ways. To begin with, Usbek has absolute rule over his harem. His commands are obeyed simply by his sending letters of instructions back to his eunuchs and wives. He changes his commands at will without any regard for rules or laws of any kind, often as a reaction to suspicious signs of disloyalty from eunuchs or unfaithfulness from his wives (PL XXI, XXII). Even when his rule breaks down at the end of the novel, his wives revolt and the harem descends into chaos, most of them are still punished. One of his wives, Roxane, who was unwilling to be punished, can only commit suicide instead of escape. Second, he similarly uses the tactic of fear to control and manipulate his harem. While he clearly does that with the eunuchs, it is slightly more complicated with his wives. Not only does the chief eunuch actually complain that Usbek is not harsh on them enough (PL XCVI), but Usbek himself occasionally expresses tender affection towards them (LXV). The general attitude, however, is still one of scaring and threatening, as even the letter just cited ends with a thinly veiled threat, where Usbek claims "I will not employ violent means...until I have tried all others.” Third and finally, Usbek, perhaps instinctively, understands the need for ignorance to maintain order in the harem. In XXXIV, after some initial observations of Parisian women’s behavior, he praises the fact that Persian women do not know of the freedom they might enjoy, which keeps “the female virtue” (namely sexual modesty) intact. He furthermore instructs the eunuchs to keep his wives isolated from each other, to lower the chance of their collective revolt against the eunuchs.

As a political arrangement, all subjects are in service of satisfying the despot’s desires. Women are at a natural disadvantage under this regime, because it is easier for men to frighten women than women men, due to the natural inequality between their physical strengths. (One could say that despots tend to be males or masculine, while everyone else is emasculated — even physically so in the case of eunuchs.) The master-slave relation between the despot and his subjects is reproduced in the man-woman relation (Nyland, 1997, p. 403). Usbek’s wives are reduced to things-for-Usbek. In letters LXXIX and XCVI, the eunuchs report their “purchases” of new wives for Usbek. The letters describe in detail their examination of the women’s bodies, so Usbek, who is far from Persia and is yet to see them, can get a sense of the beauty of his latest “possessions” (cf. SL VII.9), not to mention the inequality implied in polygamy. Nature, however, can be chased away with a fork, but it always comes back. Even before the harem falls apart, Usbek’s wives are aware of the loss of their freedom (e.g. PL III; XLVII); Montesquieu also depicts them becoming resourceful in finding ways to satisfy their sexual desires in the absence of their husband. One wife, Zephis, experiments with lesbianism (PL IV); another, Zachi, acted against harem rules and let the white eunuch into her room (XX); a third, Zelis, resorts to a private fantasy of pleasures (LXII). Homosexuality, affair with a castrated man, retreat to fantasy — all these events are meant to suggest the unnatural condition women are forced into in the despotic household.

Women are clearly unhappy under despotism. But even the despotic husband is unhappy as well.[8] Women under slavery are not good for men. Two observations suggest this. First, Usbek's striking admission that he does not love his wives (PL VI). He feels a deep apathy towards them. Kettler, 1964 suggests that he is defective in his human qualities, since the attraction between sexes is natural (see SL I.2). That might be true, but it is not satisfying: why is Usbek defective, or why did Montesquieu make him so? Is his defect representative of any husband in a harem, or something peculiar to him as who he is? Shklar, 1987 applies Usbek's own reasoning in the PL CXIV to himself and argues that polygamy caused his apathy. I think we can even be more precise: not polygamy itself, but the degradation of women that it causes, makes love impossible.[9] Insofar as love requires mutual consent, and consent presupposes agency, love does not exist in the harem, since women in it have no choice at all. Letter III hints at this. Zachi recalls all the different contests Usbek held among his wives before departing for Paris. The terms of the contests indicates how utterly the wives were subject to his whims. There is another reason for claiming that the deprivation of women's agency is the crucial factor instead of polygamy: Shklar's account could not explain why, despite his inability to feel love, Usbek shows a clear liking towards Roxane, the one who ultimately committed suicide in defiance of Usbek's rule (XXVI). His feelings towards her is readily explained, however, once one realizes that, unlike the other wives, Roxane has always asserted her independence and autonomy in front of Usbek. She even resisted his sexual advances in the past. In short, her unwillingness to be degraded into a thing makes love possible.

Second, Usbek is not simply unable to love, he is also tormented by jealousy. He is constantly worried about his wives becoming unfaithful; the letters sent to eunuchs are always instructions of vigilantly monitoring the women's activities. The novel constantly reminds the reader of his anxiety and stress. But his jealousy is not the jealousy of love, but that over his possessions (Kra, 1984, p. 273-4; the distinction between the two kinds of jealousy is discussed in the SL XVI.13).

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[8] While commentators mostly skim the surface of this point, Kra (1984, p. 274) is an exception.

[9] Montesquieu makes a similar point concerning ancient Greek pederasty. Greek men pursued boys because women were also degraded (althought not because of polygamy). Since they were treated as lacking agency, men could not find love in them and had to turn to boys instead (SL VII.9).

In this sense, Usbek ends up as unfree as those he despotically rules over: his happiness becomes dependent upon their condition remaining inhuman, remaining contrary to human nature. Zelis's letter (LXII) makes Usbek's predicament clear: the sole means he can rely on to infantilize his wives, fear, does not guarantee him what he wants. He himself becomes tortured by fear.

In sum: fear turns the natural inequality of physical strength into a political one. Women's status as slave reflects in general the situation of all subjects under the despot. And this situation is both unjust and unhappy: while it is unjust for the women in the harem, it creates unhappiness for both men and women, even in surprisingly similar ways. The natural attraction that exists between the sexes is then replaced by making wives into commodities not meant for display but for private enjoyment. As fear takes over, jealousy replaces love.

2.2 Monarchy.

Monarchy, represented in the PL by Paris (or France in general), is the rule of the single person in accordance with laws (SL II.1 and 4; PL CII). This means that the king does not wield absolute power, his authority does not originate in himself, but is derived from his ability to enforce and protect the laws that are more permanent than the individual kings that successively uphold them. The subjects of monarchy enjoy freedom. They use their freedom, however, in a way that can also be characterized as the spring of monarchy: they freely pursue honor (SL III.5-7; PL LXXXIX-XC). Honor is "the prejudice (le préjugé) of each person and each condition," or more straightforwardly, the opinion that one oneself is superior to others. This opinion motivates people to strive for ranks and distinctions, in other words, for public recognition and confirmation of that superiority.

Honor can be read as a response to the question posed by the Troglodyte story. That story suggested a disparity between the requirements of the common good and one's self-interested motivations; honor makes the latter an unwitting means to the former. Political virtue, which will soon emerge as the principle of republics, is devotion to the common good simply (it was partially realized in the earlier lawful Troglodytes); honor is not identical with that devotion but brings about a similar result: the pursuit of self-aggrandizing actions turns out to be good for the public. According to Montesquieu, the person who devotes herself to the common good simply and the person who pursues honor differ from each other like "the good person" differs from "the good citizen."[10] While the good person is always good regardless of the regime she happens to live in, the good citizen is only good in a monarchy, because only by the workings of that kind of regime do her actions contribute to the common good. Honor under monarchy thus might be said to be Montesquieu's version of the invisible hand.

An important consequence of this is that monarchies encourage liberty and equality of opportunity between the sexes (SL XI.7). This is because doing something honorable means to do something beyond expectations, and one does this by one's own accord; the very condition for the pursuit of honor is self-determination. Honor is in this sense gender-blind. However, if the operation of fear tends to make men oppress women, the operation of honor tends to be in favor of women. Insofar as women are naturally weaker, doing something honorable is more difficult and beyond expectations to a larger degree. If a man and a woman both perform the same task usually perceived as honorable, say, risking danger to help another, the woman is admired much more than the man. And indeed the liberty enjoyed by women is one of the first things Usbek and Rica (the unmarried young Persian and Usbek's friend) notice when they arrive in Europe. European women show their faces in public (PL XXIII); they participate in and host social gatherings (XLVIII); they are cultivated, intelligent, and charming both physically and intellectually (XXXIV). Compared with Persia, Paris is obviously less repressive and allows the realization of human potential to a greater degree. Monarchy is clearly better than despotism insofar as individual happiness is concerned.

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[10] This distinction likely originated in Aristotle's *Politics* Book III.

The appeal of Paris, however, is soon cast under a shadow by Rica. His descriptions of the city are not entirely free of irony, ridicule, and sarcasm. The reader sees Parisians arguing against each other, filing divorce cases, and acting. They might not be actually happy in the final analysis. Why? It seems to have something to do with honor. The pursuit of public recognition means that one is attached to some external, visible feature that can be cognized and approved by others. Honor thus motivates a strong concern with external appearances. In PL C Rica describes Parisians anxiously following the fashion trends, due to fear of not keeping up with the times. In another letter (XXX), he notices how they treat him differently if he doesn't wear his exotic Persian clothes and wears the local, ordinary French ones instead. His letters slowly but firmly build up to the point that the liberty enjoyed by individuals becomes more of a burden than a blessing. In Rica's own ironic judgment, "if man is a social animal, then Parisians are the most social of all," insofar as whatever they do is predicated on the possible change of opinion that might occur (LXXXVII). Free striving for honor becomes unfreedom; to the extent that public opinion is as unpredictable as the despot's will, the despot's whims are replaced by the caprice of public opinion.[11] Honor under monarchy, the initially attractive solution to the plight of the last generation of Troglodytes, burdens the Parisians no less than virtue burdened that mythical tribe.

Honor, then, is a double-edged sword. In SL XXVIII.22, Montesquieu discusses gallant love, defining it as "the desire to please and be pleased." It is an "illusion of love" (emphasis added) that occurs more often in monarchies. The desire to please or flatter is the constitutive of the workings of honor. Women, in the desire to please, would make use of their charm and beauty. This leads to French women engaging in deception (and ultimately, perhaps self-deception as well) concerning their ages (PL LII). They are in denial about the inevitable loss of beauty that accompanies aging. Another parallel between Persia and Paris thereby shows up. While in the former, women are treated as things, as

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[11] Schaub (1995, p. 136) notes this as well. However, she argues that Montesquieu sees the "despotism" of public opinion as a "civilized fear" which, in putting emphasis on the interdependence between humans instead of a master-slave relation, is a good thing or at least better than the despot's reign of terror.

beauty items, in the latter they are treated as humans that still have little more to offer than beauty and charm.[12] The natural difference between the sexes is in both regimes socially and politically reinforced, if only in opposite directions (slavery versus freedom).

The second point showing that things are not as well as they seem, Montesquieu suggests, is the Parisian women losing their sexual modesty, an issue that concerns men as well. His argument contains a problematic premise, namely that women are by nature modest (see SL XVI.12, PL XXVI, and previous section). Given this assumption, lack of modesty cannot be due to feminine nature, but to men or convention (SL VII.8; Nyland, 1997, p. 399). It is difficult to say what to make of this, but perhaps the following might suffice for our purposes: regardless of whether women are naturally modest or not, monarchy tends to encourage sexual license. How does this happen? Again, the spring of honor. Honor comes from comparison: I am not just good, but need to prove myself better than others, to have things that others do not have. The need to win by comparing encourages luxury spending. Just as honorable actions are defined as doing what is beyond one is required to do, luxury is the possession of what is beyond the necessary things to have (SL VII.4). Luxury spending, however, breeds new desires. From a psychological point of view, Montesquieu argues, one cannot let one desire out and control others. If people are encouraged to pursue trivial, non-necessary desires, it is practically difficult, if theoretically possible, to make them not pursue the fleeting moments of sexual desire. As he puts it in SL VII.14: “incontinence...is always followed by luxury, and always follows luxury. If you leave the impulses of the heart at liberty, how can you hamper the weaknesses of the spirit?”

The loss of sexual modesty is bad for two reasons. First, it loosens the traditionally strong bonds created and solidified by marriage and family. Second, it comes back to injure the natural pride men have. At first sight, the Parisian men seem to adjust to the new situation quite well,

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[12] There is therefore little doubt that even the linguistic similarity between parisien and persane was intended by Montesquieu to reflect the two places as almost being two sides of the same coin. See also Kra (1984, p. 276-278) for a discussion of literary devices Montesquieu uses to draw the reader’s attention to the parallels between the two places.

since most of them do not behave in a jealous, possessive way towards their wives, and the jealous ones are actually ridiculed by others (*PL* LV). If they are cuckolded, they tolerate their wives, or simply commit adultery themselves (XXXVIII). So it appears that they support the principle of liberty to the extent of holding only views that do not harm it. However, the thought that "the universal appeal of women's beauty should be enjoyed by everyone and not just me" bespeaks a troubled state of mind underneath. As Rica astutely notes, the freedom French husbands allow their wives have little to do with their understanding, tender love, or trust of any kind towards them, but actually only with "the poor opinion they have of them" (LV). In short, they react to their deep distrust of women, the thought that they are weak against the temptations of sexual desires, by giving up the relation altogether. A third parallel where monarchy seems to show a despotic face: the possibility of love is similarly lost here because women are reduced to children once more.

It looks, then, that if monarchy partly solves the problem of the unnaturalness of justice through the mechanism of honor, that very mechanism suppresses the despotic unhappiness that might be lurking under the extravagance, splendor, and free-spiritedness of Parisian society. The inequality between sexes under despotism is clearly bad, while that under monarchy is only ambiguously good. For equality of the genuine kind, one has to turn to the republic regime.

2.3 Republic.[13]

As Shklar (1987, p. 37) notes, there is only one happy couple in the PL: Apheridon and his sister Astarte. He fell in love with her since childhood, and their story, as told in Letter LXVII, consists mostly in the obstacles that had to be overcome for them to be and stay together. The obstacles might be classified into three sorts, the political, the religious, and the economic. Apheridon's family believes in Zoroastrianism, according

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[13] For purposes of this paper I do not distinguish, as Montesquieu does in the SL, between the two subtypes of republic regimes, namely democracy and aristocracy (II.2-3).

to which incest is permitted. But, even though their own religion was not an obstacle, another religion coupled with political power was. His father did not allow the marriage between him and Astarte out of fear of the "Mohammedans" (the Islamic rulers), who ruled over Persia and prohibited incest. So his father first separated them and then sold her as a servant for a sultana in a harem. Apheridon's feelings, however, did not at all diminish because of time and space. Eventually, he found where she was, but by that point, she was in a mock marriage with a eunuch, as the sultana was jealous of her beauty. Apheridon then attempted to convert her back from Islam into Zoroastrianism. They had two long conversations, after which he leaves the Zoroastrian text Avesta for her to read. Having recalled her old faith through reading the text, she rekindles her love for her brother, and they escaped from the harem. As staying in Persia was no longer viable, they settled in Georgia. But their seclusion in that place led eventually to financial problems, and Apheridon had to go back to Persia to seek help from relatives. Unfortunately, not only did he fail to find help, but during his absence the Tartars kidnapped Astarte and sold her to Jews. Again Apheridon found her, but he did not have money to buy her back. So he first sold himself and their daughter as slaves to an Armenian merchant, so he could use the money paid thereof for her freedom. However, after Astarte was released, she sold herself as a slave to the same merchant in order to be together with him. Upon hearing their story, the merchant took pity on them, and promised to set them free after a year of diligent service. Apheridon ultimately ends up as a businessman in Smyrna and lived happily as a free man with his family at the end.

The couple, similar to the early lawful Troglodytes, exemplify justice or political virtue, the spring of the republic regime. Political virtue consists in the devotion to the common good (SL III.3-4).[14] Both Apheridon and Astarte put the other before oneself as shown in their reaction to the slavery the other is suffering. Their individual happiness, as they conceive of it, is inseparable from their togetherness and unity. In the republic, therefore, freedom and virtue appear harmonious, as

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[14] There is a difference, however, according to McAlpin, 2000: the Troglodytes had political virtue while still treating women as things instead of persons. But this difference is immaterial to my argument.

both Apheridon and Astarte do the virtuous deeds of their own accord. Moreover, political virtue seems to be conducive to, if it does not necessitate, equality of the following kind. As Schaub (1995, p. 107-8) perceptively notes, the equality under question is based on similarity instead of complementarity. In the latter kind of equality, husband and wife play gendered roles in the family unit, each respecting the other's sphere of influence and knowledge. But Apheridon and Astarte's relation is not of this sort. Schaub notes three points in the story that suggest this. When Apheridon and Astarte were serving the Armenian merchant, Apheridon reports that "I was delighted when I was able to do my sister's work," an indication of the interchangeability between their assigned tasks. As hinted at before, the specific gendered natures have become fluid on account of the power of human intellect to adapt and adjust. Apheridon's and Astarte's ability to do each other's work thus show their transcending natural differences. Second, when Apheridon attempts to convert Astarte back to Zoroastrianism, they converse on equal terms, and he fully respects her power to make up her own mind. Thirdly, the most striking feature of the story –– incestuous love –– appears not to be endorsing incest per se, but also similarity.[15] Their bond of love is rooted in an unbreakable blood relation. If we read their togetherness as a miniature model for how republics work, it could be said that Montesquieu endorses the spirit behind the noble lie endorsed in Plato's Republic, if not the lie itself: the harmony between virtue and freedom is only possible if members of a community can see each other as kins. To Schaub's observations we may add a fourth: the remarkable absence of jealousy. Even when the marriage with the eunuch was a mock one, the Tartars' kidnapping of Astarte presumably involved rape (even if not explicitly mentioned in the text), but Apheridon did not show any signs of torment over that, which would be a sign of male jealousy over the female as a possession. This lack of jealousy, especially when compared with the situations in both Persia and Paris, seems to have something

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[15] Kettler, 1964 and Shklar, 1987 interpret incest as a sign that the story suggests that "...the rules of society do nothing to make us good or happy" (Shklar, 1987, p. 37). This is simplistic in light of the fact that Zoroastrianism, which allows incestuous love, is also a "rule of society" just like Christianity and Islam are rules of society. I suggest instead that what Montesquieu draws our attention to by basing this love story on incest is not the Rousseauan view that societies disregard our happiness, but rather that the ingredients of human happiness are themselves in tension –– human happiness both needs and rejects what makes society possible (cf. 1.2 above).

to do with the equality based on similarity as well. Apheridon, in his whole account, never mentions how beautiful he thought Astarte was. Those who did think her beautiful, and Apheridon never says whether he agrees with them or not, were the Tartars and the sultana, namely those who inflicted harm on her. One might say that Apheridon's love is not based on Astarte's physical beauty, which, as mentioned before, is one of the key natural differences between men and women. In other words, the absence of jealousy seems to have something to do with the suppression of or abstraction from visible natural differences. Equality based on similarity is not completely natural.

While the happiness of this family is meant to suggest the desirability of such a man-woman relation and the republic regime it represents, the unnatural character of the equality makes the realization of it look difficult if not impossible. And other parts of the story reinforce this point. To begin with, the eventual happiness was never totally in the lovers' control, despite the heroic effort to overcome those obstacles. Apheridon needed a lot of luck to find Astarte twice; Astarte might have been dead after being kidnapped; the merchant's pity was necessary to make them free. Read allegorically, Astarte's conversion scene might indicate the necessity of religious reform for the realization of a republic. (That both Islam and Christianity in Montesquieu's time regard women as inferior is mentioned several times in the novel, e.g. PL CXLI, XXXVIII.).[16] In any case, it is not completely up to humans to realize republics even if they wanted to.

A second indication of the difficulty lies in the following fact. While in the PL, a despotic kind of love happens under despotic regimes, and monarchic love happens under monarchic regimes, republican love between Apheridon and Astarte did not happen in a republic regime. Their story first unfolded under despotism (Persia), then a lawless country that does not even have a despot (Georgia), and finally, their journey ended in Smyrna, a commercial city with European influence among the ruins of other cities in Turkey (PL XIX). Does Montesquieu

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[16] Incidentally, the pity of the merchant seems to be an exemplification of Montesquieu's famous assertion that commerce is good for the promotion of gentle characters such as the merchant exhibits (SL XX.1-2).

wish to suggest that there are no real life examples of republics, that an improbable tale of incestuous and heroic love is the closest we can have to imagining what a republic might look like?

This is very likely his intention. To see how this is the case, we need to turn to the SL. It appears that real examples of republics existed, at least in Europe –– for example Greece (more precisely, Athens) and Rome. If this is so, why couldn't Montesquieu invent a love story that takes place in those regimes? One answer might be that he thought that in ancient republics, the relationship between the sexes was unequal. But why did that happen? It seems that, according to his account, the inequality was a byproduct of the need to restrict luxury spending. There was one thing that the ancient republics understood, according to Montesquieu, namely that luxury weakens political virtue. This was also hinted at in the Troglodytes story: the later Troglodytes wished to be ruled by laws and a king, and part of the reason seems to be their wealth. An argument can explain why this is so. Luxury spending tends to increase competition between citizens, which leads to inequality of wealth. Unequal wealth, in turn, produces class divisions that make it difficult for citizens to see each other as brethrens (SL VII.2, 8-9; Nyland, 1997, p. 398-9). And the notion "my fellow citizen is my family" is indispensable for making the practice of justice psychologically easy. Couple this with the ancient view (erroneous, in Montesquieu's estimation) that women are idle and most likely to indulge or encourage luxury spending, and the result is a rigorous disciplining of women in history.

This historical analysis of ancient republics signals two points worthy of mention. First, the difficulty of realizing the republic is compounded by the ambiguous effect of commerce. On the one hand, Montesquieu recognizes its potential to make humans more gentle and more sociable. The need to conduct peaceful, constant transactions with foreigners breeds customs of trust and hospitality (see note 16).[17] On the other hand, its development tends to encourage or require the demand for luxury items, which corrupts civic virtue. Apheridon and Astarte's poverty indirectly led to the kidnapping by the Tartars: virtue cannot survive or

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[17] A detailed examination of this argument in the SL XX.1-2 must be left for another occasion.

thrive without “equipment,” as Aristotle would put it, that is, moderate wealth. No wonder their happiness ends with Apheridon becoming a businessman. Second, the very fact that Montesquieu refrains from setting Apheridon and Astarte’s story in a historical republic indicates that the “republic” he has in mind might not be identical with the ancient one. He might be instituting a new ideal that has not even been conceived of so far.

It might be said that Montesquieu still uses the old word “republic” because his new ideal shares something of the same with the old ideal, namely the understanding that politics exists primarily for the sake of virtue and only secondarily for the sake of freedom. He wishes to say, let me suggest, that virtue is compatible with two modifications of ancient republics. The first modification is a more friendly, if not completely laissez-faire, attitude towards commerce. One indication of this is that Apheridon ended up being a merchant and was even able to tell his story to someone like Rica because of his profession. If ancient republics were correct in seeing the negative aspects of commerce, Montesquieu wishes to emphasize its positive side. The second modification is naturally equality between men and women. Montesquieu’s own assessment of the ancient republics’ treatment of women is not without ambiguity. He says that in Greece, “...women’s virtue, simplicity, and chastity were such that one has scarcely ever seen a people who had a better police in this regard” (SL VII.9, emphasis added). In the same chapter, however, he says that “in republics women are free by laws and captured by the mores (libres par les lois, et captivées par les mœurs).” This suggests, however, that republics at the very least pay lip service to the freedom of women. The practice of ancient republics, then, is somewhat inconsistent: they recognize women’s equal footing with men in theory, while treating them discriminately in practice. No wonder that even marriages in ancient republics are reduced to friendship (amitié, cf. note 9 above), a remark not without a tinge of irony. Montesquieu seems to be saying, in other words, that the inconsistency of ancient republics compels us to modify the model that fits the spirit of the republic better, and that model is exemplified in Apheridon and Astarte.

To say that a new ideal of the republic is desirable, however, is not to say that it is practically possible. We have already seen the difficulties hinted by Apheridon and Astarte's story above. However, are there promising signs showing that an approximation of the ideal is nevertheless possible? The PL provides an answer to that as well.

3 Liberation of Women and a New Image of Humanity

The story of Apheridon and Astarte itself alludes to the need for religious reforms and new views towards commerce if equality between sexes is to be realized.[18] But what about political reforms? More precisely, are there possibilities within monarchy and despotism that point to radical changes of regime into the new republic ideal just discussed? Montesquieu, let me suggest, indicates such signs in monarchy (or his contemporary Paris) in PL CVII. To further grasp the significance of this letter, two other ones should be consulted: Rica's fiction of a harem revolution showing the parallel diagnosis under despotism (CXLI), and Roxane's suicide letter that closes the novel (CLXI).

A comparison of those latter two letters with the former one shows little hope for change under despotism. Roxane's suicide is, at its best, a moral victory. She has no other options to assert her autonomy. Her words and deeds form a powerful indictment of despotic rule without transforming it in any way. If her deception of Usbek and consequent arrangements of sexual encounters with men outside the harem count as a revolution, that transformation of "the frightful harem into a place of delight and pleasure" was short-lived. Her restoration of human nature (as she claims to Usbek, "I reformed your laws by those of nature") is and must remain secret in the context of despotism.

What about Anais, the heroine in Rica's fiction? The story is roughly something like the following. Anais, after being killed by Ibrahim, her savage husband, went to heaven because of her virtue. In heaven, she

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[18] See also Letters XXIV (more on religious reforms) and CXXXII (economic ones –– presented as a critique of John Law's currency reform.

undertakes to save Ibrahim's other wives by sending one of her heavenly husbands disguised as Ibrahim to replace the original one. Once the new Ibrahim takes charge of the harem, he immediately releases the eunuchs and lets the other wives show their faces in public. Anais' revolution is different, then, from Roxane's in its scope and intent. Anais emancipates her fellow wives; Roxane emancipates only a few of her fellow wives. Roxane emphasizes the legitimacy of pleasure on the grounds of nature; Anais or her heavenly husband Ibrahim make the revolution one of public recognition, with no appeal to nature. As Schaub (1995, pp. 99-100) notes, however, Anais's victory is no less ambiguous than Roxane's is moral. At the end, The heavenly Ibrahim only emancipated one harem, leaving the others unchanged (cf. also McAlpin, 2000, p. 56). He even realizes that "the customs of this country was not for him," and eventually leaves the country after setting Anais' fellow wives free. It is not unreasonable to think that they will soon return to their old condition without the protection of the heavenly Ibrahim. In sum, not only is women's condition under despotism bad, but it is also not prone to improvement. The prospects are bleak indeed.

Paris or France then looks promising by comparison. In PL CVII, Rica observes that women have a lot of influence politically in France, even though on the surface this does not appear to be the case. In other words, while Roxane limits her revolution within the domestic, and Anais at her best needed a man to politicize her domestic revolution, French women are themselves already part of politics. It seems that the encouragement of self-expression by the workings of honor under monarchy allows participation of an informal sort by women (SL VII.9). Informal, because they do not hold office; and therefore difficult to discern. But they are secret gears in the huge machine that is French politics. As Rica/Montesquieu puts it, "...anyone at court...who observes the action of the ministers, magistrates, and prelates, unless he knows the women who govern them, is like a man watching a machine work without knowing about the springs that drive it" (emphasis added).[19]

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[19] Whether this description of Montesquieu's French is historically accurate does not affect my argument here; however, it is worthy of mention that Nyland (1997, p. 399) cites historians who accept this description as true of those times.

Publicly, women are ruled by men; but behind the curtains, women, as a collective political power, rule men instead.

How is this involvement of women in politics possible in France at all? A long answer is required and cannot be taken up fully here. However one thing bears mentioning: whether it is Roxane, Anais, or politically active French women, a psychological transformation must precede the political one. Both Roxane and Anais exhibit courage in the face of despotic terror. Roxane's language bespeaks heroic qualities. She twice speaks of her "spirit (esprit)" instead of her soul (âme); she never submitted to the fate of being married to someone she does not love; and she conceives of her life as an endless battle for freedom. Faced with Ibrahim's threats, Anais reacted in a similar way: her "force d'esprit," which we might translate "strength of mind," makes her scorn them. In addition, Anais showed compassion and thoughtfulness. After living a life of pleasure in the heavens, she finally came to her senses. With her "truly philosophical mind" she began reflecting on her situation on earth. This is what incited her pity for her fellow wives and resulted in her plan to save them.[20] In short, the masculine qualities (manliness, the spiritedness to fight for freedom, and a strong and philosophical intellect) are integrated with the feminine qualities (compassion, pity, sympathy) to produce revolutionary forces. To repeat a point made before: the natural difference between men and women again does not, for Montesquieu, imply a necessary division of labor in convention. This fluidity is exemplified in French women as well: by becoming bearers of a more comprehensive humanity, they are qualified to participate in politics. This is why, according to Rica, women do not become a minister's mistress merely for the sake of sleeping with him; they do so in order "to be able to submit five or six petitions every morning." They exhibit a "natural goodness" in their eagerness to help out and to be known as helpers throughout the country. In other words,

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[20] I note in passing that Anais symbolically occupies the position of the Christian god, whose son (her husband) descends from heaven for the sake of humankind: the compassion of the Christian god is therefore seen as something positive in Montesquieu's estimation. If the unfavorable bias towards women in Christianity is something that needs to be overcome, the humanitarian love of Christianity can be the ally of political reform.

the courage that Roxane and Anais must gather to counter despotism is not lacking, but tempered with civility among French women: a "public spiritedness," to use Schaub's apt phrase (1995, p. 105; 123-4), a humanitarian benevolence transfigured and elevated from their erotic desires.

It almost looks as if women are already behaving like republicans, that is, people with justice or civic virtue, and this is indeed borne out by Rica's description: women in French politics is "like a republic within a monarchy." While Roxane and Anais have to fight for women first, French women can afford to exercise their capacity to care for the common good, both men and women alike. Even more interestingly, the socially defined hierarchy between them do not seem as rigid as the distinctions and ranks among men. Due to the very fact that women's influence in France is not socially specified with clear-cut determinations of rights and duties, this suggests that the communication and exchanges between women, and even between women and men, take place on a less unequal (if not truly equal) terms than those that would usually result from tightly-defined hierarchical relations. They can afford to ignore the unequal norms prevalent in monarchy precisely because they exert their influence privately, behind the curtains as it were.

Strangely enough, despite all the seemingly positive descriptions of France, Rica is repulsed by what he sees. Some like Nyland (1997, p. 401) consider this to be Montesquieu's opinion as well. Others (such as McAlpin, 2000) simply ignore the fact that the tone of the letter is almost derogatory and fail to explain it altogether. While I do not think Rica's disgust can be identified with Montesquieu's own view without qualification, I would suggest that Montesquieu intentionally exaggerates the negativity to encourage the reader (the majority of whom would be his contemporary French fellow citizens) to think what might be wrong in France. In other words, he exaggerates to create the distance necessary for reflection on one's own conventions. It should not come as a total surprise that Rica, as open-minded as he is, might still find the situation where men are secretly controled by women rather unpleasant and even loathesome. After all, he is coming from Persia where males rule over females, his youth and open-mindedness notwithstanding. But even this prejudice is not completely unjustified. France shows signs of the worrisome possibility of a reversal of inequality, but this time in favor of women instead of men. That would be as undesirable as the other inequalities. Moreover, while they could be going in a desirable direction of republican equality, they also could be reinforcing the negative tendencies in monarchy. If the "republic within a monarchy" expression suggests that monarchy is tending towards equality, it could equally suggest that there is an internal divide within a country and even might lead to a "battle of the sexes" situation. In light of these considerations, Rica's repulsion is perhaps best read as a cautious warning from Montesquieu to his fellow citizens: France is in a transitional, but only transitional, phase towards equality, a phase that is not without dangers.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, let me raise three general points. First, Montesquieu's diagnosis of the potential of monarchy towards equality suggests that he certainly puts women at the center when thinking about political and social reforms. If the political revolution is tending towards equality, equality is not something to be realized, as if it only exists in the future and "is not yet here." In a crucial sense, it must "already be here," if not comprehensively, at least in a significant portion of society. This portion is identified by Montesquieu in a transformation of women. Furthermore, he suggests that the revolution of women's self-understanding precedes the political revolution towards republics. Insofar as feminism involves the understanding that the situation of women is crucial for society as a whole, that their revolution always has consequences reaching beyond themselves, Montesquieu's very thinking can be said to be feminist or proto-feminist.

More generally speaking, for Montesquieu, the "ideological" revolution, the revolution in how we understand ourselves, is the crucial condition for the success of political, religious, or economic revolutions. Precisely because the historical oppression of women has led women themselves to think of themselves in a biased way, curing this bias becomes all the more necessary before anything else. Roxane and Anais are liberated from those opinions of themselves. Montesquieu himself opens his *magnum opus* by stating that his intention is to cure people of prejudices. What are prejudices (*préjugé*)? He says that it is "not what makes one ignorant of certain things, but what makes one unaware [alternatively, "ignorant"] of oneself" (*SL* Preface).[21] Precisely through showing the reader the self-understandings, self-misunderstandings, and self-deceptions of all kinds of characters –– women and men, east and west –– the *Persian Letters* practices philosophy in the old Socratic sense: making us aware of who we are as humans. The novel itself is meant as such an ideological revolution: Montesquieu is himself the heavenly Ibrahim writing on behalf of women.

Finally, the situation of French women illustrate an interesting notion of equality in the context of contemporary gender (and more generally identity) politics. It was said before that the republican equality relies on abstraction, namely the disregard of the natural sexual differences. However, as the analyses of the republican regime and French politics show, there is another way of conceiving of republican equality: not abstraction, but integration. Instead of bypassing differences for the sake of what we share in common, women under French monarchy suggest a mobilization of those differences into a more inclusive view of humanity. More concretely, not all differences are to be tolerated for the sake of avoiding antagonism, but some of them should be actively promoted because of their potential to unify and produce cohesion in society. Accordingly, this more comprehensive conception of humanity that accompanies Montesquieu's new vision of politics need not be abstract. Put more bluntly, he does not "de-sex" humanity but "androgynizes" it. The androgynous vision might turn out to be the human nature we look to realize through conventions.

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[21] It is useful here to recall that préjugé was part of the very definition of honor (see 2.2 above). Montesquieu then is suggesting that monarchy works by a blind spot in one's understanding of who one is.

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[received December 15, 2016
accepted January 17, 2017]

INTERFACE —JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 39-50
DOI: 10.6667/interface.2.2017.34

Political Crisis in Rhetorical Exercises of the Early Roman Empire

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Abstract

The ancient Romans experienced a great political crisis in the first century B. C. They fought many civil wars, which ended the republic and led to the establishment of the empire. The nature of these civil wars and the new regime was a politically very sensitive question for the next generation and could not be treated in a direct manner. In this paper I shall examine how literature in this age dealt with this sensitive problem. Special attention will be paid on declamations (rhetorical exercises on fictitious themes), which discussed repeatedly themes concerned with political crises such as domestic discord or rule of a tyrant.

Keywords: Latin Oratory, Rhetorical Training, Early Roman Empire, Roman Politics

Political Crisis in Rhetorical Exercises of the Early Roman Empire

1. Politics in Rome in the 1st Century B.C.

Rome experienced its greatest political change in the 1st century B.C. Since the latter half of the previous century, its Republican system, which was established in the late 6th century B.C. according to the tradition, proved to contain serious problems. This led to repeated fierce civil wars in Rome. In the middle of the 1st century B.C., Caesar fought against Pompey and other members of the senatorial nobility who tried to defend the traditional system and defeated them completely. After this war, he forgave his former enemies and restored them to their previous dignities; however, by becoming the permanent dictator, who could retain supreme power alone, he preserved only the appearance of a Republic. To those senators who did not support him, this situation was of course nothing but a monarchy. Therefore, some of them, trying to restore the Republic, conspired to assassinate him. However, though this was successfully accomplished on March 15th, 44 B.C., the situation regarding the old constitution did not become better because of that. The successors of Caesar, especially Antony and Caesar Octavian, continued to fight for their own dominance. They defeated first the Republicans, then fought against each other. This renewed civil war lasted for some thirteen years until Octavian defeated his rival decisively at the battle of Actium in 31 B.C., after which the latter fled to Egypt and committed suicide there. Octavian (later Augustus) was now the sole political leader in Rome. The Republican system was on the surface restored by him, but all the important offices were now retained by him or people recommended by him. He carefully represented his regime as the restoration of the tradition of the Republic, but everyone knew that it was in fact something totally different from it, that is, a monarchy.

Thus, under the reign of Augustus, who died in 14 A.D., and of Tiberius, his successor, a great problem for people in the Roman world presented itself: How should they comprehend and represent the new regime and the civil wars which led to it? Literature also faced this problem; poets like Virgil and Horace as well as historians like Livy had to mention—at least indirectly—this era in their works. They largely glorify the victory of Augustus and the new regime; this was, on the one hand, to some extent compulsory under the emperors but, on the other hand, the authors might have really felt that the current regime which brought the civil wars to an end was much better than the Republican system. However, they remember at the same time the dark side of this regime: people killed in civil wars by the victors and the loss of true liberty under a sole ruler. This ambiguity was expressed in many passages of Latin literary works preserved to us from this age. Modern scholars discuss it repeatedly. Here I shall focus on one particular literary genre that was very typical of this age: the rhetorical exercise called declamation.

2. The Function of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Schools in Rome in the 1st Century B.C.

Let me make here a brief description of this practice of rhetoric in the ancient world.[1] Public speaking was a very important medium for ancient politicians. The art of rhetoric, which developed this medium, originated in the Greek world in the 5th century B.C. and was fully elaborated during the Hellenistic period. It was then introduced to the Romans in the 2nd century B.C. and integrated into their intellectual culture in the next century. Since the political struggles at the end of the Republican period gave great importance to oratory in the Senate and in the courtroom, its greatest achievements in Rome were accomplished in this period, most notably by Cicero. By the time of his old age rhetoric had become essential education for Roman elites. Boys belonging to the upper and middle classes went to rhetorical schools during their teens. They were taught rhetorical theory there and practiced speaking well according to the techniques of this discipline. The most advanced

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[1] On the history of rhetoric in the Greek and Roman world in general, see Kennedy (1963), Kennedy (1972), Kennedy (1994).

exercises in these schools were the declamations, i.e., speeches on fictitious themes which imitate either deliberative or forensic oratory.[2] In a declamation, a declaimer would represent one side of a controversy and try to find and develop arguments favorable to his side.

Under the empire, however, declamation, which, as mentioned above, was originally developed as an exercise for young students, acquired another function.[3] It was now practiced not only by boys but also by adult men, both professional rhetoricians and amateurs, before a large audience which could include important politicians and sometimes even the emperor himself. As mentioned above, declamations were either deliberative (called suasoriae) or forensic (called controversiae). The former type was often taken from some real historical events, sometimes very recent ones like the civil wars. The latter one could have as its background some politically difficult situation, for example, tyranny. These elements in declamations were or could be connected to recent history or a contemporary political situation and so could be dangerous to those who declaimed on these themes in public. However, since declaimers argued for either side of one theme and tried to make use of any argument for their selected side, it was sometimes necessary for them to touch upon such sensitive questions in their declamations. It is thus interesting to see how they treated such matters in declamations at that time, in other words, how they represented political crises like civil wars or the danger of tyranny in fictitious debate when these were either recent past or contemporary problems. One may ask further why they continued to handle such materials in schools and before an audience. Was that only a continuation of the rhetorical tradition since the Hellenistic age, or was there any desire to criticize implicitly what was being done under the empire or in the struggles leading to its formation? In the rest of this presentation, in order to answer the first question, I shall make a brief sketch of relevant passages in the works of Seneca the Elder, father of Seneca the philosopher, which contain citations on various themes from declaimers of this age.[4] The second

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[2] For a brief description of declamation as rhetorical exercise, see Kaster (2001); Bloomer (2007).

[3] On the situation of declamatory practice under the first emperors, see Bonner (1949); Kennedy (1972) 312-322; Clarke (1996), 85-99; Bloomer (2007).

[4] About his life and works in general, see Fairweather (1981); Sussman (1978).

question is difficult to answer here, but I hope some hints toward an answer will be given in this essay.

3. The Representation of Tyrants in the Works of Seneca the Elder.

The works discussed here contain four controversiae (i.e., forensic type of declamation) whose theme mentions a tyrant.[5] In one of them, a man killed one of his brothers because the latter was a tyrant.

> Sen. Con. 1.7: (law: Children must support their parents, or be imprisoned.) A man killed one of his brothers, a tyrant. The other brother he caught in adultery and killed despite the pleas of his father. Captured by pirates, he wrote to his father about a ransom. The father wrote a letter to the pirates, saying that he would give double if they cut off his hands. The pirates let him go. The father is in need; the son is not supporting him.[6]

In another, a tyrant tortured the wife of a man who he suspected was preparing to kill him.

> Sen. Con. 2.5: A wife, tortured by a tyrant to find out if she knew anything about her husband's plot to kill him, persisted in saying she did not. Later her husband killed the tyrant. He divorced her on the grounds of her barrenness when she bore no child within five years of marriage. She sues him for ingratitude.[7]

In still another, during his rule a tyrant permitted slaves to rape daughters of their master.

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[5] Cf. Berti (2007, 100 n. 2); Tabacco (1985).

[6] LIBERI PARENTES ALANT AVT VINCIANTVR. Quidam alterum fratrem tyrannum occidit, alterum in adulterio deprehensum deprecante patre interfecit. a piratis captus scripsit patri de redemptione. pater piratis epistulam scripsit: si praecidissent manus, duplam se daturum. piratae illum dimiserunt. patrem egentem non alit (all the translations of Seneca the Elder in this article are from Winterbottom (1974) and the texts in footnotes are from Håkanson (1989)).

[7] Torta a tyranno uxor, numquid de viri tyrannicidio sciret, perseveravit negare. postea maritus eius tyrannum occidit. illam sterilitatis nomine dimisit intra quinquennium non parientem. ingrati actio est.

> Sen. Con. 7.6: A tyrant gave permission to slaves to kill their masters and rape their mistresses. The chief men of the state fled; among them one who had a son and a daughter set off abroad. Though all the other slaves raped their mistresses, this man's slave kept the girl inviolate. When the tyrant had been killed, the chief men returned, and crucified their slaves. But this man manumitted his slave, and gave him his daughter in marriage. His son accuses him of insanity.[8]

In the fourth example, a tyrant forced two brothers to beat their own father.

> Sen. Con. 9.4: (law: A son who strikes his father shall have his hands cut off.) A tyrant summoned a man and his two sons to his castle; he ordered the youths to beat their father. One of them threw himself from the height, the other beat his father. Later he became one of the circle of the tyrant, killed him and received the reward. His hands are sought; his father defends him.[9]

Scholars have already noted some characteristics common to these themes.[10] One of them is that the tyrant does not participate in the trial which constitutes the declamation; in all these themes he belongs instead to a past event which caused the trial. This characteristic can be easily explained. Under a tyrant, a "democratic" trial which requires eloquence from advocates would be impossible; therefore, the tyranny must have been ended by the time of the trial. Another characteristic connected to this is that neither side has to defend the deeds of the tyrant. Although the two parties oppose each other, they criticize unanimously what was done by the tyrant. Accordingly, the tyrant is represented as having a totally bad character. This makes it possible to attribute whatever evil

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[8] Tyrannus permisit servis dominis interemptis dominas suas rapere. profugerunt principes civitatis; inter eos qui filium et filiam habebat profectus est peregre. cum omnes servi dominas suas vitiassent, servos eius virginem servavit. occiso tyranno reversi sunt principes; in crucem servos sustulerunt. ille manu misit et filiam conlocavit. accusatur a filio dementiae.

[9] QVI PATREM PVLSAVERIT, MANVS EI PRAECIDANTVR. Tyrannus patrem in arcem cum duobus filiis accersit; imperavit adulescentibus, ut patrem caederent. alter ex his praecipitavit se, alter cecidit. postea in amicitiam tyranni receptus occiso tyranno praemium accepit. petuntur manus eius; pater defendit.

[10] Berti (2007) 99-100; Tabacco (1985) 9-14.

he has done to his wickedness and ignore all considerations concerning his political behavior. With these observations, scholars tend to think that the declamatory themes concerning a tyrant did not have much relevance to the contemporary feeling about the empire.[11] These are, they maintain, based only on stereotyped images about tyrants traditional in the Hellenistic world. When declaimers attacked such a tyrant, they had no intention to criticize the emperor. This conclusion is probably irrefutable; however, I would like to add two points which might indicate that these representations of tyrants could perhaps be connected to their contemporary situation.

First, the fact that tyranny is always represented as a past event in Seneca the Elder implies that it is associated not with the current regime of the emperor but with the brutal leaders in past civil wars, for example Antony.[12] Thus, even if the description of tyranny in declamations was not a direct criticism of the current monarchy, it was a reflection on the process through which that monarchy came into existence. Second, declaimers handling these themes made a contrast between the tyranny and the Republic; while tyranny is always a bad thing, the ideal opposed to it is the Republic, not any good king or emperor. This is in accordance with the political stance of the early emperors, who disguised their own supreme power with the appearance of Restored Republic. Both points

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[11] This does not mean that the relationship between declamatory tyrants and Roman emperors was ignored by scholars; rather, the prosperity of declamation itself was regarded as a result of the establishment of the Empire (see Bornecque (1902, pp. 46-48); Bonner (1949, pp. 42-43); Sussman (1979, pp. 14-15), and it is observed that declaimers' descriptions of great kings, in particular Alexander, reflected their view on Roman emperors (for Alexander, see Migliario (2007, pp. 51-83). However, the observation of Tabacco and Berti (see the previous note) that this relationship should not be overestimated seems to me still reasonable, because, as mentioned above, tyrants appeared in rhetorical exercises already in the Hellenistic period, and declaimers arguing against tyranny were hardly critical to the Empire (a discussion of the political dimension of declamation in general is offered by Feddern (2013, pp. 67-75). My own observations should be read as small modifications of this view. The relationship between declamatory themes and the society declaimers lived in is interpreted in a more sophisticated way by Gunderson (2003), though his main concern is not tyranny.

[12] For the description of Antony as a tyrant in declamation, cf Berti (2007, pp. 108-109); Migliario (2007, pp. 103-4). One may also compare a chapter titled 'Of arrogance and outrageousness' (De superbia et impotentia) in Valerius Maximus, who composed a compilation of historical examples under the reign of Tiberius. In this chapter Antony, Alexander, and Xerxes are mentioned in a sequence (V. Max. 9.5.4-ext.2). Since the latter two were typical Eastern monarchs for Romans, it is possible that the former was also regarded as such.

indicate that the relationship between the declamatory tyrants and the contemporary emperors was not so simple.

4. The Representation of Civil Wars in the Works of Seneca the Elder.

The second element in declamations which allows us to speculate about their relationship to their age is civil wars. Compared to an imaginary tyrant, an imaginary civil war is rare in Seneca the Elder; it is only once mentioned in this theme:

> Sen. Con. 10.3: (law: An action may lie for madness.) In the civil wars, a woman refused to desert her husband, though her father and brother were on the other side. Her own side defeated and her husband killed, she came to her father; he would not admit her into his house. She said: "How do you want me to make amends to you?" He replied: "Die!" She hanged herself before his door. The father is accused of madness by his son.[13]

There are instead three other themes which, unlike those concerning tyranny, mention real civil wars in Rome in the recent past. All of them are concerned with the death of Cicero. In one of them, Cicero's murderer is accused of a criminal act of ingratitude.

> Sen. Con. 7.2: (law: An action may lie for misconduct.) Cicero defended Popillius on a charge of parricide; he was acquitted. When Cicero was proscribed, Popillius was sent by Antony to kill him, and he brought back his head to Antony. He is accused of misconduct.[14]

The other two (Sen. Suas. 6, 7) are suasoriae, i.e., deliberative speeches,

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[13] DEMENTIAE SIT ACTIO. Bello civili quaedam virum secuta est, cum in diversa parte haberet patrem et fratrem. victis partibus suis et occiso marito venit ad patrem. non recepta in domum dixit: 'quemadmodum tibi vis satisfaciam?' ille respondit: 'morere!' suspendit se ante ianuam eius. accusatur pater a filio dementiae.

[14] DE MORIBVS SIT ACTIO. Popillium parricidii reum Cicero defendit; absolutus est. proscriptum Ciceronem ab Antonio missus occidit Popillius et caput eius ad Antonium rettulit. accusatur de moribus.

in both of which Cicero deliberates whether he should save his life by obeying Antony.

> Sen. Suas. 6: Cicero deliberates whether to beg Antony's pardon.[15]
>
> Sen. Suas. 7: Antony promises to spare Cicero's life if he burns his writings: Cicero deliberates whether to do so.[16]

In these themes the responsibility for one of the tragic deaths of Republican Romans during the civil wars is directly discussed. That responsibility, however, is always put on Antony, who in the next stage of these civil wars would fight against and be defeated by Octavian. The fact that the latter also contributed to the death of Cicero was, so far as we know from the extant text of Seneca the Elder, never touched. Thus, in these themes declaimers could handle the dark side of their recent history without blaming the new regime established through it. One might ask here why themes like these, which certainly required cautious argumentation in order to avoid political danger, were actually practiced in rhetorical schools at that time. Unlike in the case of tyrants, Greek tradition here offers no adequate explanation because they treat recent Roman history. One possible reason for this was the famous status of Cicero, by far the greatest Roman orator, for the students of rhetoric; one may say that they liked to discuss the tragic death of this famous figure despite the political danger. Another interpretation would be that his death was ideal to create the impression that everything bad in the last civil war was committed by Antony—or someone else—but not Octavian because of the orator's renowned last 'Philippic' speeches against Antony. If this is true, the handling of these themes in rhetorical schools was also in accordance with the official representation of the civil wars and the new regime; civil wars were for the Republic a misery, in which a villain like Antony could kill a hero like Cicero, but Octavian defeated the villain and restored the previous status of Republic for which Cicero gave his life.[17]

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[15] Deliberat Cicero, an Antonium deprecetur.

[16] Deliberat Cicero, an scripta sua comburat promittente Antonio incolumitatem, si fecisset.

[17] Plutarch tells us that Augustus showed his sympathy to Cicero and made some effort to rehabilitate him (Plut. Cic. 49.5-6). His attitude may have influenced the way declaimers treated the orator under his reign (I owe this reference to an anonymous reviewer of INTERFACE).

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of the Imperial period in Rome, rhetorical schools were not only the place for the education of young men but also for communication among the elite class of the empire. The declamatory themes argued there contained some topics, like tyranny and civil wars, which were politically sensitive. Neither the inclusion of these topics in declamations nor their treatment in these can be explained only from the influence of rhetorical tradition. They were, rather, affected by the official representation of the recent past and the new regime at that time and, even when declamatory practice allowed or required declaimers to argue matters diligently from both sides, their argumentation was on the whole in line with this representation.

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[received August 10, 2016
accepted January 17, 2017]

INTERFACE
—JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 51-73
DOI: 10.6667/interface.2.2017.27

The Promotion of Environmental Literacy under an Attention Economy Perspective

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Abstract

While information and knowledge is growing exponentially, our day continues to have 24 hours. As a consequence, we live under constant shortage of attention. We do not read anymore - we skim; information that used to be relevant for a day, is now relevant for a few hours, since we need to pay attention to the new information. And "[…] in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something" (Simon, 1971). Internet and new media play such a dominant role in modern life that other aspects of life are neglected. And among the most neglected areas we find the interaction with nature and wildlife. .Promoting environmental literacy aims at strengthening the capacity to recognize and understand the relative health of environmental systems and set proper measures to maintain and/or restore the physical condition of those systems. However, the formation of an environmentally literate person requires a broad knowledge and ecological understanding in order to result in an intrinsically motivated green decision making. Foreign language teaching may not only contribute by raising environmental awareness but also by developing skills and competences, creating positive emotions and shaping attitudes that may lead to changes in behavior and trigger action in real life.This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the promotion of environmental literacy through foreign language teaching among the generation digital-born. The paper starts starts with a discussion of the theoretical concept of environmental literacy, and then proceeds to establish links between environmental literacy and learning, and discusses how information overload interferes with learning processes.

Keywords: attention economy, environmental literacy; language learning; environmental education; information overflow

The Promotion of Environmental Literacy under an Attention Economy Perspective

1. Introduction

We live in an era where humans affect almost all aspects of life on our planet. Human impact has reached a level that scientists propose to refer to the current era as the anthropocene (Crutzen, 2006). Obviously, addressing the ecological challenges of the Earth's ecosystems requires substantial changes in the economic, political, societal and educational realm. However, there is doubt if we have sufficient knowledge and understanding of human-environment interactions to make environmental-sound sustainable decisions (Salmon, 2000). In the long run, we can only sustain the Earth's ecosystems and prevent ecological collapse if we enhance our understanding of human-environmental relation in all aspects, and promote pro-environmental behavior. Also the higher education sector is in strong need to re-adjust its focus in order to enable graduates to deal with current and future economic, ecological, political and societal challenges. In the future, graduates will be exposed to much more environment-related issues throughout their careers than now, requiring them to have an even deeper understanding of ecological challenges. Thus, they need to be prepared by understanding the issues and developing skills to assess and evaluate proposed measures. In order to be able to tackle ecological challenges, we are in strong demand of forming environmentally literate graduates. Across the globe, there have been efforts to promote environmental awareness and step up efforts in environmental education. For example, in 2005, the UNESCO launched its UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) (UNESCO, 2005). Within this decade, educational institutions around the world attempted to increase their efforts to educate students for a more sustainable future. Education for Sustainable Development aims to equip humans with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. This includes the development of necessary competences like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way. Key areas include climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction, and sustainable consumption.

The concept of Environmental Literacy (EL) is an approach that aims to address ecological issues by strengthening the capacity to recognize and understand the actual ecological situation but also by developing skills to evaluate proper measures to maintain or restore the physical condition of ecological systems. Unsurprisingly, the development of an environmentally literate individual requires an educator to have a broad ecological knowledge and understanding, but also a solid environment-conscious behavior. However, outcomes of educational efforts are influenced by various factors, including the intrinsically motivated green decision making processes or the learning environment. It is important to understand that students draw most of their environmental knowledge from education institutions and not from media, peers or family (OECD, 2009). In learning environments where information and knowledge overflow is normal, skimming replaces reading, and attention is easily drawn away by mobile devices. As a consequence, the build-up of in-depth understanding of complex systems (such as ecological systems) is not an easy task for students and educators. Students - like many other individuals - live under constant shortage of attention. There is no time and necessity to read and reflect anymore. Information that used to be relevant for a day is now relevant for a few hours, since we need to pay attention to the new incoming information. As Simon correctly put it "[…] in an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something" (Simon 1971, p. 40-41). Internet and new media play such a dominant role in modern life that other aspects of life are neglected. And among the most neglected areas we find the interaction with nature and wildlife. While the boundaries between labor and leisure erode, work intrudes our private life, and parents have less time with their kids. Children spend only half as much time outdoors than their peers did two decades ago, and the consumption of entertainment media among kids (aged 8-18) exceeds 7 hours per day (Rideout et al., 2010). Childhood has moved indoors, with all its consequences, such as declining creativity, concentration deficiencies, underdeveloped social skills, and alienation from nature (Hofferth, 2010).

2. The Concept of Environmental Literacy

The term literacy came up in the late 1800s, and interestingly was predated by the word illiteracy by several hundred years (Venezky, 1987). While the original term literacy mainly referred to the ability to read and write, the term has evolved significantly over the last centuries, particularly during the Industrial Revolution with its far-reaching social and economic changes (e.g., mandatory elementary public education). As of now, dictionaries show two definitions of the term literacy: First, the ability to read and write, and, second, the knowledge or capability in a particular field. Thus, being literate in the broadest sense means to have knowledge or competence in a certain area. Or as the OECD ("Adult Literacy") puts it: "[l]iteracy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society". The concept of literacy has been extended to cover the ability to understand, to make informed decisions, and to act accordingly in order to address complex issues of modern society (Roth, 1992; Scholz & Binder, 2011). However, academic literature has some difficulties to agree on a narrow definition of environmental literacy (Stables & Bishop, 2001; Bowers, 1996; McBride et al., 2013). Disinger and Roth define environmental literacy as the "...capacity to perceive and interpret the relative health of environmental systems and take appropriate action to maintain, restore, or improve the health of those systems." (Disinger & Roth, 1992, p. 2). Likewise, environmental literacy needs to be evaluated in terms of observable pro-environmental behaviors. The understanding of the concept of environmental literacy was profoundly extended by the writings of David Orr, when he raised a major issue:

> "The crisis of sustainability and the problems of education are in large measure a crisis of knowledge. But is the problem as is commonly believed, that we do not know enough? Or that we

> know too much? Or that we do not know enough about some things and too much about other things? Or is it that our scientific methods are in some ways flawed? Is it that we have forgotten things we need to remember? Or is it that we have forgotten other ways of knowing that lie in the realm of vision, intuition, revelation, empathy, or even common sense? Such questions are not asked often enough...”
>
> (Orr, 1992, p. 155)

According to his point of view, educators should abstain from simplifying complex problems to an extent where connection to the context is lost. Abstracting a problem may be helpful to understand the larger picture but what is the meaning of it when it is not reflecting realities anymore and does not relate the topic with the audience? Analytical modes of teaching often use abstracting problems from the context, however, this artificial simplicity and clarity is only supportive when students are still connected to the issue. Otherwise it fails to be an effective method of teaching (Moseley, 2000; Reynolds, 2010). However, how realistic is it to expect students to get a full understanding with all the necessary details? Schneider (1997) argued that instead of in-depth details and knowledge, students should learn to ask three major questions to experts: “what can happen”, “what are the odds” and “how do you know.” Students do not have to know much of the technical details, however, they should have the skills to evaluate the integrity of proposed environmental measures. To be able to address basic environmental issues students need to be able to understand different point of views, analyze problems, and take informed action. Among the most required skills are problem solving and critical thinking skills which enable them to apply new knowledge to the individual’s existing environment. Studies have revealed the positive relationship between environment-based education and critical thinking (Ernst & Monroe, 2004). However, most scholars see the detailed contextual understanding of an ecological challenge as a precondition of environmental literacy. Only this allows analysis, synthesis, and evaluation in order to make informed decision making. Simmons (1995) studied the components of environmental literacy proposed throughout the academic literature, and drafted a framework for EL, where he identifies several major components as the basis of EL: affect, ecological knowledge, socio-political knowledge, knowledge of environmental issues, cognitive skills, and environmentally responsible behaviors. Thus, environmental literacy is about skills, activities, practices, and connectedness based on knowledge, and it aims at the capacity of individuals to act in daily life based on environmental sound principles.

In regards of EL at higher education institutions, it would mean that environmentally literate students should develop the knowledge, tools, and sensitivity to adequately address an environmental problem in their professional field. However, environmental considerations are not only present at work/study but also in daily behavior, and private decision making processes. The environmentally literate student would thus include environmental considerations in all aspects of life. While environmentally conscious people have developed awareness and knowledge about environmental problems, environmentally literate individuals adopt lifestyles, behaviors, and make decisions and choices that mirror their understanding of the potential harm to the Earth and the Environment. EL requires students to go beyond what has typically been expected of them, and collect a wide range of knowledge that ultimately leads to an intrinsically motivated decision making.

2.1 The Literacy Gap and How to Form Environmentally Literate Individuals

Despite intensifying environmental education efforts and despite the spread of the environmental literacy concept - that has helped to implement numerous programs - reality shows that large parts of the student population still lack the basic environmental knowledge, attitudes or emotional attachments that would enable them to restore public health, preserve natural resources, limit energy needs, and more importantly, engage themselves in a movement towards a more sustainable future. While the demand and need for EL is great, a number of reasons have prevented EL from reaching its full capacity. The fact that environmental literacy has not become an integral part of the curriculum indicates that the issue has not reached top-level decision making bodies, and thus does not enjoy top priority yet. As a consequence, problems arise from the lack of instructional time to apply environmental literacy approaches, and the lack of resources (Stevenson et al., 2014). In addition, since standardized tests do not include an assessment of environmental literacy skills, educators prefer to spend the limited time on test related areas. Moreover, educators fear that they do not possess adequate content knowledge for implementing environmental literacy approaches in their classes. A major boost to promote environmental literacy could be provided by integrating of environmental literacy in the overall curriculum as well as improving access to environmental literacy related lesson plans, and activities. Increased training programs could encourage foreign language educators to integrate EL-based elements in their course structure.

The ultimate goal of environmental literacy is developing the capacity for action and increase participation. However, the process of engagement is a very complex issue. In general, the formation process of an environmental literate individual can be divided into five major phases (CEL, 2007): While the first phase covers the formation of awareness between human, life and earth, the second phase is characterized by creating knowledge and understanding about humans, natural systems and processes (Table 1). The third phase embodies the involvement of attitudes of appreciation and the formation of concern for ecological issues. Phase four includes the development of problem solving skills as well as critical thinking skills. Only after having gone through the previous four phases, action and participation for the environment will occur. However, the model serves more as a blue print indicating a loose hierarchy from the simple to the more complex. While in theory, each phase builds on the previous step, in reality learning and development steps may overlap and occur simultaneously. However, in order to achieve EL no step can be left out.

Awareness	→	Knowledge	→	Attitudes	→	Skills	→	Action/Participation

Table 1: Five Elements of Achieving Environmental Literacy

(Source: Campaign for Environmental Literacy, http://www.fundee.org)

Since changes towards a pro-environmental behavior - as we all know - are not easy to accomplish, it requires continuous efforts, a step-by-step build-up of environmental competences, collecting personal experience and emotional attachment to the issue. It is a combination of knowledge, values, and attitudes that is needed in order to foster EL among students. Besides having profound knowledge about the environment to secure effective teaching, educators need to demonstrate their environment-friendly behavior and attitude to be credible. All in all, universities take a vital role in promoting a more sustainable life-style (Müller-Christ, 2014; Cortese, 2003).

3. An Attention Economy Perspective on Promoting Environmental Literacy

For centuries scarcity of information and information distribution was a limiting factor. In 1472, the library of the Queens College, Cambridge, listed about 200 volumes. This is not far from the amount a single person can carry around on his e-book reader or a similar mobile device nowadays. While at that time, getting enough material to read was the major concern, we are now more worried about how to deal effectively with the massive information flow and how to filter relevant from irrelevant information. While information technology is supporting our demand for more information, there are physical limits of absorbing information for body and brain (Pashler & Sutherland, 1998). In the information age, knowledge was important, but in the era of infobesity, we may ask ourselves the question what is the optimum amount of information we can handle? Knowledge and information is growing exponentially, and the information overflow is not only limited to consumers, managers, employees, educators, parents, but also to students.

Defining attention as the focused mental engagement on a certain element of information, we immediately realize how limited attention is. Everybody who tried to listen to two messages at the same time knows that we face natural barriers of comprehension. Focusing on one message may be successful but listening to both will trigger substantial difficulties. Doubtless, information technology eases the way of communication among people. However, in response of the extensive application of information technologies across many disciplines of life, more people have turned into producers of information and knowledge, which then has to be communicated to people. As a result, attention has developed into a scarce resource on the planet. Based on the fact that the human ability to multitask and allocate simultaneous attention is highly limited, we need to admit that attention is a new scare resource: one has to decide on how to spend attention (Kahneman, 2011).

Thinking of attention as of a market, there are suppliers and consumers. Various forms of media, news companies, publishers, marketing companies, but also common people, comprise the supply side, while individuals (as consumers) represent the demand side. The increased amount of knowledge and information enlarges the supply. However, consumers need to make decisions on how to spend their attention. If one is in short supply of attention one may want more. Since attention is trade-able and buyable (such as by outsourcing of activities), attention has become a valuable commodity. In a way it can be argued that attention serves as the new currency (Davenport & Beck, 2013). Regarding the management of financial resources, we have – more or less – learned to deal with it and apply complex decision making processes before we spend money. However, as marketing teaches us, strolling around in a mall seduces consumers to impulsive shopping. In a similar way, strolling around in an information-rich environment (e.g. internet) may result in impulsive spending of attention. As a consequence, we need to apply appropriate decision making processes regarding the spending of attention too.

When attempting to maximize attention, we realize that attention can be distinguished into several categories. In their work Davenport and Beck (2013) propose six major types of attention (Figure 1). Captive attention refers to the individual's intrinsic interest, and as we know, humans have a deeply curios nature (Stafford, 2012). Unlike other mammals, we allocate more resources for playing and discovering new things. Voluntary attention describes the attention one pays attention to what one has to pay attention to but also what one wants to pay attention to. While the first two categories focus on self-driven aspects of human attention, aversive attention stems from the motivation to avoid negative consequences ("carrot-and-stick"). Attractive attention refers to attention that develops out of expectations of positive experiences. Given that our human information processing capabilities are limited, back-of-mind attention frees resources for other activities, while front-of-mind attention requires effortful, conscious, and explicit focus (Kahneman, 2011). Unlike back-of-mind attention, the front-of-mind attention requires the allocation of resources, and overuse can result in cognitive depletion and fatigue.

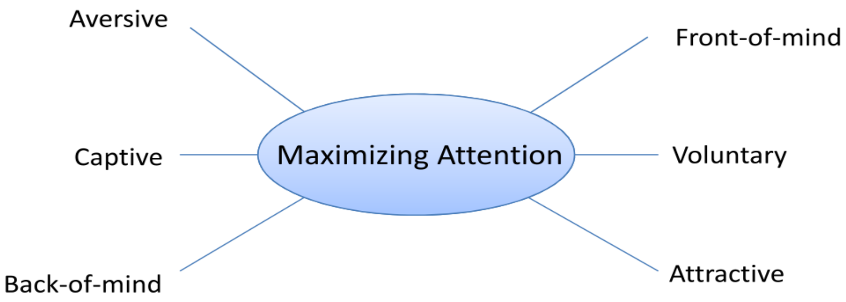

Figure 1: Six types of attention according to Davenport and Beck, 2013

3.1 Attention, Learning and Environment Literacy

The most common measurement of attention is the proxy time. However, since one can spend many hours reading a language book without effectively paying attention, time seems a questionable proxy. While in the industrial age, time was the limiting factor to output, the information age was heavily shaped by the access to information. Now, in an information-rich society, capacity to handle and deal with massive flows of information is the new limiting factor (Table 2).

Age:		**Limiting factor**
Pre-industrial age	⇨	natural resources
Industrial age	⇨	time
Information age	⇨	access to information
Information-rich age	⇨	attention

Table 2: The change of limiting factors over developmental stages

(Source: Author´s own illustration)

Given that learning without paying attention is impossible, and attention is a limited resource, the determining factor to strengthen the learning process is finding a proper mean to deal with attention spending. Considering attention as a psychological/cognitive process, items of information come into our awareness, attention is spent to a particular item, and then decisions are made whether to act or not (Table 3). There is a causal relationship between awareness, attention, and action. Awareness is thus not equal to attention, but precedes attention. Only when information reaches a certain threshold of meaning for us, awareness turns into attention, and possibly triggers action. Consequently, teaching needs to aim at increasing the level of meaning for learners in order to achieve desired outcome.

Table 3: Causal relationship between Awareness, Attention and Action

(Source: Davenport & Beck, 2013)

In times where attention management is a key to successful learning, educators realize that many students are unable put information into perspective because of a shortage of attention and chronic information fatigue. As a result, the quality of decision making is negatively affected (Hwang & Lin, 1999). Learners with chronic information fatigue are unable to make decisions or cope in other ways, they show irritability and anger, suffer from pain in the stomach and muscles, feel helpless frequently, and show signs of lethargy (Ruff, 2002). They may suffer from insomnia and feel constantly exhausted, and do not have hobbies or do not show great interest in leisure activities.

The attention economy perspective provides us with three major categories of tools to manage attention: Attention-getting tools, Attention-structuring tools, and attention-protection tools. First, attention-getting tools aim to draw attention at all, and the focus lies on the creation of a learning environment that stimulates the captive attention (e.g., evocative pictures/posters, short clips, provocative questions). Second, attention-structuring tools seek to uphold attention. In a classroom context this could include non-linear structures, games, interactive websites, books, storytelling, and life-like and real environments. Linking issues to learners′ real life contexts provides a feasible method to spur participation. This also includes setting goals that are meaningful for life, and discussing the flow of attention stream.

Third, attention-protection tools aim to provide shelter from too much information. The focus here lies in sorting out the relevant from the irrelevant, and to save attention for the important issues. Based on the assumption that learning of a new skill is a front-of-mind matter, successful learners will be those who succeed in attention management. However, this means to refrain from trading attention in order to receive free goods and services (e.g., social network platforms, etc.). While over time we have learned that buying something in a shop is based on a trade (payment against good), we still face massive issues to acknowledge that making use of social networks - such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. - also requires a trading. Although most common social networks are free, most of us are not aware that we still have to pay for them, not with money but with attention - the new currency. The average German mobile phone user uses his phone 2.5 hours while only 7 minutes for making telephone calls (Markowetz, 2015). It is not the time spent on the phone, but the amount of interruptions that sum up and distracts us. Smart phone users unlock their mobiles 88 times on average per day, 35 times for minor tasks (e.g., checking the time), and a staggering 53 times for bigger tasks (such as receiving and sending messages, etc.). Since we are disturbed every 18 minutes on average, our attention is drawn away frequently, and concentration on work or study suffers. The 2015 Nielsen Media Index reveals that Taiwanese users spend even more time on their smart phones. They are an average of 3 hours and 38 minutes online per day (Nielsen, 2016). This represents 55 minutes longer than the world´s average. In other words, Taiwanese users spend more than one full day per week (over 25 hours) online.

While in the modern working environment, electronic devices are indispensable, many of us lose sight of the impact the devices have on our behavior and decision making. However, it is not only the time spent with electronic devices that matters. Prolonged sitting has adverse effects on human health (e.g., forward neck posture, slouched posture or rounded shoulders), and the body position may not only influence the respiratory function but also human behavior (Kang et al., 2016). Investigating the behavioral impact of electronic devices on humans, a study showed that the size of the electronic devices has an impact on human decision making (Bos & Cuddy, 2013). Due to their more contractive body posture participants interacting with smaller electronic devices showed a more passive and less assertive behavior than participants working on a desktop PC applying a more expansive body posture (Huang et al., 2011).

In Taiwan, there are governmental efforts to protect children from extensive use of electronic devices. In January 2015, lawmakers passed a revision to the Protection of Children and Youths Welfare and Rights Act to cover the use of electronic devices (The Straits Times, 15 January 2015). Under the new regulation children under two years are banned from using electronic devices, while juveniles “may not constantly use electronic products for a period of time that is not reasonable”. However, since the amendment fails to define what a “reasonable” amount of time is, the law will be not more than a symbolic gesture at best.

The market for attention has just been established, and in the near future, there will be even more information competing for less attention. Excessive spending of attention leads to severe consequences. Information fatigue results in poor decision making, eventually translating into slow progress in learning and substantial loss of interest in the subject. Bridging the gap between attention-getting infotainment environments from mobile devices outside class and “boring information” in classrooms is increasingly harder to achieve.

Without question, technologically based information is compelling to us as our brains find the process of communicating with others deeply rewarding. However, technological distraction often leads to impaired self-control as our devices exceed our capacity to use them effectively. The application of information technology in education itself does not automatically enhance teaching and improve learning processes (Wright, 2008). While a majority of teachers (77%) sees the use of the internet and digital search tools have had a “mostly positive” influence on students’ research habits, 87% claimed that these technologies contribute to the formation of an “easily distracted generation with short attention spans”. And some 64% indicated that digital technologies “do more to distract students than to help them academically" (Purcell et al., 2012). And people who are engaged in teaching can observe the decrease in concentration-spans among students year by year. Attention deficits due to information overload and decreasing spans of concentration are major obstacles to generate environmentally literate students. This is particularly true, since EL calls for in-depth understanding of the issue and seeks to avoid simplification and abstract modeling. Thus, what role should gaming play in the promotion of environmental literacy? Video games may provide a significant boost in learners′ motivation, and they may increase (environmental) knowledge and consciousness. However, there is doubt to what degree video games/online games are an appropriate method to develop environmental literate students (Gee, 2003; Squire, 2011). Applying computer games for the purpose of developing environmental literacy, educators need to assess clearly, if the game promotes social interaction, participation in real life and prevents alienation from nature. While computer games may have positive effects on foreign language learning, it needs to be considered if these games also contribute in the development of environmental literacy (Chik, 2012; Hopper, 2002). As of now, research on the integration of games in environmental education is very limited (Arslan et al., 2011; Ballantyne & Packer, 2005; Hewitt, 1997).

On the other hand, lessons purely based on textbooks stand no chance to compete with mobile devices, and have little chances of receiving much attention. Texts - particularly long ones - have lost their ability to maintain attention, while images become more powerful (Rosen, 2005). Incrementally, we seem to re-transform into an image-based culture. However, if someone's attention is constantly wandering around and concentration spans are short, the best solution to draw attention is to offer very few pieces of information at a time. Besides, new information must be different from anything around it to generate captive, voluntary attention. Another promising approach is to address the most basic needs possible. As a teacher we have to understand that someone's front-of-mind attention can only be directed towards a task after having created positive attachment to the issue before. Thus, the topic needs to be connected with the person, and bring in information about the learner as much as possible. Issues need to be tailored to the audience and closely relate to the individual. This can be achieved by approaches based on the story line method aimed at connecting the topic with the person (Bell et al., 2007). Hands-on teaching (experiments and conclusions), outdoor education, and field trips could mean a major boost to spur students´ motivation. The role of the educator is to create learning environments that enable the development of needed skills and stimulate pro-environmental behavior. Informal learning contexts provide life experiences and foster pro-environmental attitudes.

As for Taiwan, both foreign language acquisition and environmental education receive much attention from policy makers. However, they are treated as two separated, not linked areas. In 2010, the Legislative Yuan passed the Environmental Education Act, which aims at integrating mandatory environmental education for Taiwanese schools, businesses and organizations (China Post, May 19, 2010). Through this legislation a larger portion of the population is exposed to discussions about environmental issues - a first step towards rising awareness levels. However, environmental knowledge and level of environmental awareness do not correlate with increased environmental action and environment responsible behavior. As the study of Hsu and Lin (2015) suggests, individuals with higher knowledge levels about carbon reduction have a stronger environmental consciousness, and incline to have higher intentions in carbon reduction but do not take concrete actions in their life. Consequently, increasing environmental awareness levels and consciousness among the public are essential, but focus must be laid on fostering changes towards environmental behavior of individuals to ensure that environmental action is stimulated. Liu et. al (2015) showed in their study that many educators fail to show environmental friendly behavior too. A national survey of schoolteachers' environmental literacy was conducted in Taiwan in order to set up a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of environmental education policy. The study included educational institutions at all levels and regions, and revealed that local educators do have satisfactory levels of environmental knowledge and attitudes but they show low degrees of environmental action. Elementary school teachers performed better than high school teachers. This underlines the necessity to develop environmental literacy among educators (and administrators) too, since they take the position of essential role models for learners.

4. Conclusion

While concerns for the environment have steadily increased over the past decades, there has been little substantial change in human individuals´ behavior to reduce the impact on the global ecosystem. The concept of environmental literacy aims at promoting awareness, knowledge on environmental issues but also seeks to trigger changes in attitudes and behavior. However, the rise of the information age and the penetration of our daily lives by information technology threaten the development of environmentally literate students. Although awareness about environmental issues is increasing constantly, real action and changes in behaviors are hard to achieve. In an environment where more information is competing with less attention, the management of attention takes a key role. Unless we find a way to deal with attention spending, grasping complex learning contents (such as ecological systems) will be infeasible. Furthermore, it triggers negative consequences for the environment, as most environmental challenges are complex in their nature. As this paper argues the promotion of environmental literacy can only lead to satisfying results when it is accompanied by the implementation of attention management methods. As a consequence, we are in strong need to continue developing new tools and instruments at all educational levels that enable the generation digital-born in sustaining their capacity to grasp complex environmental systems, and feeling responsible to take care of their environment.

The concept of environmental literacy provides an approach that allows the combination of foreign language teaching with the formation of environmentally responsible students. While foreign language teaching has a history on integrating topics that would otherwise be neglected by the curriculum, foreign language instructors are said to have a broad international perspective on global issues since many of them finished their studies abroad, and that enables them to draw meaningful comparisons between domestic and international developments. Thus, foreign language teaching not only provides a good starting point to raise environmental awareness but also allows the development of skills and competences, creating positive emotions and shaping attitudes that may lead to changes in behavior and trigger action in real life. However, the development of environmental literate graduates faces severe obstacles due to substantial societal changes and an obvious shortage of attention. Getting more in touch with nature and generating a sense of responsibility to protect the environment requires a rethinking of the overall education policy and the integration of environmental literacy goals in the curriculum. Moreover, it also requires a slow-down of our busy daily routine and a re-assessment of our entire digital life-styles that obviously increases physical and emotional distance to nature.

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[received October 4, 2016
accepted January 17, 2017]

INTERFACE
–JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ISSN: 2519-1268
Issue 2 (Spring 2017), pp. 75-81
DOI: 10.6667/interface.2.2017.37

BOOK REVIEW:

Querdenken gegen die intellektuelle Leitkultur – W. G. Sebald interveniert

Schütte, Uwe (2014). Interventionen: Literaturkritik als Widerspruch
bei W. G. Sebald. München: edition text + kritik.
ISBN: 978-3-86916-354-3. 651 S., 45 EUR.

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Mit seinem neuen Buch Interventionen: Literaturkritik als Widerspruch bei W. G. Sebald legt Uwe Schütte, Reader an der Aston University, Birmingham, nach W. G. Sebald: Einführung in Leben und Werk und Figurationen: Zum lyrischen Werk W. G. Sebalds eine gewaltige Studie von mehr als 600 Seiten vor, die sich mit ungeheurem Detailreichtum Sebalds Essays zur Literatur widmet. Vor allem bekannt durch seine Romane und Erzählungen – zu nennen wären hier an erster Stelle Austerlitz, Die Ausgewanderten sowie Die Ringe des Saturn – markieren Sebalds Schriften zur deutschsprachigen Literatur ein bisher nur unzureichend erforschtes Terrain. Stellte Schüttes W. G. Sebald: Einführung in Leben und Werk eine erste generelle Annäherung an Werk und Autor dar, so repräsentiert Interventionen nun die erste umfassende Studie zu Sebalds stark zwischen Literaturwissenschaft und Essayistik schwankenden Aufsätzen zu (hauptsächlich) deutschsprachigen (teils bewunderten – teils radikal abgelehnten) Schriftstellern. Mit großer Kennerschaft läßt Schütte kaum einen Aspekt von Sebalds oftmals polemischen Essays unberührt und analysiert das umfangreiche Werk unter Zuhilfenahme biographischen und bisher in der Sekundärliteratur der Forschung vernachlässigten Materials. Schüttes persönliche Bekanntschaft mit Sebald als dessen Doktorand und Assistent an der

University of East Anglia und folglich sein gleichsam privilegierter Zugang zu wenig bekannten Aspekten aus Sebalds Leben trägt zum beeindruckenden Informationsreichtum der Studie maßgeblich bei.

Strukturell gliedert sich Schüttes Buch in drei Hauptteile mit insgesamt zwanzig Kapiteln und beginnt mit den frühen kritischen Schriften Sebalds zu Carl Sternheim und Alfred Döblin. Chronologisch bewegt sich die weitere Ausarbeitung an Sebalds kritischen Essays weiter bis zu dem kontroversen Luftkrieg und Literatur und Logis in einem Landhaus. Schütte zeigt, daß sich in diesen frühen Kritiken an etablierten Autoren des deutschsprachigen Literaturkanons bereits die Abnabelung Sebalds von der akademisch betriebenen Germanistik abzeichnet – ein Prozeß, den Sebald im Lauf seiner schriftstellerischen Tätigkeit im unkonventionellen Umgang mit deutschsprachigen Autoren in seinen Essays zur österreichischen Literatur Unheimliche Heimat sowie Die Beschreibung des Unglücks und vor allem im Kritik-Band Logis in einem Landhaus zu seltener essayistischer Perfektion bringen sollte. Immer wieder kommt Schütte auch auf die Romane Sebalds zu sprechen, so daß die Studie einen wertvollen Einblick in das gesamte schriftstellerische und literarische Schaffen des Autors bietet. Insbesondere die enge Verschlingung literaturwissenschaftlich-essayistischer Arbeit mit den großen Prosakunstwerken des späten Sebald arbeitet Schütte minuziös heraus und bietet so ein Panorama des Schreibprozesses, in dem Autor und Material – Biographie und Fiktion – untrennbar im Prozeß der ästhetischen Arbeit miteinander verbunden sind. Besonderen Stellenwert haben in Schüttes Analyse die literarischen Wahlverwandten Sebalds: Franz Kafka, Robert Walser, Jean Améry, Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke (u. a. bevorzugterweise österreichische Schriftsteller), an deren Vorbild der deutsche Schriftsteller nicht nur seine Prosa, sondern auch seine (melancholische) Mentalität entwickelte.

Der besondere Wert von Schüttes Studie liegt nun vor allem darin, daß er seinen ehemaligen Lehrer nicht idealisiert – nein, Schütte wirkt nie epigonal und spart nicht mit Kritik an Sebald und dessen unkonventioneller literaturwissenschaftlich-kritischer Vorgehensweise – eine eigentümliche Sebaldsche Art literarischer Analyse, die es durch ihre polemische Zielsetzung mit den Fakten nicht immer genau nimmt.

Vor allem den selektiven (manchmal sogar gleichgültigen) Umgang mit Sekundärquellen wertet Schütte als Makel der Sebaldschen Essayistik und führt dies dezidiert vor an Sebalds Kafka-Essay Das unentdeckte Land. Zur Motivstruktur in Kafkas Schloß vor. Auch den international hochgelobten Roman Austerlitz – Sebalds letztes publiziertes und vielleicht weltweit bekanntestes Werk – erkennt Schütte im Vergleich zu Sebalds früheren Prosaschriften als künstlerisch weniger bedeutsam.

Schütte bietet jedoch keine Dekonstruktion des Autors, sondern vielmehr eine Rekonstruktion der Genesis des literarischen Werks Sebalds aus den literaturkritischen Schriften und zeigt, wie sehr sich die Prosa des deutschen Exilschriftstellers aus dem ästhetischen Querdenkertum Sebalds entwickelt hat, das auch Sebalds kritische Haltung zur zeitgenössischen Politik und zum historischen Diskurs bestimmt hat. Unter dem ironisch-parodistischen Titel „Lehrjahre & Gesellenstück – Ein Portrait des Germanisten als junger Mann" beginnt Schütte seine Charakterisierung des jungen Sebalds, der bereits früh als wortgewaltiger Polemiker gegen den etablierten Literaturbetrieb austeilt. Sebald erscheint als Schriftsteller in einer ideologisch-formativen Phase, der vorsätzlich gegen den literarischen Strom der Zeit schwimmt. Im Hinterkopf trägt er dabei stets die kritische Theorie der Frankfurter Schule, um die große Namen der zeitgenössischen Deutschen Literatur zu destruieren. Insgesamt sieht Schütte Sebalds intellektuelle Wahlverwandtschaft bei Walter Benjamin, was besonders deutlich im Essay Luftkrieg und Literatur zum Ausdruck komme: „Als erste wichtige Quelle für Sebalds Denken der Geschichte als eines naturhistorischen Verfallsprozesses sind die entsprechenden Passagen im Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels zu benennen." (510) Diesen Verfallsprozess sieht Sebald nicht nur in der Natur, sondern auch in der zeitgenössischen Kultur und hier vor allem in der vom germanistischen Establishment kanonisierten Literatur. Bei seiner kritischen Arbeit geht der Autor folgerichtig mit Vorliebe gegen die Lieblinge der Germanistik vor.

Das erste Idol der Germanistik, das Sebald durch seine Attacken von seinem Podest stößt, ist Carl Sternheim. Bereits bei dieser ersten kritischen Publikation im Kohlhammer-Verlag wird Sebalds unkonventionelle Vorgehensweise deutlich, bei der der Autor sich wenig oder kaum an die formalen und stilistischen Vorgaben zum Verfassen einer akademischen Studie hält – eine Eigenart, die Sebald auch in seinen späteren Essays beibehalten wird, und in der sich der Stil der späteren Prosaarbeiten bereits andeutet.

Neben der polemischen Sternheim-Studie, mit der Schütte seine kritische Studie eröffnet, steht selbestredend Sebalds polemische Attacke Der Mythus der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins auf dem Programm. Wie die Sternheim-Arbeit markiert die Döblin-Schrift einen Angriff Sebalds auf das literarische Establishment ansich durch eine recht einseitig-polemische Analyse des Werks eines etablierten Autors, der gewissermaßen stellvertretend für die zeitgenössische Germanistik als Autorität in Sachen Literatur und Ästhetik abgestraft wird. Dass Sebald ausgerechnet die jüdischen Schriftsteller Sternheim und Döblin ins Visier nimmt, mag zunächst ungewöhnlich erscheinen, wenn man seine weltanschauliche Identifikation mit der Frankfurter Schule bedenkt. Allerdings leuchtet diese Vorgehensweise spätestens bei der Döblin-Kritik ein, da es Sebald um eine konkrete Revision des literarischen Kanons durch einen gezielten Angriff auf die Autoritäten des Kulturbetriebs geht. Mit Sternheim und Döblin wählt Sebald jüdische Autoren, die (in seinen Augen) den Fehler begangen haben, sich an den offiziellen deutschen Literaturbetrieb und der legitimen literarisch-ideologischen Leitkultur anzubiedern. Wie weit Sebald mit seiner Polemik geht, wird dann deutlich, wenn er die Anbiederung an die deutsche Leitkultur mit der Behauptung untermauert, Döblin (wie auch Sternheim) seien insgeheim Judenfeinde: „Die Provokation [...] bestand darin, Döblin einen manifesten Antisemitismus zu unterstellen; ein gewichtiger Vorwurf, der ihn für Sebald in einer Reihe mit Sternheim stehen ließ.“ (121) An diesem Beispiel führt Schütte vor, dass Sebald zur äußersten Provokation bereit ist, und mit extremen Mitteln gegen von der Germanistik kanonisierte Schriftsteller vorzugehen bereit ist. Sebalds Essays zeigen folglich eine Facette des Autors, die aus den Romanen, in denen stets der Philanthrop und Holocaust-Schriftsteller Sebald von der Kritik lobend hervorgehoben werden, auf den ersten

Blick gänzlich zu fehlen scheinen. Der scharfzüngige Kulturkritiker, dessen Polemik einen weitaus holistischeren Charakter hat, wird in Interventionen Stück für Stück mit großer Genauigkeit herausgearbeitet.

Schütte spürt in seinem Buch diesem eigenwilligen Vorgehen Sebalds detailliert nach und beweist anhand unzähliger Beispiele, dass Sebalds provokanter Wahnsinn Methode hat und einem wohldurchdachten Plan folgt. Dies belegt Schütte eindrucksvoll und mit einer Fülle von Fakten anhand Sebalds Essays, in welchen nicht nur verhasste Literaten wie Alfred Andersch aufs Schärfste kritisiert werden, sondern in vielen Fällen verehrten literarischen Vorbildern ein Denkmal gesetzt wird. In gewisser Weise ist es gerade dieser (Sebalds eigener) Kanon von ästhetischen Leitfiguren, die ein bezeichnendes Licht auf den Autor und seine eigenartige Position in der Germanistik werfen. So vernichtend Sebalds Kritik an Schriftstellern wie Sternheim, Döblin, Andersch und Grass auch sein mag – so grenzenlos sind sein Lob und seine Bewunderung für Autoren wie Jean Amery, Georges Perec, Robert Walser und Peter Handke (dieser selbst eine umstrittene Persönlichkeit in der literarischen Welt der Moderne). Besonders interessant wird es in Schüttes Studie, wenn die Verehrung Sebalds für den absoluten literarischen Außenseiter Ernst Herbeck – den schizophrenen Dichter, der die meiste Zeit seines Lebens in der Psychiatrie verbracht hat – in den Mittelpunkt der Betrachtung gerät. Hier betritt Schütte in nicht geringem Maß interpretatorisches Neuland, indem er konstatiert, dass „Sebald die aus dem psychotischen dérangement resultierenden Deformationen der Sprache zunächst grundsätzlich als künstlerische Leistung affirmiert, anstatt sie als Krankheitssymptom zu diffamieren [...].“ (291) Die „mindere Literatur“ (288) Herbecks (wie auch Herbert Achternbuschs) steht in Sebalds essayistischem Werk der opportunistischen Prosa von Autoren wie Alfred Andersch klar überlegen gegenüber. Schütte arbeitet diesen Umstand in seiner monumentalen Studie eindrucksvoll heraus und präsentiert Sebald auf diese Weise als Intellektuellen, hinter dessen „außerordentlichen Literatur eine außergewöhnliche Literaturkritik“ steht. (619)

Natürlich lässt Schütte auch Sebalds eigenwillige Interpretation bekannter Werke namhafter Autoren nicht aus. Vor allem Sebalds intensive Beschäftigung mit seinem großen Idol Franz Kafka nimmt eine wichtige Stellung in Interventionen ein: „Ach wo er nicht über Kafka und dessen Texte selbst schreibt, taucht der Prager Schriftsteller auf als Referenzpunkt oder Maßstab, an dem Literatur gemessen wird." (206) Wichtig ist in diesem Fall insbesondere Sebalds totales Desinteresse am standardisierten akademischen Vorgehen. Schütte macht ferner darauf aufmerksam, dass Sebald wiederholt bewusst wichtige Quellenangaben ignoriert. In seiner Kafka-Interpretation ist dieser Umstand umso wichtiger, da sich Sebald auf die Forschungsergebnisse anderer Verfasser stützt, ohne diese namentlich zu nennen. Besonders eindrucksvoll führt Schütte dies anhand Sebalds Schloss-Aufsatz Das unentdeckte Land vor, indem er anführt, Sebalds Fund, das Wort „Landvermesser" habe im Hebräischen (fast) dieselbe Bedeutung wie „Messias", sei nichts weiter als eine „plagiatorische Übernahme" eines Ergebnisses der Kafka-Studie Kafka and the Yiddish Theater von Evelyn Torton Beck. (216) An Beispielen wie diesem wird deutlich, dass Schütte einen eindeutig kritischen Blick auf seinen alten Lehrer wirft. Sebalds Eigenarten werden somit nicht ignoriert oder entschuldigt oder gar als Marotten eines eigenwilligen Künstlers abgetan – nein, die Tatsache, dass Sebald durch die Übernahme fremder Forschungsergebnisse zu glänzen suchte, weist den Autor in nicht geringem Maß als Karriereristen aus, dem es nicht zuletzt darum ging, sich als wortgewaltiger Intellektueller einen Namen zu machen und seinen festen Platz als origineller Interpret im zeitgenössischen Literaturbetrieb zu finden, auch wenn dies auf Kosten der Forschungsethik geschieht.

Neben handfesten literaturwissenschaftlichen Analysen gibt Schütte ferner bizarre Details aus Sebalds Leben preis, wie jenes, dass der Vegetarier Sebald auch seinen Hund vegetarisch ernährte. Kunstgriffe wie dieser tragen zur Auflockerung des enormen Texts bei, der durch diese Art des comic relief trotz seiner Länge und des oft pessimistisch-resignierenden Charakters der diskutierten Sebaldschen Essays kaum jemals ins Stocken gerät und langatmig wird, sondern den Leser neugierig auf mehr macht. Interventionen erweist sich somit als für Literaturwissenschaftler und Laien gleichermaßen geeignete Lektüre und ist ferner ideal für den Einstieg in Sebalds Werk wie auch die professionelle Beschäftigung mit wenig untersuchten Teilaspekten der Schriften des deutschen Exilautors.

Schütte gelingt es, das intrikate – vielverzweigte Werk Sebalds strukturiert zu analysieren und ein Gesamtbild des Œuvres herauszuarbeiten, welches dem interessierten Leser einen schnellen Zugriff zu Sebald als Person und als Autor ermöglicht. Auf stilistisch hohem Niveau präsentiert Schütte einen bisher unbekannten Sebald – einen Mann, dessen Facettenreichtum sich in seinem Werk – dem essayistischen wie dem prosaischen – widerspiegelt. Der Querdenker Sebald, der sich seit frühester Jugend bewußt zwischen alle Stühle gesetzt hat und später als Germanist mit seinen Essays gegen die etablierte deutsche Literaturwissenschaft anschreiben sollte, wird bei Schütte in ebenfalls zum Gegenstand einer kritischen Analyse, an deren Ende die Ambivalenz des schriftstellerischen Schaffens W. G. Sebalds – des streitbarsten Exilanten der späten deutschen Moderne ihre verdiente Wertschätzung erfährt.

Mit Interventionen hat Uwe Schütte eine wegweisende Studie zur Sebald-Forschung vorgelegt – ein durch profunde Textkenntnis bestechendes Grundlagenwerk für jede tiefergehende Beschäftigung mit Sebalds Werk, das die zukünftige Rezeption und Untersuchung von Sebalds Leben und Schriften maßgeblich beeinflussen wird.