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## Literature: A Flesh Made of Fugitive Suns

LINDA TY-CASPER

Because truth changes in our perception of it and has to be revealed to us again and again, any country's literature is not written once and for all times. If it is to give us a choice of dreams and meanings, it cannot be limited to one masterpiece, so outstanding in scope and depth, so perfect in proportions and languages that our literature is accomplished forever. If it is to give us intimations of what we are and what we can be, individually and collectively, it must tolerate as many voices as are able to speak. Truth is in each of us in proportion not to audibility, but to the depth of perception and feeling, and the offering of that perception in a communion of words. For literature fails if it discloses only what words say.

Our literature is necessarily made up of pieces, neither equal nor equivalent, though all of importance. The most realistic view is that literature is a *bayanihan* effort at constructing a time capsule for the future to unlock. What will be found there is our common likeness.

Ideally it should be possible to read literature without knowing who wrote it, because we should be persuaded by the merits of the work rather than by the personality or popularity of its author. Because literature must bear itself, it need not be introduced by other writers who can say only what the reader must be able to discover for himself, and who might be tempted, in the custom of our courtesy, to overpraise. This is not to deny the writer his work. His whole best being has gone into what he has written. The clarity by which he has seen life, the integrity with which he has refrained from making his work serve himself, the manner in which he has devoted himself to his work: all have influenced his testimony to the character and essence of life. For example, in a 1978 writing workshop at Ateneo de Manila, we proceeded to

write from a common situation and discovered we had written very different stories.

It is fortunate that we do not write alike, and that even if we try we cannot really resemble one another; that we are moved by different things, by the same things in different ways. This fact ensures variety and complexity in proportion to the enrichments in life itself.

Nevertheless, while a writer's work bears the distinctive mark of his creation, it should preserve not his ego but the moments of life that flared long enough for his heart to feel its beat. Such moments transfixed stand for all other flashes of time which left no trace. The writer, then, is *in* his work but must disappear *into* it; must relinquish all claims to it once it is written. It is no longer his own but the country's. He helps to accomplish this by using distance — as little of himself as possible — the detached and objective regard for something that will always *hold* a part of him but will cease to *be* a part of him; like a soap bubble wherein one's breath is contained even as it sails away.

Literature must catch the eye of the reader's imagination, so that he becomes enmeshed with the characters and the writer in a continuity which is the closest we can come to immortality. Permeated by possibilities, the reader is forced to define and refine himself whenever he is presented with imaginative alternatives.

It is not the purpose of literature to provide an escape from life or a forum where we can amuse ourselves with sheer artistry in words. The reader who seeks escape will be threatened by serious literature. Certain moments of life, certain visions of truth are hard to face. Yet, standing in the place of the one betrayed, the one afraid, the one who loves and is loved, the reader can extend his world and his invulnerability, if he wants to. Literature can prepare him for his own moment when he stands at the brink of yielding to or resisting life's temptations. For we can survive almost anything, as long as we know that what we are suffering has been suffered before. When our time comes to falter, we can take comfort in the small triumphant gestures which rendered someone, very much like ourselves, indestructible despite death. Or we can ignore literature and banish ourselves from our own lives.

The reader's role is by no means passive. Raquel Sims Zaraspe saw beyond the loss of the pawned necklace in "The Transparent Sun" that the "death of a world of values" is "more radical

in the life of a people than armed uprisings.”<sup>1</sup> My story centered on the necklace, but she saw the loss of something greater than the jewelry. The particular way we read literature makes it our own. Nilda Rimonte discovered in my first stories something I was unaware of: “the inner-turning of the characters upon a value that a still traditionalistic people are most sensitive about. . . the value of honor. . .hiya. . .”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, no one has seen what I myself saw *after* “The Outside Heart” was published: the flagellant’s servant who lashes his back in the Lenten ritual of penance and then carries him to the sea to wash his wounds is named Eloy — short for Marcelo. In the agony on the cross, Jesus’ fourth lament when he calls to his Father is “Eloi, Eloi. . .” The Christians among us can further enrich that story with their beliefs or what remains of them in this secular world. Others might see that coincidence as a device, a straining for effect, or might trace its source to some need or relationship buried in my psyche. To me, the possibility of just such discoveries as this is part of the excitement of literature.

#### LITERATURE DEFINED

The question of the nature of literature can elicit all sorts of loyalties. Our minds protectively react by assuming that there is a limit to everything — to space, to the reach of our heart: so we rank everything from heroes to movie stars. We discover that this is an effective way to exclude what does not meet our tastes, and we rank our literature as if we can decide for all times which is great and which is small. Is it really necessary to decide if Amado Hernandez wrote great literature or not? It seems to me somewhat like deciding which senses we would choose if we had to: is sight better than touch? Can literature be sorted the way eggs are by size? There are times that we write with a lesser or more self than usual. Some subjects solicit the best in us, others our weaknesses. Some efforts stay trapped in our psyches. Some of us have the playfulness and wildness of spirit that old age alone, perhaps, will tame. Some of us are so full of seriousness, it spills over into our laughter. How do we decide between these? With some of us, a

1. Raquel Sims Zaraspe, *The Philippine Collegian*, 11 September 1968.

2. Nilda Remonte, *Heritage*, July 1967.

small vocabulary suffices beautifully because we can use that select cache the way a painter, through an endless combination of primary colors, creates multiple rainbows. For some of us, metaphors only way-lay the idea. Some of our works literally sing, while others move as deliberately as a *pasion* or a river abandoning its bed. Some are like a nest of boxes hiding each other; some, like flags around which to rally. Which is better? Which is best?

And yet, we have to have a sense of the bounds of literature. Can we use the writer's own intention by which to judge his work? Will he know it himself? Is there any writer who does not strain against his limits, his own sure knowledge? Does anyone proceed deliberately to write mediocre literature; or is it only that writers have to compromise themselves in the act of writing: succumb intermittently and finally to interruptions and distractions, to loss of will and confidence, to self-questionings about the quality of work that is so lean in rewards while demanding more than anyone should be expected to part with, his own life? If we are not supposed to achieve our own potential in life, dare we expect it in literature?

Perhaps we could use the yardsticks of relevance and truth, form and art, language; and accept all kinds of testimony in the belief that literature is a form of witnessing, and witnesses' good faith and competence are assumed until proven otherwise.

Truth is not an easy test to apply. Which truth and whose? We testify to what we *see*, not to the *essence* of things. Some writers say they deal with "beautiful lies": how can they be tested against truth when they have no use for it? To other writers, literature is the net in which they capture truth. For still others, it is the way they go beyond truth and life to pure art. Yet even fantastic literature has a human content or reference. Art creates what did not exist before, but only out of what did exist, exists and will exist. Whenever a mind is probed in order to see how it can be made to yield, whenever flesh is excited or scourged, life and its apparent truth are implicated. For truth is the one that seeks us, not the other way around. We might ignore its presence and pressures; but it is there in the other face, reflected, the way darkness only heightens light. However, the truth of literature is different from that of life, as steam is different from the boiling water out of which it rises. They are of the same essence but of different physical appearance and properties. Literature as well as other arts

orders life — not to dispel its mystery but to make us feel that mystery beating inside our hearts. Life and history are in *The Peninsulars*, for example, in the same manner that the Spanish Civil War is implicit in Picasso's *Guernica*, and the war with Napoleon is epitomized in Goya's *The Third of May*.<sup>3</sup> Life and history cannot be reproduced, but they can be represented — intensified, not to falsify them or to make them sensational or to change their results, but to make them vibrate again and divert our attention from current preoccupations. There are degrees of intensification — some writers call their method distortion. Luna's *Spoliarium* and the *zarzuelas* and *moro-moros*, banned early in the American occupation when our language and means of expression were “foreign-occupied,” depicted part of our history through indirection and allegory.

One of the questions I am often asked about *The Peninsulars* is why there are more Spanish than Filipino characters; why there are good Spaniards in it. The novel had to work with the facts brought out by my research from varied sources. It is not the function of literature to rewrite history or even to counter its misrepresentations and lies, with other lies. The Spaniards held the reins of power all throughout 377 years of our history. In a novel recreating the 1750s and the political ferment of the times — meant to serve as background for two other novels in a trilogy about the rise of our national consciousness — I could not ignore the fact that the Spaniards were numerically ascendant in the exercise of power. Similarly, much as I wanted to have all the Filipino characters wise and good and selfless, facts show that we have always been capable and willing to oppress one another, as lustily as though foreign to each other. To deny this is to blind ourselves to a danger constantly facing us from within.

Some facts surprised me. The Spaniards oppressed each other as well. I thought we were the only victims. But if there were *caciques* here, so were there in Spain, trying to dominate everyone and everything clear to the sky. If they strung us up in the positions classic to water torture — which Americans learned to use against us later, and we against each other — the Spaniards lined up at the doors of churches to stab their doomed countrymen as they walked out of confession, hurrying them on to the dug graves or

3. Linda Ty-Casper, *The Peninsulars* (Manila: Bookmark, 1964).

precipices at the end of the torment. If the Spaniards threw our dead onto bone piles and unconsecrated grounds, they also dishonored *their* dead: in the frenzy of the wars among themselves, they danced in the streets with the disinterred bodies of their nuns and priests.

How could the goodness of characters in literature depend upon their nationality, when our own goodness does not?

In the Philippine-American War, the subject of my research these past several years, American soldiers harried us out of our trenches as if we were rabbits; rained naval shells among us, splintering our bones, our churches and our homes. One of their generals ordered a swath of land, twenty miles across Samar, cut down and burned in order to turn it into a "howling wilderness." Yet I have come across letters of American soldiers — the other part of *they* — who, full of guilt, tried to fire high in order to miss us; who were shot in the back for attempting to prevent rapes; who, convinced that nations as well as man had to be moral and just, wrote to newspapers in America describing the war when army censors would allow only reports glorifying the imperial republic, and who for this effort often bore the brunt of official investigations into the brutality of that war.

Part of the paradox of life, which history bypasses as it reports tableaux of nations on rampage, is the humanity of the enemy.

## LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Literature is one way history, which too often reduces life to dates and events, can animate life so that man is returned to the center of human existence. It is man, after all, not nations, who feels the hunger caused by economic recessions and market fluctuations, who suffers separations and dislocations from social upheavals, who catches the bullets and bombs of war. It is in man's flesh and bones that the events of history are etched. Individuals die, while their country goes on. It is in literature that generations of images representing man are preserved. It is in literature that we can recover again and again the promise of our resurrection. It is the house of our flesh in which we can refresh, restore and reincarnate ourselves.

Conversely, history is one way that literature can put a form upon life, and upon itself. If literature is about an individual's

struggle to know and to survive, history is the record of a peoples' struggle to exist and prevail. But while history is a measure of time, a designation of place, an allocation of responsibility for victory or defeat, literature is a spiritual landscape, a transcendence of time, a tracing of moments that stop time and make it flow backward, an identification of its celebrants and victims. History marks the distance men and nations reach around the globe. Literature marks the distance man travels into himself, the labyrinths there that lead him astray and trap him.

Literature is not the place, however, in which to *learn* history, but to *understand* it. The reader who knows history enriches literature with his knowledge. His is the additional pleasure of discovering how it shaped the story, how typical of the period and culture the characters are. Literature and history interanimate each other but do not take each other's place. Literature can serve as endnotes or footnotes to history by providing the particulars and exceptions. A story about people who try to escape the street barricades and run into Japanese flamethrowers and bayonets during the liberation of Manila illustrates textbook statements that tens of thousands died and Manila's destruction was only second to that of Warsaw.

In a sense literature cannot avoid being historical because it is about life. Where it is contemporary and realistic, it registers the pressures upon a particular society at a particular time. It acts much like a seismograph recording the cultural, political, social and economic disruptions and quietudes; identifying the fault lines of life. Even fantastic literature provides clues about the milieu that produced its writer. It is not only in dreams of sleep and wish fulfillment, but also in nightmares and wakeful trances that we reveal ourselves.

Literature's primary purpose is not to preserve the past; but it performs an outstanding service by freeing the past from its time and giving it a duration for both present and future to experience again and again. Merely because the past is irrecoverable does not make it lost or useless. It has ordered the patterns of our thoughts and attitudes. It is in our brain stems in the form of intuitions. As certainly as the meaning of future lives will be affected by the significance we manage to wrest for ourselves, we are the beneficiaries of what those in the past achieved. We can, at least, try to discover the costs at which they earned this for us. Like flesh which



becomes part of the richness of the earth, our literature enriches our lives. Knowing that this flow of life — perhaps the whole essence of immortality — passes through us, we can stand more confidently in our own time and place.

Why does not literature let history alone speak for the past? Because the events of the past, however remote — the wars and civil disorders and natural calamities — are felt in the lives of individuals, while official history deals with mass movements and aspirations, with entire countries locked against each other or with themselves. It is for literature to recover the human essence when history summarizes events; to decode the significance of those who, in Camus' words, "suffer history"; those in whose lives economic and sociopolitical factors take their toll. Literature, not history, preserves the hunger of those who secretly dip their fingers into pots of *bagoong* they could not afford, in order to flavor their boiled rice; the despair of those who marched armed by their desperate belief in their invulnerability as the Guardia de Honor, the Sakdalistas and Lapiang Malaya. Through the inner lives of characters in literature, the forces that met headlong in history clash again in our modern minds.

Because history has none, literature has to find space for those who live on three feet of ground between a private fence and an *estero*, clinging to life the way their huts, built out of refuse, clutch the soil; those who work inside foreign factory compounds, whose cry cannot climb the walls which are tall enough to divide the sky; those who, choked with abundance, cannot find room inside their skin for all the luxuries they can afford, and, therefore, space themselves out with drugs; those whom minor successes deface and those who do not yield even to death. Among the latter I count the man dying of cancer in "Cousin, Cousin," who finishes building his house with the money given for his cobalt treatment; the old farmer in "The Dead Well" who, dispossessed of land inherited from his father, finds the courage to assert himself by running the agent into a dead well, not killing him but rendering him incapable of remaining alive, just as he himself is being deprived of his existence.<sup>4</sup> We have need of their courage in our moments to come, of struggle with our lesser selves.

4. Linda Ty-Casper, "Cousin, Cousin," *The Secret Runner and Other Stories* (Manila: Alberto S. Florentino, 1974), pp. 80-96; "The Dead Well," *The Transparent Sun and Other Stories* (Manila: Alberto S. Florentino, 1963), pp. 40-47.

History salvages the numbers of casualties and their distribution according to sides and battlefronts. Literature's concern is with the man who felt the bullet in his jaw, the woman running from an exploding church who discovers, on reaching safety, that the weight in her arms is a pillow, not her child. Were they actual? Literature presents composites of many, through characters who stand for all of them, manifesting their feelings and expectations, of those once alive but who otherwise would vanish.

Literature set in the past recreates it on the basis of known facts. Where history is silent, literature has to fill the gaps on the basis of what is recorded and with due regard to what could have happened. Recorded history is not infallible. Our memories tend to select what we can bear. Alterations result from human willfulness and predisposition to play God, from indifference, and the impossibility of seeing and recalling everything. In the process of fixing battlegrounds, history has even misplaced battle lines. In fixing responsibilities, it has lost track of accomplices. Will we ever know all who were responsible for Bonifacio's execution; or for that of Luna?

Even when dates and places are reasonably fixed, history does not furnish the details which will make literature alive; which will enable us to see the stars grow large in the sky and the sun come out hot and direct. Though it will not have to mention these details, literature needs to know them, for they affect the way the characters act. To have a character mount a horse, you have to have an idea of how heavy he is, how sturdy the horse, their relative heights. Do his feet drag on the ground as he rides? You can move a story across the land — the characters at one with their surrounding — if you know after how many paces a river will have to be forded; if the land breaks out into hills or sags into waterholes or drops into ravines; if treelines obscure the horizon; if the sand is wet. To anticipate his characters, the writer will have to see in his own mind the weeds that covered the ground, whether the flowers attracted bees or were past their bloom. The odor of grass, the color of fields, the taste of rain, the grains of the soil are part of the "root system" that holds literature in place. They are not visible, but they make the characters alive in our imagination because alive in the writer's.

## LITERATURE AND LIFE

How much of life/history can literature bear? Though ignorance of facts turns fiction into a romance of adventure rather than into literature, too many facts will clutter the story and inhibit its natural development. Literature has to put an order upon life, or it is reduced to an evidence of the writer's erudition. Literature is a different discipline from journalism. The temptation, however, is to include a proof of elaborate research. The best way is for the writer to read everything he can get hold of, then set them aside until the urge to write is too great to ignore, although this must be while the writer is still sympathetic to the subject. By then a critical perspective should have been acquired. The writer has to know more than he puts into a story or book; has to put into them more than will ever show.

How much of history literature can bear depends upon whether it is used as background or foreground. In *The Peninsulars*, history was used as background. It was not meant to intrude, to become a protagonist itself acting with the characters. Through the details of daily life — what people wore and drank and desired and possessed — I tried to present the society prototypical of the 1750s. I assembled details from pictures and histories, literature of Spain, the Latin American countries, Mexico particularly, as well as, of course, the Philippines. I assumed a picture of a mirror from Peru, in the absence of one from the Philippines, bore some resemblance to those imported into our country; indeed, might have come out of the same hands. I tried to imagine the interior chambers of that society, its minds and appetites, all realms that history fears to enter. Where I had to present something about which I could find nothing, I speculated, based on possibilities. I used sentence arrangements and metaphors that I thought were proper to the period, associations to recreate the frictions that wore souls raw then (souls are rare phenomena in the modern world; we now have psyches, and hope for comfort and “fulfillment” instead of for salvation).

The events of history, which resist the order historians try to impose upon them to make them manageable, are even harder for literature to put into a story. In *The Peninsulars*, for example, after I had already researched the English invasion — I needed an external crisis at the end, to push the internal torments farther

into the characters' minds and souls — I realized it would redirect the story in a way it should not go. It was a hard decision. I had hundreds of index cards I could not use, and nothing in its place. Luckily I came upon accounts of Dutch threats to the Philippines, of the same period or span of time. In the novel, the invasion came not from any specific Dutch attack, but was assembled from these various threats. In this way history did not become one of the protagonists acting with the others, but acted upon and through them; and remained underground, holding the story in place the way roots hold growing things to the earth. The Muslim invasion drew, as well, not on any single attack, but is the essence and substance of many such invasions during the period. If I were writing history, such condensations and alterations would have been unthinkable. But I was writing literature based on history. I had to discard what would restrict the story to purely factual dimensions and make them reproduce actual records. I was making a reflection *upon*, rather than *of*, history. I had to be less concerned with *sequence* than with *consequence* (the ravage of lives): less with the events, than with the lives in which these events took place.

Neither could I have the characters see the events through which they were living with the eyes of historians. Those who have something to lose in historical conflicts cannot have the same detachment or interest in them as those recording such events. Participants to the same events see different things, attest to the same things with varying points of view.

These same reasons made me refer to the government officials by their rank, not by their names. I wanted to imply the power and authority which positions gave to individuals who wielded them. At the same time, it is natural to refer to officials by their rank, out of respect, and with no confusion in mind about exactly who is indicated.

Somebody else writing about the 1750s would have his own ideas about methods, about selecting which events to use and adapt. History could have been more obviously the outline of *The Peninsulars*. The propriety of method to purpose is a matter of individual choice. No single version exhausts the incidents of life. To use as a basis for judgment of literature how the critic might write "the" story is self-serving and irrelevant to it — part of the *el supremo* syndrome among us.

In *The Three-Cornered Sun*, history stays in the foreground, acted out by characters standing for those whose will and bodies were put to a test in the 1890s.<sup>5</sup> The novel follows the acknowledged sequences of the Revolution of 1896. The novel follows the order history placed upon life then. Of a less remote past than *The Peninsulars*, the history in that novel did not require as much intensification in order to stun our imagination and make us pay attention. The Revolution is still at the edge of our memories. Its last lingering survivors still march in our parades. Its moving spirit is still part of our present struggle for national integrity. It can still be seen in the ruins of Guadalupe, just as World War II can be seen in the beheaded churches of Intramuros.

Consequently, I could rely upon the excitement and turbulence of the Revolution to emerge, by reproducing the almost leisurely way the battles took place — the lines crossing and recrossing the banks of the Zapote River; the skirmishes halting for the night, or to honor the obligations of Sunday. Unlike *The Peninsulars* which Franz Arcellana called a “frieze,” *The Three-Cornered Sun* develops much like a slowly unreeling documentary film. It takes the time to savor the contemporary innocence and faith that justice would eventually prevail; that we had only to resist as far as we were able, for God to take a hand, allocating victory to us because we were the oppressed; that the end of fighting would see the beginning of freedom. Almost before our eyes as it must have occurred to the *revolucionarios* themselves, they lose to the revolution what they each valued most. We come upon their early victories, accompany them as their paths grow bloodier and their lives fall beyond their control again; and desperation, not hope and faith, shapes their will to go on fighting.

#### LITERATURE AND WORDS

Through the use of the only tool literature has, words, the forces that met headlong in our history clash again in our minds. Silence can communicate only so much, can carry a thought only so far. And although words are known to fail, or are often inadequate, they can be made to work with reasonable accuracy. Inten-

5. Linda Ty-Casper, *The Three Cornered Sun* (Quezon City: New Day Publishing, 1979).

sity and simplicity, apparent odds, in combination can make language convey the felt dimensions of joy and agony, whatever mixture the moment contained and carried, by generating symbols and images.

Each story, poem, play or novel is meant to be a burning bush — the revelation of ourselves, the way God was revealed to Moses. Language is what can make literature *burn*. However, if it is too clever, too unrestrained and beautiful, there is a burning without a bush. Nothing is discovered by the writer's primping with words. Where language fails to convey the story in images that will produce in the reader's mind the same motions of thought that had moved the writer to create, there is a bush but no burning. Only when language comes *from* the story, does not stand apart from its pace and feelings; when it disappears in the instant of its meaning's passing through it — only then is there a revelation, a burning bush. And this burning can occur again and again: just as that burning bush through which God revealed himself was not consumed, neither does the story disappear after its revelation.

Sometimes a word is used, seemingly out of place, to indicate the magnitude of an act or moment. In *The Peninsulars*, for example, I used the word "decapitate" with reference to another part of the body to express the psychological severity of the mutilation. Sometimes risks must be taken to extend understanding.

Having only the use of words, literature has to rely upon cultural affinities to implicate us even more deeply into one another. The word *saya*, even in a story in English, can express more than the glossary will tell someone who has to consult it. To those of us who not only know what it means but have lived with that meaning, *saya* can evoke a grandmother who has smothered us with her attention and threatened us with hellfire; women walking on the long dikes of ricefields carrying the morning's abundance on their upright heads; a marketplace rich with life-smells; a church with dark lights reaching our hearts. Beyond these are other associations which can summon back the feelings we had, beholding them in the past; feelings *now*, remembering ourselves, anticipating the future full of present longing. We who have these memories can share dreams; can make promises to one another, in our literature.

Because our literature is about our many selves, is the house of our selves, of our flesh alive in words, the language in which it is

written will necessarily be all the languages we speak and know, which speak to us and know us; all the dialects we understand, use. Our life is not so small and singular that it can be expressed in one language only. The likelihood is that all the languages we use will, instead of dividing us, give us a sense of our solidarity in our diversity.

To insist on one language for our literature, out of the several we know and speak, is to lose sight of the fact that literature is a reflection of all our rich variousness. Instead of coercing us to choose between these languages, the fact that translation from one to another can redirect a story towards a variety of images and feelings, can give it an unexpected intensity, should only convince us that our complexities are served by just such a multiplicity of languages and dialects. Like several mirrors, each of these languages and dialects catches a different reflection of us, a different angle of vision that multiplies the nuances of our lives, our possibilities and alternatives.

We would be denying this cultural variety if we refused to accept the fact that accidents of politics have made some of us write better, at least more confidently, in the language imposed upon our country during the years of our education. To insist that those of us who write in English about ourselves and our country do not contribute to Philippine literature is also to state that a foreigner writing about himself and his own country in Pilipino is writing Philippine literature.

We would be leaving gaps in our history, lose large parts of our heritage as a nation, if we insisted that our literature written contemporary to certain periods in our history — for example, Rizal's novels in Spanish times — should have been written in languages contemporary to us now.

## CONCLUSION

That we cannot know ourselves fully and finally is part of the human dilemma which is also at the roots of life's excitement, the very source of our complexities. We are good *and* bad, great *and* cowardly. By presenting us to ourselves, literature gives us a chance to choose between our greater and our lesser selves.

Each of us, early in life, determines the things he will do and those he will not be forced to do. The more we intend to keep

these separate, the more life prods us to compromise. By showing us where it is possible for life to be lived, our literature helps us learn from one another. A host of desires will try to lead us in all directions at once and thus, by frustrations, slay our wills or, by excess satisfaction, reduce us to mere appetites. Our literature can help us sort out the confusing demands the world makes upon us by allowing us to test our beliefs alongside those of the characters it creates out of our many selves. Finding ourselves in others and others in us can be so striking a perception that it can forever form a part of our life experience.

Though we should not mistake literature for life or give it a priority over living our own lives, literature is one place where we can keep ourselves intact and whole. It is our common and ultimate flesh: remembering, foreknowing, becoming and being. It is at once our wake and our christening. In it we are born and in it we enter into our rest.