

If Only You Could See What I have Seen with Your Eyes<sup>1</sup>: Staging an Encounter  
Between Social Science and Literature<sup>2</sup>

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Then came a man of knowledge, who said to the merchants of tea, and the drinkers of tea, and to others: 'He who tastes, knows. He who tastes not, knows not. Instead of taking about the celestial beverage, say nothing but offer it at your banquets. Those who like it will ask for more. Those who do not, will show that they are not fit to be tea drinkers. Close the shop of argument and mystery. Open the teahouse of experience.

-From the Sufi tale, "The Story of Tea"<sup>3</sup>

The only way in which to apprehend reality's thickness is either to experience it directly by being a part of reality one's self, or to evoke it in imagination by sympathetically divining some one else's inner life. (251)

There are resources in us that naturalism with its literal and legal virtues never reckons of, possibilities that take our breath away, of another kind of happiness and power, based on giving up our own will and letting something higher work for us, and these seem to show a world wider than either physics or philistine ethics can imagine. (305)

-From William James', *A Pluralistic Universe*.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the movie *Blade Runner*.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is prepared for Franke Wilmer and Donald J. Puchala (eds) *Through the Eyes of Others*, forthcoming. A version of this paper was prepared for the workshop "Looking at the World Through Non-Western Eyes." Walker Institute of International Studies, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, April 3-4, 1998. The careful readings and comments of Sankaran Krishna, Brett Heindl, Erin Schwab, and Josh Rowe have greatly enriched my presentation. Zillah Eisenstein's precise comments and provocative suggestions were pivotal in my continued rethinking of these issues. I have been greatly influenced by the ideas and writings of Sorayya Khan.

<sup>3</sup> Idries Shaw, *Tales of the Dervishes*, p. 89.

## Motivation

I compare “Western” social science narratives and those of a “non-Western,” “third world,” “fourth world,” or simply “resisting” literatures.<sup>4</sup> In contrasting such fictional narratives with social science writing, I wish to suggest, first, that while each type of narrative has its proper role, we in social science may learn much by emulating fiction writers. I claim, second, that third world or resisting visions of social life emerge less from proper social theory written by ‘non-Westerners’ - most of whom, like myself, have been epistemologically colonized. Rather, such visions emerge from those who understand the limits of the theory/fiction, politics/art, scientific/mythological, freedom/determinacy dichotomies, and then manage to uncover the overlap between theory, fiction, politics, art, science, and myth. They move to create a holistic intimacy between the reader, writer, character, text, and context.

Do we really need such an internal intimacy? Carrying on with our daily lives and fulfilling our long term projects often requires that we create instead a distance between ourselves and certain dire issues that may disrupt our routines. Issues such as economic exploitation and injustice, inadequate participation in processes that influence our lives, inappropriate modes of contact between social entities with more and less power, and destructive conflicts over the meaning and purpose of life can press deeply. Because attention to such issues threatens paralysis on the one side and unproductive impulsive action on the other, distancing *can be* useful in overcoming both immobility and counter-productive action. It can give us an appropriate mix of calm engagement with analytic focus allowing us to act usefully on these and other problems. It seems important therefore not to take lightly the necessity of distancing nor to disregard what that posture enables. Nevertheless, such distancing comes at a cost. When it becomes a habit that dominates the exploratory posture instead of being a necessary but partial moment within it, distancing severs itself from a fuller and deeper appreciation of questions. Distancing can thereby create irrelevant solutions and further confound problems.

As a point of departure I make several assumptions: (1) Such distancing serves as the foundation of an epistemology which first became dominant in post-Reformation Europe and then, with colonialism, throughout the world. This epistemology emerged as an attempt to resist, contain, and control the genocidal dogmatism Catholics and Protestants fired upon each other. Their symmetrical exterminating wrath resulted from their total investment in the belief that all differences were degenerate forms of God's original word and labor. This commitment to what James Tully calls an "empire of uniformity" led to a failure to appreciate or even to acknowledge cultural/religious differences.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, epistemological distancing was not then, nor is it now, monolithic. Indeed, both inside and outside the geopolitical confines of its European "origins," alternative epistemologies offer substantive resistance. Thus, for my purposes the term "West" or "Western" serves less as a geopolitical container and more to identify those instances when the epistemology of distancing is employed. Likewise, while the spatial location of the resistance to this epistemology remains relevant, terms such as "non-West," "Third World," "Fourth World," serve less to demarcate a clean and hard line between homogenized Euclidian spaces and more to identify instances of resistance regardless of spatial location.<sup>6</sup> With these caveats in mind, I will be using

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<sup>4</sup> I clarify my use of these terms below.

<sup>5</sup> Tully, James. (1995) *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity*. New York: Cambridge University Press. For more on Europe's internal crusades and its inability to confront the problems posed by internal and external difference, see David Blaney and Naem Inayatullah, "The Westphalian Deferral," *International Studies Review*, volume 2:2, 2000, pp. 29-64, and "Intimate Indians: Diversity as Degeneration in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe," Manuscript.

<sup>6</sup> Of course we cannot escape the boundary problem. What do we mean by West, non-West, third world, and fourth world? Consider, for example, that the lands just west of the Indus river, now part of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran were colonized by the Greeks for more than five hundred years. Consider also that Alexander the Great's Empire had almost the same geopolitical boundaries as the Persian empire which it succeeded. We might ask, then, how modern Europeans so easily presume that they can claim Greek civilization as their own - a civilization that could just as easily be claimed by Persians, Turks, or Arabs. We could also ask to what degree classical Greek civilization was itself the result of other cultural influences. On the former question see Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* ; on the latter see Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*. Then there is the question of whether Islam is Western or not. A further problem is that our containers are not

“epistemological distancing” and “Western” interchangeably while using “third world,” “fourth world” and “resisting” as synonyms. (2) As I tried to suggest above, distancing is not wholly negative. However, I do take it to be the key insight that serves as the *differentia specifica* of the modern Western understanding of life. (3) This insight has been developed into a type of a culture of systematicity that we call (social) science. (4) Because now it is no longer employed in the context of its antipode, namely dogmatic religious faith against which it served to create a sense of tension and balance, the practices of this culture may be characterized more by how deeply they confound problems than by how well they illuminates them. (5) Today, instead of simply generating more distance we may need to develop a continuity and a sense of intimacy with difficult and potentially overwhelming questions, doubts, and with difference itself. Generating intimacy with life does not require us to altogether reject the fruits of rigorous analysis offered by epistemological distancing. Rather, by acknowledging the presence of intimacy and feeling within our thinking we begin to understand life more holistically - with both mind *and* body, with both thought *and* emotion, with both an analytic distance *and* an awareness of our familiarity and complicity in life’s construction.

Let me anticipate a criticism. The reader may well ask: “In writing this essay will you incorporate the lessons you suggest? Will form and content cohere?” No, I am afraid not. Trained as a social scientist, I read literature as an amateur.<sup>7</sup> The propositions explored here are new to me. As such, this essay cannot hope be a living demonstration

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geopolitically pure; the third world exists in the West and the West in the third world. The problems, it seems, are endless. And yet, these problems are as much conceptual as they are historical. This is why at one level the division between West and the third world makes some sense. This difference derives, I suspect, from the distinctive nature of modern colonialism which combines the hierarchical indifference to others (the heritage from past empires) with the assimilationist universalism of liberal capitalism. By in large, the West were/are the colonizers and the third world the colonized. That we continue to prefer the cartographic categories to those of power and ethics reveals our continued discomfort with our own history. This discomfort can also be a good thing. On the boundary problem, see Donald J. Puchala, “Third World Thinking and Contemporary International Relations,” pp. 135-6

<sup>7</sup> I am aware that I have slipped into the professional/amateur dichotomy. I see the writing of this essay as an attempt to step into the overlap between professional and amateur.

of what I have learned from reading literature. Failure in this regard is due less to an absence of desire and more to an absence of opportunities to practice the suggestions that emerge from appreciating resisting literatures.<sup>8</sup>

I also want to remind the reader that I do not wish to argue for the replacement of scientific analysis by literature but to contrast them in order to ascertain whether their differences might serve as potential resources. Nevertheless, I admit my interest is not evenhanded. I aim primarily to uncover whether Western social science might deepen its ability to understand and thereby to change the world by incorporating aspects of literature. I begin by making some general claims about the difference between scientific and literary narratives.

For most of us, reading a novel and reading a professional article call for different dispositions. They require not only different habits of mind, but more importantly, each calls for a distinct posture even before we open the text. Let me start with the claim that in reading a scientific narrative our ‘guard’ is up, whereas it is down while reading a literary narrative. But what is the ‘guard’ that is relaxed? And, what allows its lowering?

In a scientific narrative the reader knows that the writer will make an explicit argument, marshaling all available arguments, evidence, and authority to support a claim. The reader’s task is two-fold. She must quickly, first, ascertain the contours of the argument, so the better, second, to resist it. The reader knows that even if she agrees with the claim, she may not agree for the same reasons, with the same intensity or scope, or for the same purposes. The reader is keen, therefore, to note what is not being said. Through years of training and experience she knows not to expect the writer to provide the best arguments against his own position. The task of providing the balance, and therefore a sense of wholeness to the deliberation, belongs, it seems, not to the writer but the reader. Perhaps this is why the reader is on guard.

Unless we are reading professionally, we take a different attitude when reading literary narratives. Because no explicit claim is being contested we need not worry about

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<sup>8</sup> If I have not written one, nevertheless, I have *read* narratives that I consider to be social scientific but which contain many of the attributes of literature discussed below. These include, Tzvetan Todorov’s *The Conquest of American*, Ashis Nandy’s *The Intimate*

our own position. What the author offers is a vision of an alternative world, a world that is precisely not the one we occupy. There is a certain distance between the world of the author's creation and the world the reader inhabits. Ironically, it is perhaps this distance that allows us to relax as we read.

With guard down, the reader can settle in to delight in the narrative. An effective narrative can transport us in time, space, and most importantly in social location. This ability in literature enables us as readers to do two important things: First, it allows us to enter the life and tribulations of characters with whom we might not otherwise empathize. A moral continuity between the reader and the characters is created. Second, it allows us a sense, therefore, that there may be multiple valuable positions on any issue. And that, with the right attitude, we can locate alternative positions within our own thinking/feeling process.

Strong literary narratives also display a commitment to a holistic approach to characterization. They display a generosity towards every character, but especially towards antagonists. An effective narrative contains characters that have complex motivations embedded in thick social relations and grounded in potent ethical dilemmas. The author's ability to honestly probe an antagonist's motivations coupled with the previously mentioned transportative quality of literary narratives enables us to, third, feel our possible complicity in the very problems we work to solve. This traversing from our initial position to that of the other and back allows us, fourth, to, feel that we have participated in an enriching and sometimes transforming experience.

Even if these claims are true, it can of course be argued that these characteristics are so specific to literary narratives that they cannot be generalized to social science proper. Further, as I will mention later, there are many necessary qualities of social science narratives that literature cannot provide. There are ways in which the Western and resisting visions exclude each other. To a degree, we may need to accept this difference. Nevertheless, let me suggest the possibility that: by examining how literary narratives do their work we can begin to incorporate *some* of their characteristics into our more explicitly analytic narratives, and if this is not easy or possible, then at the very

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*Enemy*, Jean Said Makdisi's *Beirut Fragments*, Minnie Bruce Pratt's essay, "Identity:

least, we can use literature ethnologically. That is, we can use the culture of literature to evaluate scientific academic culture. In sum, if my claims about literature bear any validity, examining how literature enables these qualities may provide hints about how to overcome scientific distancing and how to enrich revitalize the Western vision.

With this in mind, I propose to examine parts of three novels: Duong Thu Huong's *Novel Without a Name* (1995), Ivo Andric's *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), and Isabel Allende's *House of Spirits* (1982). I follow this by offering six propositions that may distinguish literature from scientific prose. I claim that relative to social science narratives: 1) literature is more interested in the process of narration than in the moral of its stories; 2) while literature's message is always political, it is more suggestive than argumentative; 3) literature leaves the responsibility of closing on an interpretation to the reader rather than the writer; 4) literature explains complex life processes and deep meanings through characterization, mood, and the action of its characters rather than by reference to social forces; 5) literature is often characterized by a generosity towards otherness and difference rather than by an exclusionary focus; and 6) rather than striking an imperative mode, literature adopts a posture of modesty and patience about its capacity to influence its readers. I then assess the three novels according to these propositions. I close by suggesting what social science can learn from literature and what the West can learn from visions of life that resist it. Perhaps the most significant lesson to emerge from an encounter between Western social science and resisting literature is that the latter offers an emerging alternative epistemology that might transform both the West and the rest.

## The Novels

### 1. *Novel Without a Name* by Duong Thu Huong (1995)

Duong Thu Huong, we are told on the jacket cover, is one of Vietnam's most "beloved" contemporary writers. She tells her tale of war by presenting the tribulations

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Blood Skin Heart," and, Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*.

of Quan, a young soldier of peasant origins. Quan's deepest dilemmas revolve around two issues: First, whether the ideals of communism can sustain him through the crushing weight of ten years of combat. He fears that his initial beliefs in the ideals of communism and the glory of his nation were sentiments used by slick urbanites and party bureaucrats to make peasants (like him) fight battles from which only the Party members reap rewards. Yet, even by the end of the war, the pull of his ideals and the pride in his people never entirely leave Quan. Second, Quan wonders whether he can offer protection to his intellectually gifted younger brother (and to those in his company that resemble his talented sibling) from the grinding difficulty of life and war. His mother was unable to offer this protection to Quan because she was overwhelmed by her struggle to provide for Quan and his brother without the aid of her husband - who is off fighting in the war. Quan is still a child when his mother dies. He finds no sympathy or comfort in his father who is seduced by dreams of war glory. Quan feels deep resentment towards his father because when he and his brother come of age, rather than safeguarding them, his father offers his sons to the war effort. Quan's motivation becomes to provide for others the kind of protection he did not receive.

The psychological depth and power of Huong's novel emerges, in part, from her exploration of the kind of childhood memories that ground motivations, especially during crises. Consider how Huong weaves together themes of national glory, gender differences around the meaning of "weakness," and the power of childhood memory:

My mother died when I was eight. But I had seen other mothers weeping soundlessly through the night, squatting in their kitchens, in front of the flickering cooking fires. I remember the crumpled, tear-stained hems of their *ao dais*, the dirty handkerchiefs they carried. Their swollen eyes. I had seen it all in broad daylight. I had watched all of this while we young recruits, drunk on our youth, envisioned ourselves marching toward a glorious future; we were the elect in a grandiose mission.

This was not simply another war against foreign aggression; it was also our chance for a resurrection. Vietnam had been chosen by History: After the war, our country would become humanity's paradise. Our people would hold a rank

apart. At last we would be respected, honored, revered. We believed this, so we turned away from those tears of weakness.

Ten years had passed. But none of us had forgotten. The deeper we plunged into the war, the more the memory of that first day haunted us. The more we were tortured by the consciousness of our appalling indifference, the more searing the memory of our mothers' tears. We had renounced everything for glory. It was this guilt that bound us to one another as tightly as the memory of our days tending water buffalo together. (31-2)

We see that the author seems less concerned to recount details of the war and aims instead to highlight how the meaning of the war emerges out of, and reflects back upon, the delicate but nevertheless firm patterns of practical ethics in everyday life.

Initially bedazzled by dreams of honor and glory, Quan returns to his village to find those dreams eclipsed by the war. In contrasting his father and mother he compares what was with what might have been:

It's over. It's all too late.... Too late for the dream I had of rebuilding our family, our lineage. My little brother had been intelligent. There would have been a place for him in a society at peace. His fate had been sealed the second my father raised his hand at that Party cell meeting: "I promise to convince my boys to enlist." The whole family thrown into the game of war! So that is how it had happened. From the depths of his ignorance, my father's ambition had overcome him: He too wanted to reserve his place at the victory banquet...

A rooster announced the first dawn watch; another answered him in the distance. Then all the roosters in the village sang. A bluish star throbbed in the sky, spreading a soft glow. The memory of my mother tortured me. The palm hedgerow reminded me of her. On evenings like this, in a courtyard strewn with palm flowers, she used to bathe me in an earthenware basin, the water scented with grapefruit flowers. Everything would have been different if she were still alive. After I enlisted, Quang would have stayed at home. In a mother's heart, there is no glory worth the life of child, no ideal higher than the desire to give happiness. But this village was ruled by the authority of a father. "In times of war the future belongs to the combatants!" My father had won. The rooster

crowed again, announcing the second dawn watch. The chant spread from hamlet to hamlet. The blue star had vanished. A wisp of smoke had seeped into the wind. I felt my pain subside, the urge to destroy myself ebb away. Perhaps there was still something left. (124-5)

He, his childhood friends, his country had followed the voice of the father. They win the war but lose something, perhaps, more important. Still, even in this defeat, Huong foreshadows that there is something left, something of the mother's voice, something powerful enough to sustain the will to live and to preserve the life to which women give birth. This desire seemed absent in Quan's father, but Quan revives it in himself.

Nevertheless, the desire to protect life, to bring its potentialities into full fruition, that desire may still not be enough in a world dominated by shouts of glory. Even enabled by the power of mothers and motherhood, he fears he will be unable to protect his brother and his comrades. In this way, the anxiety amounts to the fear that his compassion produces the same results as those produced by his father's vainglory. Quan, at last, enters the circumstances that force him to face this fear:

I had been attached to Hoang, but had always tried to hide my affection; if I hadn't, he would have become a scapegoat for the whole company. Discreetly, I tried to keep an open eye out for him, tried to protect him from certain things in our soldier's life, from the common snares that had been laid for this sensitive idealist. How many times had I watched, helpless, as men like him were snuffed out by the violence, the deprivation. A shell had ripped off one of his arms and a leg. The corpse had gone cold, begun to stiffen. His blood had run dry and hardened on my shirt. I caressed his hair, his shoulders. The night shielded me; no one could have seen my gestures. The little one was dead! From now on I had the right to express my affection, my regret, my hatred. I had strained myself for so long. It had finally come home, the moment I feared; I hadn't been able to protect him. (220)

The death of Hoang, echoes the death of his younger brother whom he has also been unable to protect. Ironically, these deaths release Quan from the hold of his idealism allowing him to explore his realism. He takes on a new favorite, the realist Kha.

Near the end of the war, Quan and his troops penetrate into the South. They do not face much resistance except for the sudden disappearance of discipline among his troops who begin shooting and destroying valuable American medical supplies. Quan asks:

“Who gave you the order to shoot?”

He planted his submachine gun between his legs. “Chief, this stuff is American, so I’m destroying it.”

“Are you blind? Do you know what this is?”

“I don’t know anything. All I know is that it’s American.”

“This is medicine, energy, food. The stuff they inject you with when you’re in the army hospital.”

“No, chief, you’ve got it wrong,” Tuan shrieked. “They injected me with Soviet medicine.” He fell silent, teetered for a moment, unsteady on his feet, and stepped aside. I saw a vein on his neck pulse. (270)

Quan realizes that it is Kha, his new favorite, who has given the order to shoot:

A gust of wind raised the curtain in the room, shattering my glass on the floor. The crystal shards scattered on the stone floor. Kha glanced at the debris, still waiting. I went and sat down next to him.

“Why?”

Kha spoke softly. “Forgive me, elder brother.”

“But why did you do it?”

He said nothing. I pressed him: “What was in it for you?” Kha raised his eyes and looked me straight in the face. “In any case, it will be the same for me.”

“You are wrong. You ransacked public property, the people’s property. Everything we’ve paid for with our blood belongs to the people.”

Kha just laughed. “Ah, but do the people really exist?... I’ve thought a lot. I also listen to everything that’s said. You see, the people, they do exist from time to time, but they’re only a shadow. When they need rice, the people are the buffalo that pulls the plow. When they need soldiers, they cover the people with armor, put guns in people’s hands. When all is said and done, at the festivals,

when it comes time for the banquets, they put the people on an alter, and feed them incense and ashes. But the real food, that's always for them."

I was dazed. I felt as if I were drowning, just like when my cousin used to play at pushing me in the river. Kha continued: "You can court-martial me, but I can't change. It's too bad that I've learned the truth. I won't be able to see things in the same way anymore."

He lowered his head. The bastard. He had completely stunned me. I remember the whiteness of his hands as he warmed them over the fire in Scorpion Cave. I remembered the piece of stringy, burned vulture he had given me on the murderous Route No. 9. I remembered his skinny, naked body, tortured by malaria, scampering along the edge of the stream. I remembered...and my body tensed, started to shake. I shouted at him: "Get out of here! You deserve a bullet from the firing squad. Go to sleep. And from now on, stop fucking around, and stop the mindless waste."

Kha rose. He left without a word. (270-76)

Later, Quan reflects on Kha's clarity:

I felt alone. Kha's story obsessed me. My cowardly heart couldn't bear the doubt. My own private was tougher than I. Kha had fought like the rest of us, put up with all the misery, the deprivation, and he had survived. He was one of the twelve men still left from my old company. And yet Kha had made the long march without ever dreaming of glory, without ever hoping for a share of the spoils. In his numbed brain, beyond the rainbow of glory, he knew that there would come a day when he would go back to the mud of rice paddies, to life as it had always been, from time immemorial. (279)

Quan feels alone, in part, because while he admires Kha's courage and clarity he makes no moves to emulate him. The author does not drain Quan entirely of his idealism. She leaves the relationship between Quan and Kha on a note of ambiguity:

At noon, at the victory banquet, the champagne flowed. I pretended not to notice Kha, but I knew he was watching me. It must have been a pitying look.

No doubt he discerned in my pale, troubled face the confusion of a kid who had just been left in the dark for the first time...I tried to control my fury, let my eyes wander over the gathering. When I looked at him, he smiled. A sad, comprehending smile, like a last ray of winter sun. He looked uneasy, like a man for whom time was running out, and who had just shifted his burden to another's back, a burden he had carried alone for too long, that he couldn't bear any longer. (279-80)

Huong suggests that Kha's kind of realism leads to a type of timeless death where the present, past, and future overlay perfectly and represent the capitulation of human will to eternal laws. Even Kha is happy to shed the weight of this changelessness. Huong hints that while dreams of glory feast on the lifeblood of the innocent, nevertheless, without these dreams and ideals we find ourselves in an endless darkness. How then to find a balance between idealism and realism, between feeding on the innocent and an endless darkness? Is this what mothers know so well?

## 2. *The Bridge on the Drina*, by Ivo Andric (1945):

While Huong's novel explores the relationship between ideals and the reality of power, on my reading, Andric probes two questions. Prior to the arrival of modernity, how did human beings negotiate and accommodate cultural and religious difference? And, how did modernity change the dynamics of such accommodation?

Spanning 400 years, the novel is a series of stories about relations between Greek Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Muslims, and Jews in a small Bosnian town. While the stories have different characters they all converge around the bridge. The meaning of the bridge is manifold and changing through the novel. It represents, first, the difference between the Christians who live on the left bank of the Drina and all the others, including the Muslims who live on the right bank. It stands also for the link across the difference that Andric suggests is as enduring and permanent as the white stones that constitute the bridge. It stands, furthermore, as a metaphor for overcoming the pain that each group causes the other. I examine this third meaning in greater detail.

The Grand Vizier of the Turkish Empire, Mehmed Pasha, ordered the bridge built. Forcibly taken from his family as a child, he felt a great agony only the building of the bridge would ease:

The first idea of the bridge, which was destined to be realized, flashed, at first naturally confused and foggy, across the imagination of a ten year old boy from the nearby village of Sokolovici, one morning in 1516 when he was being taken along the road from his village to far-off, shining and terrible Stambul [Istanbul].  
(22)

The boy was one of many in an entourage headed to the Empire's capital, each a blood tribute to the Empire:

On that November day a long convoy of laden horses arrived on the left bank of the river and halted there to spend the night. The aga of the janissaries, with armed escort, was returning to Stambul after collecting from the villages of eastern Bosnia the appointed number of Christian children for blood tribute. It was already the sixth year since the last collection of this tribute of blood, and so this time the choice had been easy and rich; the necessary number of healthy, bright and good-looking lads between ten and fifteen years old had been found without difficulty, even though many of the parents had hidden their children in the forests, taught them how appear half-witted, clothed them in rags and let them get filthy, to avoid the aga's choice. Some went as far as to maim their own children, cutting off their fingers with an axe. (23-4)

As the convoy of soldiers and kidnapped boys heads to Stambul another convoy of women trails in its wake:

A little way behind the last horses in that strange convoy straggled, disheveled and exhausted, many parents and relatives of those children who were being carried away for ever to a foreign world, where they would be circumcised, become Turkish and, forgetting their faith, their country and their origin, would pass their lives in the ranks of janissaries or in some other, higher, service of the Empire. They were for the most part women, mothers, grandmothers and sisters of the stolen children. (24)

The relatives try to keep pace with the convoy of living tribute but even the most resolute are left stranded by the ferry's refusal to carry them across the Drina river:

Now they could sit in peace on the bank and weep, for no one persecuted them any longer. They waited as if turned to stone and sat, insensible to hunger, thirst and cold, until on the far bank of the river they could see once more the long drawn out convoy of horses and riders as it moved onward towards Dubrina, and tried once more to catch a last glimpse of the children who were disappearing from their sight. (25)

With this poignant backdrop, Andric turns to the ten year old boy:

Somewhere within himself he felt a sharp stabbing pain which from time to time seemed suddenly to cut his chest in two and hurt terribly, which was always associated with the memory of that place where the road broke off, where desolation and despair were extinguished and remained on the stony banks of the river, across which the passage was so difficult, so expensive and so unsafe. (25)

Perhaps recognizing that the reader is likely to interpret the boy's pain as a mere longing for his relatives, his childhood innocence, and his culture, Andric evokes more universal themes.

It was here, at this particularly painful spot in that hilly and poverty-stricken district, in which misfortune was open and evident, that man was halted by powers stronger than he and, ashamed of his powerlessness, was forced to recognize more clearly his own misery and that of others, his own backwardness and that of others. (25)

As it turns out, the boy grows up to be the great Mehmed Pasha, who "waged wars that were for the most part victorious on three continents and extended the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire." (26) Nevertheless, even in old age, the Vizier does not overcome the pain of childhood separation:

with years and with age it appeared more and more often; always the same black pain that life after brought to him. With closed eyes, the Vezir would wait until the black knife-like pang passed and the pain diminished. In one of those moments he thought that he might be able to free himself from this discomfort if he could do away with that ferry on the distant Drina, around which so much

misery and inconvenience gathered and increased incessantly, and bridge the steep banks and the evil water between them, join the two ends of the road which was broken by the Drina and thus link safely and for ever Bosnia and the East, the place of his origin and the places of his life. Thus it was he who first, in a single moment behind closed eyelids, saw the firm graceful silhouette of the great stone bridge which was to be built there. (26)

In these moving passages Andric anticipates a number of themes. First, despite selecting a starting point that reveals Christian Serbs to be the victims of Muslims Turks, Andric moves quickly away from any naturalizing essentialisms about ethnicity. The builder of the bridge is born and raised a Christian Serb *and* is an important character in Ottoman history. The builder of the bridge represents a hybridity that accepts and valorizes the differences that constitute him. As with the builder and the bridge, so also with the bridge and the town. The bridge represents a hybridity that incorporates and transcends the different parts of the town without denying them their specific differences. As such, Andric rejects any notion of sovereignty that is pure, homogeneous, and exclusive.

Second, the bridge attempts to overcome the lonely and potentially paralyzing gap between the being of one's origins and the becoming of one's labor. It is important to recognize early on, given Andric's later critique of modernity, that he has no intrinsic hostility towards labor, technology, or the scientific mind. He accepts the progress that accrues when such elements are born from the desire to heal wounds and thereby gain a restful understanding of life. Indeed, the creation of the bridge gives birth to a town where once there was only a ferry crossing. But importantly, both the bridge and the town are developments issuing from Mehmed Pasha's desire to heal himself. It is only when the bridge is complete that the Vizir's chest heals back into one (69-70).

Third, and perhaps most significantly, the purpose of the bridge is not limited merely to transient earthly goals. The bridge is a gift born from universal human pain and an offering meant to represent all healing:

Thus was born the bridge...and so the town developed around it. After that, for a period of more than 300 hundred years, its role in the development of the town and its significance in the life of the townspeople was similar to that which

we have described above. And the significance and the substance of its existence were so to speak, in its permanence. Its shining line in the composition of the town did not change, any more than the outlines of the mountains against the sky. In the changes and the quick burgeoning of human generations, it remained as unchanged as the waters that flowed beneath it. It too grew old, naturally, but on a scale of time that was much greater not only than the span of human existence but also than the passing of a whole series of generations, so that its aging could not be seen by the human eye. Its life, though mortal in itself, resembled eternity for its ends could not be perceived. (70-1)

The bridge, though built by humans, represents human humility in the face of the eternal.

The destruction of the bridge coincides with the arrival of modernity and signals the overthrow of the old order. With it is lost a rich, complex, and overlapping notion of individual and cultural sovereignty, a meaningful motivation for human labor, and the profound creative power that comes from humility and faithfulness. The book demonstrates the promise of the world view that constructs and is constructed by the bridge. All this soon changes.

In the third quarter of the 19th Century, the Austrian Empire brings modernity to a Bosnian town. Under the appearance of great industry, prosperity and progress, things fall apart:<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, the town changed rapidly in appearance, for the newcomers cut down trees, planted new ones in other places, repaired the streets, cut new ones, dug drainage canals, built public buildings. In the first few years they pulled down in the market-place those old and dilapidated shops which were out of line and which, to tell the truth, had up till then inconvenienced no one. In place of those old-fashioned shops with their wooden drop-counters, new ones were built, well sited, with tiled roofs and metal rollers on the doors. (Alihodja's shop too was destined to become a victim of these measures, but the hodja opposed it resolutely, took the affair to law, contested it and dragged it on in every possible way until at last he succeeded, and his shop remained just as it was and just where

it was.) The market-place was leveled and widened. A new *konak* was erected, a great building intended to house the law courts and the local administration. The army, too, was working on its own account, even more rapidly and inconsiderately than the civil authorities. They put up barracks, cleared waste land, planted and they changed the appearance of whole hills. (138-9)

The newcomers reveal a new attitude. They reverse the relationship between Nature and humans and claim for themselves a role usually reserved for God. The old timers grasp the new attitude as a type of mindless busyness:

The older inhabitants could not understand, and wondered; just when they thought that all this incomprehensible energy had come to an end, the newcomers started some fresh and even more incomprehensible task. The townsmen stopped and looked at all this work, but not like children who love to watch the work of adults but as adults who stop for a moment to watch children's games. This continual need of the newcomers to build and rebuild, to dig and put back again, to put up and modify, this eternal desire of theirs to foresee the action of natural forces, to avoid or surmount them no one either understood or appreciated. On the other hand all the townsmen, especially the older men, saw this unhealthy activity as a bad omen. Had it been left to them the town would have gone on looking as any other little oriental town. What burst would be patched up, what leant would be shored up, but beyond that no one would needlessly create work or make plans or interfere in the foundations of buildings or change the aspect which God had given to the town. (138-9)

Nevertheless, overtime the town hospitably accommodates the new rhythms as it had accommodated all previous change. Their reward was an apparent prosperity:

Life in the town besides the bridge became more and more animated, seemed more and more orderly and fuller, assuming an even pace and a hitherto unknown balance, that balance towards which all life tends, everywhere and at all times, and which is only rarely, partially and temporarily achieved.

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<sup>9</sup> The allusion to Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is intended. The two novels can be read to show a significant overlap in themes.

In the far off cities unknown to the townsmen whence at that time the power and administration over these districts originated, there was - in the last quarter of the nineteenth century - one of those short and rare lulls in human relationships and social events. Something of that lull could be felt even in these remote districts, just as a great calm at sea may be felt even in the most distant creeks.

Such were those three decades of relative prosperity and apparent peace in the Franz-Josef manner, when many Europeans thought that there were some infallible formula for the realization of a centuries-old dream of full and happy development of individuality in freedom and progress, when the nineteenth century spread out before the eyes of millions of men its many-sided and deceptive prosperity and created its *fata morgana* of comfort, security and happiness for all and everyone at reasonable prices and even on credit terms...(173)

The 'new prosperity' seemed to transform old religious and cultural differences and create 'modern men.' But Andric warns that older differences may be concealed but not eliminated:

After the first years of distrust, misunderstanding and hesitation, when the first feeling of transience had passed, the town began to find its place in the new order of things. The people found order, work and security. That was enough to ensure them that here too life, outward life at least, set out 'on the road of perfection and progress.' Everything else was flushed away into that dark background of consciousness where live and ferment the basic feelings and indestructible beliefs of individual races, faiths and castes, which, to all appearances dead and buried, are preparing for later far-off times unsuspected changes and catastrophes without which, it seems, peoples cannot exist and above all the peoples of this land....

But for none of the townspeople did the new life mean the realization of what they felt deep down within themselves and had always desired; on the contrary all of them, Moslems and Christians alike, had taken their place in it with many and definite reservations, but these reservations were secret and concealed, whereas life was open and powerful with new and apparently great possibilities. After a

longer or shorter period of wavering, most of them fell in with the new ideas, did their business, made fresh acquisitions, and lived according to the ideas and customs which offered greater scope and, it seemed, gave greater chances to every individual.

Not that the new existence was in any way less subject to conditions or less restricted than in Turkish times, but it was easier and more humane, and those conditions and restrictions were now far away and skillfully enforced, so that the individual did not feel them directly. Therefore it seemed to everyone as if the life around him had suddenly grown wider and clearer, more varied and fuller...(173-5)

The illusion of equality and progress is powerful enough to become a self-fulfilling prophecy for some. But its price is a loss of humility. That loss registers as human indifference to powerful forces that can bring home calamities and are beyond human control:

Like fresh blood, money began to circulate in hitherto unknown quantities and, which was the main thing, publicly, boldly and openly. In that exciting circulation of gold, and silver and negotiable paper, every man could warm his hands or at least 'gladden his eyes', for it created even for the poorest of men the illusion that his own bad luck was only temporary and therefore the more bearable....In fact even in that there was greater restriction, order and legal hindrance; vices were punished and enjoyments paid for even more heavily and dearly than before, but the laws and methods were different and allowed the people, in this as in all else, the illusion that life had suddenly become wider, more luxurious and freer. (176)

Such illusions are not undetected and some of those who do spot them resist. Here Andric concentrates on the character of Alihodja, a Muslim, who, from the start, opposes the arrival of modernity. In the end of book, just before he dies, Alihodja appraises his lifelong resistance to modernity. This is Andric speaking in his most direct voice:

Yes, thought the hodja more animatedly, for he was now breathing a little more easily, now one can see what all their tools and their equipment really meant, all their hurry and activity. (He had always been right, always, in

everything and despite everybody. But that no longer gave him any satisfaction. For the first time it really did not matter. He had been only too right!) For so many years he had seen how they had always been concerning themselves with the bridge; they had cleaned it, embellished it, repaired it down to its foundations, taken the water supply across it, lit it with electricity and then one day blown it all into the skies as if it had been some stone in a mountain quarry and not a thing of beauty and value, a bequest. Now one could see what they were and what they wanted. He had always known that but now, now even the most stupid of fools could see it for himself. They had begun to attack even the strongest and most lasting of things, to take things away even from God. And who knew where it would stop! Even the Vezir's bridge had begun to crumble away like a necklace; and once it began no one could hold it back. (313)

Rather than despondence, Alihodja feels if not elation, then at least faithfulness:

So be it, thought the Hodja. If they destroy here, then somewhere else someone is building. Surely there are still peaceful countries and men of good sense who know of God's love? If God had abandoned this unlucky town on the Drina, he had surely not abandoned the whole world that was beneath the skies? They would not do this for ever. But who knows? (Oh, if only he could breathe a little more deeply, get a little more air!) Who knows? Perhaps this impure infidel faith that put everything in order, cleans everything up, repairs and embellishes everything only in order suddenly and violently to demolish and destroy, might spread throughout the world; it might make all of God's world an empty field for its senseless building and criminal destruction, a pasturage for its insatiable hunger and incomprehensible demands? Anything might happen. But one thing could not happen; it could not be that great and wise men of exalted soul who would raise lasting buildings for the love of God, so that the world should be more beautiful and man live it better and more easily, should everywhere and for all time vanish from this earth. Should they too vanish, it would mean that the love of God was extinguished and had disappeared from the world. That could not be. (313-4)

Thus even at the end of the novel the destruction of the particular - the bridge, a way of life - establishes not an ending but the beginning of desire to see and connect to the universal elsewhere and in others.

### 3. *House of Spirits*, by Isabel Allende (1982)

If Huong evokes tensions between idealism and realism in the face of war, and Andric demonstrates the coherence of pre-modern visions of faith, culture, and accommodation of difference, Allende's *House of Spirits* explores class tensions.

Allende builds her novel around the women across three generations of one family. These women feel compassionate towards the suffering of others and tend, as a habit, to take on their burdens. Against this theme of empathy, compassion, and selflessness, Allende erects the central character of Esteban Trueba, the patriarch of the family. Married to Clara, he must fight a battle of wills and words against Clara, their daughter Blanca, and their granddaughter Alba. Allende builds the novel around the contrast between the spiritual solidarity of the women and the competitive materialist conservatism/fascism of Trueba. This distinction is all the more important for us because the differences between the women and Trueba embodies well the contrast between the non-Western and Western vision of life. While the tone of the novel is partial towards the women who are its strongest characters, what is striking is Allende's generosity toward Trueba.

In the following passage Allende has Trueba only slightly altering the familiar sounds of Kipling's 'white man's burden.'

Trueba continued polishing his reputation as a rake, sowing the entire region with his bastard offspring, reaping hatred, and storing up sins that barely nicked him because he hardened his soul and silenced his conscience with the excuse of progress. In vain, Pedro Segundo Garcia and the old priest from the nuns' hospital tried to suggest to him that it was not little brick houses or pints of milk that made a man a good employer or an honest Christian, but rather giving his workers a decent salary instead of slips of pink paper, a workload that did not

grind their bones to dust, and a little respect and dignity. Trueba would not listen to this sort of thing: it smacked of Communism.

“They’re degenerate ideas,” he muttered. “Bolshevik ideas designed to turn the tenants against me. What they don’t realize is that these poor people are completely ignorant and uneducated. They’re like children, they can’t handle responsibility. How could *they* know what’s best for them? Without me they’d be lost... You have to have a strong hand on these poor devils - that’s the only language they understand... the only thing that really works in these countries is the stick. This isn’t Europe. What you need here is a strong government, with a strong man. It would be lovely if we were all created equal, but the fact is we’re not. It couldn’t be more obvious. The only one who knows how to work around here is me, and I defy you to prove otherwise... If I wanted to sell out, I could go to Europe and live off the interest, but I’m not going anywhere. This is where I plan to stay, killing myself. I’m doing it for them. If it weren’t for me, they’d be lost... And then they start in on the story that we are all equal! It’s enough to make you die laughing!” (63-5)

Trueba, always loud and clear, is not against justice for the poor; rather he believes they already have what they justly deserve. Clara’s vision, on the other hand, is distance reducing and empathizing:

As for Clara, she went everywhere with her daughter hanging from her skirts. She included her in the Friday sessions and raised her in the greatest intimacy with spirits, with the members of secret societies, and with the impoverished artists whose patroness she was. Just as she had done with her mother in the days when she was mute, she now took Blanca with her on her visits to the poor, weighed down with gifts and comfort.

“This is to assuage our conscience, darling,” she would explain to Blanca. “But it doesn’t help the poor. They don’t need charity; they need justice.”

This was the point on which she had her worst arguments with Esteban, who was of a different opinion on the subject.

“Justice! Is it just for everyone to have the same amount? The lazy the same as those who work? The foolish the same as the intelligent? Even animals

don't live like that! It is not a matter of rich and poor, it's a matter of strong and weak. I agree that we should all have the same opportunities, but those people don't even try. It's very easy to stretch out your hand and beg for alms! But I believe in effort and reward. Thanks to that, I've been able to achieve what I've achieved. I've never asked anybody for a favor and I've never been dishonest, which goes to prove that anyone can do it. I was destined to be a poor, unhappy notary's assistant. That's why I won't have these Bolshevik ideas brought into my house. Go do your charitable work in the slums, for all I care! It's well and good: good for building the character of young ladies. But don't start coming in her with same half-cocked ideas... because I won't stand for it!" (136-7)

Like the socialists, Tueba believes in reward for hard work. The difference is that he considers labor as exclusively the result of individual will and effort. All obstacles in the way of self-made men can, and must, be overcome with one's own effort. To believe otherwise is to be dependent and weak:

...Esteban was absorbed in his usual monologue about the ingrates who bite the hand that feeds them, "all because of those goddamn politicians like the new Socialist candidate.... we're not letting anyone in here to start preaching against honest work, the reward for work well done, the reward for those who meet life head-on, you can't expect the weak to have the same as those of us who've worked from sunup to sundown and know how to invest our money, run risks, and take on responsibilities, because when you get right down to it the land belongs to those who work it... not even Jesus Christ said we have to share the fruits of our labor with the lazy..." (169-70)

The weak and the lazy, according to Esteban, are not too weak or lazy to invent doctrine to rob the strong and industrious of what is rightly theirs. And when his son questions Esteban's division of the world into the 'weak' and 'strong,' Esteban suggests that human nature, like animal nature, obeys the law that the strong devour the weak.

"You're a hopeless loser, son," Trueba would say, sighing. "You have no sense of reality. You've never taken stock of how the world really is. You put your faith in utopian values that don't even exist."

"Helping one's neighbors is a value that exists."

“No. Charity, like Socialism, is an invention of the weak to exploit the strong and bring them to their knees.”

“I don’t believe in your theory of the weak and the strong,” Jaime replied.

“That is the way it is in nature. We live in a jungle.” (297)

His son is quick to point to a weakness in his father’s position. It is only a jungle because those who make the rules claim it as such; change the rules and life changes. The hope of such a shift fires his son’s idealism:

“That is the way it is in nature. We live in a jungle.”

“Yes, because the people who make the rules think like you! But it won’t always be that way.”

“Oh, yes, it will. Because we always win. We know how to move around in the world and how to use power. Listen to me, son. Pull yourself together and open your own clinic. I’ll help you. But cut out your Socialist nonsense!”

Esteban Trueba thundered, with no results. (297)

In this dialogue Trueba does not reject his son’s constructivist theme, namely, that those who hold power determine the meaning of human nature. Rather, Trueba banks on the assumption that such power will always be in the hands of the upper-class. This is his essential mistake, one on which the novel pivots. Trueba further admits that the issue is not so much the nature of humans but his fear of communism, a fear he never understands.

Through elections, the socialists do come to power causing the upper class to fear the loss of its privileges. Eventually Trueba, who has become a conservative senator in the government, agrees with the military and with foreign interests that this socialist government must be defeated through force. He backs the military coup. But the cure turns out to be worse than the illness of socialism. Unsurprisingly, the military resolves to consolidate and maintain power rather than to return it to the upper class. His naiveté exposed, for the first time in his long life, Trueba begins to face his vulnerability. The secret police arrive at his house to secure evidence of his granddaughter Alba’s affiliation with the resistance:

“I’m Senator Trueba! for God’s sake, don’t you recognize me?” the grandfather shrieked in desperation. “You can’t do this to me! This is an outrage! I’m a friend of General Hurtado’s!”

“Shut up, you old shit! You don’t open your mouth until I tell you to!” the man replied brutally.

They forced him to surrender the contents of his desk, and put everything that interested them into paper bags....

“Sign here!” the man in charge ordered Trueba, shoving a piece of paper in his face. “It’s a declaration that we entered with a court order, showed you our identification cards, and that everything proceeded properly, with all due respect and proper manners, and that you have no complaints. Sign it!”

“I’ll never sign this!” the old man shouted furiously.

The man spun around and slapped Alba in the face, a blow that knocked her to the floor. Senator Trueba was paralyzed with terror and surprise. He realized that his hour of truth was finally upon him, after living almost ninety years as his own boss. (402)

But, it is not quite true that, until then, Trueba had always lived as his own boss. Indeed, the death of his love Rosa, the ruin of the family fortune by his father, the ill-health of his mother, and the unexpected productivity of his gold mine are events that had remained indifferent to his desires and efforts. Trueba was never the self-made man he projected himself to be. In his hour of truth, Trueba faces the fact that even the most potent men are often powerless to protect what they most cherish. As in *Novel Without a Name*, the women in the novel understand this powerlessness. They also realize that accepting this predicament recovers a need and compassion for others that enables a protective solidarity against the forces of the ‘jungle.’

We create this solidarity, Allende asserts, not just with the living. When Alba wishes to die rather than to face more torture and rape by the military regime, her dead grandmother’s ghost reaches out to her:

She tried not to breathe or move, and began eagerly to await her death. She stayed like this for a long time. When she had nearly achieved her goal, her Grandmother Clara, whom she had invoked so many times to help her die,

appeared with a novel idea that the point was not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle...Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live. She suggested that she write a testimony that might one day call attention to the terrible secret she was living through, so that the world would know about this horror that was taking place parallel to the peaceful existence of those who did not want to know, who could afford the illusion of a normal life, and of those who could deny that they were on a raft adrift in a sea of sorrow, ignoring, despite all evidence, that only blocks away from their happy world there were others, these others who live or die on the dark side. "You have a lot to do, so stop feeling sorry for yourself, drink some water, and start writing," Clara told her Granddaughter before disappearing the same way she had come. (414)

Compassion for others does not so much weave us all together as it helps us to understand that we are already a part of each other. So while the debatable and contested meanings of equality and justice are crucial, even more important is the integrated context of feeling/ experience from which we derive those meanings. Perhaps, Sufis and William James might nod in agreement with this sentiment.

In the epilogue, Allende begins to clarify why she rejects the 'negation of negation' and opts instead for a gesture of transformation. Negating the negation generates a kind of circularity of vengeance and of time that Allende wishes to question:

When I was in the doghouse, I wrote in my mind that one day Colonel Garcia would stand before me in defeat and that I would avenge myself on all those who need to be avenged. But now I have begun to question my own hatred...I am beginning to suspect that nothing that happens is fortuitous, that it all corresponds to a fate laid down before my birth, and that [Colonial] Garcia is a part of that design. He is a crude, twisted line, but no brushstroke is in vain...Each piece has a reason for being what it is, even Colonel Garcia...It would be difficult for me to avenge all those who should be avenged, because my revenge would be part of that same inexorable rite. I have to break that terrible chain. (431-2)

We begin to note a theme in Allende we have seen previously in Ivo Andric. This is a deep sense of humility that emerges not just out of religious piety but more from an adequate sense of proportion between the overwhelming fullness and largeness of life and our limited capacity as individuals and as civilizations, bounded as we are by space and time, to grasp that fullness much less to articulate its rich meanings:

At times I feel as if I had lived all this before and that I have already written these very words, but I know it was not I: it was another woman, who kept her notebooks so that one day I could use them. I write, she wrote, that memory is fragile and the space of a single life is brief, passing so quickly that we never get a chance to see the relationship between events...(432).

At her deepest, Allende challenges our normal scientific conception of space and time<sup>10</sup>:

We cannot gauge the consequences of our acts, and we believe in the fiction of past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens at once... (432).

### Analysis

Having shown the reader a glimpse of these novels, I hope I have supported two of my claims: that such narratives can help us enter the life and tribulations of characters with whom we might not otherwise believe we can empathize, thereby creating a moral continuity between the reader and the characters; and, that such narratives can help us gain a sense that there may be multiple valuable positions on any issue, positions we can identify within our own thinking/feeling process.

Before I comment on some of the remaining claims, namely that literary narratives help us feel our complicity even in the very problems that we hope to solve, and that they help us traverse the space between self and other thereby allowing us to feel

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<sup>10</sup> I suspect this challenge is also at the center of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Compare to William James (p. 254):

Past and future, for example, conceptually separated by the cut to which we the name of the present, and defined as being the opposite sides of that cut, are to some extent, however brief, co-present with each throughout experience.

that we have participated in a transforming experience, let me first turn to the question of *how* literary narratives transverse the distance between self and other.

To do this, I would like to return to my six contrasts between scientific and literary narratives. For purposes of presentation, I present these differences starkly while recognizing that such differences are more likely matters of degree:

1) *Purpose of narration*. The telling of the tale versus getting to ‘the point’: The reader knows that in a literary narrative she will read a tale the primary purpose of which is its telling in an aesthetically engaged and pleasing manner. The primary purpose of the scientific narrative is to make the point, state the case, or defend a claim.<sup>11</sup> 2)

*Transparency of the message*. Implicit versus explicit purposes: In literary presentations the ‘argument,’ if there is one, will be implicit. The narrative will be open-ended and exploratory as it probes ethical ambiguities. The scientific presentation is driven by the argument and strives to be explicit and direct about its aims. 3) *Responsibility towards closure*.

In literary texts, the narrative’s aesthetic closure is the author’s responsibility, but a substantive or political closure is left up to the reader; it is up to the reader to discover certain messages and to close, if necessary, on particular interpretations. A scientific text is considered incomplete unless the author demonstrates closure on the substantive issues. 4) *How the work is shown*. In literary texts, ethical ambiguities are shown through feelings, thoughts, gestures, words and actions of specific characters and very rarely through reference to abstract forces. In scientific texts, such forces are common coin. Indeed, scientific texts rarely contain active characters or agents, except in the history of thought. 5) *The role of generosity*. In literary texts, generosity is necessary towards all characters and towards their points of view. Thus even characters that perpetrate gross injustices must be shown to have reasons for their actions. Further these motivations need to be linked to the life experiences of characters. In scientific narratives, generosity to the other is rare, and when present, is a prelude to the other’s destruction or assimilation. 6) *The Goal of the project*. The goal of literary text, besides to be aesthetically coherent, is to create a small shift in the consciousness of the reader.

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<sup>11</sup> Even the most aesthetically able social scientist would hope first and foremost that his/her point is substantiated.

Scientific narratives invite us, and sometimes command us, to submit to the truth being demonstrated.

How do our three novels fare under these six propositions of difference?

1. The purpose of narration:

I have reproduced parts of these novels so that the reader can judge whether these narratives are telling a tale in an aesthetically pleasing manner. As for as having a point, it seems clear to me - and perhaps too clear since I am trained as a social scientist - that all of these novels have one, and perhaps many points. Would the authors agree? Would they agree that the foci I have selected are their points? Probably not. They are more likely to deflect me from my pursuit and suggest that making one or many points is not their central concern. More so, they are likely to suggest that their primary concerns are to express a voice, explore a set of feelings/problems, and to create a work that coheres as aesthetic and ethical vision.

2. The implicitness of the message:

I hope to have demonstrated that these narratives are comfortable with ambiguity and the untidy multiplicity of life.<sup>12</sup> They are, therefore, at ease in exploring ethical issues from multiple perspectives. In *Novel Without a Name*, Quan sympathizes with the idealism of party and nation. Later in his life and in the course of the war he turns to the realist themes exhibited by Kha, and again while sympathetic, does not altogether embrace Kha's philosophy. It is as if Duong Thu Huong uses the novel to explore how to move beyond the usual impasse between idealism and realism. I do not sense in her the need for a definitive breakthrough on these tensions, only hints about a particular understanding of mothers.

Allende, also, does not offer an analysis complete with resolution about how to think of equality, justice, labor, and property. She, too, gropes for a way beyond stale oppositional narratives. She seems to stress the wholeness women acquire when they realize their need for others, not as weakness or dependence but as enabling power. Indeed if the need for others is a weakness, it is the kind of weakness through which humans own up to their prior solidarity with others. Both Allende and Huong suggest not

so much resolutions to problems but rather ways to pose old issues in alternatively rich contexts.

In contrast to Huong and Allende, I see Andric searching less. My reading suggests that through the words of Alihodja, Andric arrives at what he thinks is a resolution. While not utterly hostile to modernity, he hopes, perhaps, to modify it by fusing it with the best qualities of pre-modernity. One such quality is pre-modernity's self-conscious recognition that all systems of thought ground themselves, ultimately, in leaps of faith. From this, another quality follows: that before one makes such leaps blindly one admit the fragility of one's confidence in initiating any act and, therefore, that one take up a posture of humility to life itself.

### 3. On firmness of closure:

I feel some confidence in offering my interpretations of these novels. This is in part because, I believe, the texts allow or license my rendition. Nevertheless, to offer these conclusions, I read between the lines. This makes these interpretations more my own than those of the authors. The point is that varied interpretations are not only possible but necessary. For even though what marks a 'finished work' of literature is that it cohere aesthetically as a world unto itself, nevertheless, such a world necessarily contains many realms.

If the authors felt the need to close on specific realm, they are likely to have done so. The aversion to confine the work to one particular message forcefully distinguishes, I believe, literature from science. Thus while literature initially relaxes the guard of the reader it also demands, at the other end, that the reader engage in the act of interpreting the work as a whole. In contrast, scientific prose raises the reader's guard but usually does not insist that the reader construct an interpretation outside the one intended by the author. Here the non-West and the West seem to offer up alternative notions of freedom. The latter suggests that freedom comes from the disciplined work of grasping the master's pedagogy while the former asks us to valorize resistance to pedagogy as a port of entry to the life of multiplicity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I thank Sankaran Krishna for the point about "untidy multiplicity" being different from ambiguity.

<sup>13</sup> Thanks again to Sankaran Krishna for evoking this point.

#### 4. How the work is shown:

The force of abstract ideals and structures such as socialism, capitalism, modernity, progress, development, freedom, equality, etc., push and pull the characters of these novels. But these forces are never reified. The force of structures is revealed always by the feelings, thoughts, gestures, and actions of specific actors. In contrast, while human actions and actors are always implicitly the subject matter of scientific prose, it rarely contains characters or actors. Social scientists concentrate on structural forces that move actions and actors often ignoring that all forces and structures work through human action. Such reification allows us to forget, as Anthony Giddens puts it, that “structures exist only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action” (Giddens 1984, 337). This forgetting has one profound effect: it allows us to ignore, and therefore to distance ourselves from our complicity in both structures of domination and oppression as well as in structures of liberation.

Novels rarely allow such severing. Indeed, their momentum and tension result from the insight that every character acts both to reproduce structures and to change them (Giddens 1976, 102, 128). Thus: Huong makes it clear that, on the one hand, Quan participates in the very same illusions of glory for which he blames his father and the party. Quan accepts the stark realism of Kha’s world view as an internal revelation, which, ironically leaves him in the dark. On the other hand, Quan understands, explores, and reaches for that intuitive devotion to life he witnessed in his mother and the mothers of his comrades. The women in *House of Spirits* regret Esteban Trueba’s domination of the peasants at Tres Marias, but they also live from the profits of his exploitation, never breaking their relationship with the family patriarch. Trueba champions his independence, but never seems far from the revelation of his utter dependence on at least one other human being; first Clara, then Alba, and finally Transito Soto. Allende makes each complicit in the sins but also in the redemption of the other. In *Bridge on the Drina*, the Austrians bring modernity to the town but are themselves seduced by the town’s old world charms. More importantly, if the harbingers of modernity underestimate the power of the eternal, it is also the case that the town’s people take a smug attitude towards the Austrians and their habits. This inhumility towards what humans can do to themselves

and to symbols of the eternal marks the Bosnian complicity in their own downfall. If in his assessment of the Austrians, Alihodja was from the start correct, he was the only one; he consistently resisted but his Bosnian brothers and sisters did not. Thus, the seductions of modernity implicate everyone.

#### 5. The role of generosity

The exhibition of a character's complicity in, say, in a system of domination, repression, and exploitation is a difficult task because it must be shown without severing the reader's emotional investment in the character. Esteban Trueba, Kha, and the Austrians are characters that perpetrate some form of destruction or injustice. To be rich characters their actions need an understandable motivation that must be grounded in a viable social psychology and a meaningful political context. And, this grounding must be displayed as the necessary outcome of the life experiences of the character. Creating such characters calls, above all else, it seems to me, for conscious acts of generous understanding. It calls for appreciating in the other's point of view a core grain of truth that must *not* be assimilated, transformed, or ignored.

Here, especially, the contrast between literary writers and scientific writers favors the former. Because scientific prose usually moves to make a single claim, all energy is devoted to the clear and persuasive presentation of that claim. Only with difficulty does such immediacy allow a due generosity to either other claims or the claims of others. In remaking the world into its own image the Western colonizing mind must force a focus on its task to the exclusion of all doubts and counter claims. In resisting this assimilationism, the non-Western mind must engage all doubts, counter claims, and alternative visions including even those of the colonizer. In one, power excludes multiplicity, through the other multiplicity re-asserts itself.

#### 6. The goals of the project: parts of knowledge versus a holistic wisdom:

If novelists construct a coherent alternative world, their construction still can be read to comment on the world within which their novel is created. They do not marshal arguments to convince us of the rightness or usefulness of a particular view. However, they do, it seems to me, invite us to comprehend the world of their creation so that when

we return to our own world, we may, if we are lucky, notice within us a shift in our consciousness. If this is a more modest goal, it is also perhaps a more effective one.

### **Suggestions Emerging from the Encounter**

I wish to remind the reader that I do not argue for the replacement of scientific analysis by literature nor do I imagine an elimination of epistemological distancing. There are reasons why we produce not just literary but also analytic narratives. While novels can absorb us in fictional worlds tangential to our own and thereby create imperceptible shifts in our consciousness, they do not directly specify how and why that shift occurs. This is not part of their purview. To further the work that novels begin we need a more analytically explicit mode that emphasizes the usual strengths of social science narratives. These include: getting to the point over telling the tale, requiring us to be explicit about closing on claims rather than leaving that work to the reader, needing to specify the nature of structural forces, proceeding through abstractions, and sacrificing a sense of generosity to alternatives in order to uncover the full depth and implications of a selected point of view. Nevertheless, as I mentioned earlier, I believe social science has drained this legitimacy of its lifeblood. In order to retain the semblance of an emancipatory practice, it needs to become more humane. I have banked on the hope that one way to move in this direction is to incorporate aspects of literary narratives.

Which aspects do I propose we as social scientists incorporate? First, while not losing sight of the imperative to make arguments, we could pay more attention to our aesthetic or formal engagement. We might do well to ponder what part of our message is contained in the form of our prose. If we stress opening up questions rather than displaying a hurry to close them, if we expose our ambiguity, if we share the complexity and difficulty of the issue rather than hiding it, we can move to a cooperative and collegial relationship with the reader. With the reader relaxed, she can use her efforts more effectively to learn for her own purposes.

Second, we can learn something by focusing on how literary authors show their work. We can show our complicity in structures of oppression as well as our contribution to structures of liberation if we, 1) explore universal ethical issues through specific

characters and circumstances without creating a binary between the universal and the particular, and, 2) resist the temptation to reify structures by demonstrating how structures operate, sustain themselves, and change through concrete human action. Because they create the world they explore, novelists need no reminders that their work is an intimate part of themselves. While in social life we, individually, do not have the constructive license literary authors possess, nevertheless, collectively, we also create and re-create the world we explore. If so, then we need to admit and demonstrate a similar intimacy.

Third, we might do well to emulate literary authors' generosity towards their characters, especially antagonists. Gandhi supposedly said: "whenever I have searched for my enemy's sincerity, I have found it." Perhaps the secret to finding that sincerity is that while externally the enemy may be many things, that enemy is always, also, an internal doubt. The quality I most esteem in novelists is their willingness to explore, expose, and display an intimacy with such doubt. In social science, by contrast, doubt is usually seen as a dangerous opponent. But doubt need not paralyze us, nor must it present hazardous obstacles for our claims. Indeed, if our prose incorporates doubt with a sense of play and humility, it can help us to tell our tale as well as to present convincing arguments.

Fourth, literature suggests that modesty is a powerful virtue when it comes to changing human attitudes. Students consistently confirm my own experience that literature transforms us in ways that even the best analytic argument alone often cannot. It accomplishes this task, I believe, by being indirect about its purposes and modest about its political goals. In social science we perhaps cannot afford to be so implicit and circumspect, but we *can* take a more humble attitude towards changing others and ourselves. Such an attitude may even accelerate the possibility of effective change.

While I have focused on form, that is, on changing the processes of our theory/practice, my reading of resisting literatures also suggests a substantive engagement, for example, with the meaning of freedom. I read resisting literatures as a moving away from envisioning freedom as the polar opposite of determinacy and towards uncovering an overlap between the two. Here every sense of freedom exists within limits and within a context. The crucial issue becomes less the attainment of greater quantities

of abstract freedoms and more assessing the quality of life allowed by different contexts of freedom. This latter understanding of freedom emerges not from the fiction of overly abstract and de-contextualized images of “savages” leaving a Hobbesian or Lockian “state of nature,” but from an intimate understanding of actual humans as they dance within various forms of everyday bondage. Such a re-articulation and transformation of freedom suggests, of course, a similar modification of equality, and individuality, and related terms. In my reading, the epistemological and an axiological transformation envisioned by resisting literatures is enabled by a key insight; that the streams, rivers, and oceans of life are too overflowing, too rich, and too interconnected to be cut with tools of surgical precision and then stored in the mutually exclusive containers of modern science. Note that this last claim can be consistent both with Sufism and with the pluralism of the philosopher William James.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Idries Shaw various books on Sufism; and William James’ *A Pluralistic Universe*.

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