

June 2014

Volume 1.2

# The Narrator

EMILY  
WILLIS

*Narrating Autism  
in Literature*

SAM  
KAUFMAN

&

STEFAN  
KIELBASIEWICZ

*Architects*

LEONORA  
O'HANLON

*Window Lid*

DANIEL  
UNDERWOOD

*On Wilde*

CHERELLE  
JOHANNES

*For You*

EMILY  
GARDNER

*Who Started It?*

MARTA  
DONATI

*On Sorrentino*

WITH

ANNA  
MURPHY

ANDREW  
HOOLEY

ELEANOR  
BRIDGER

SOPHIE  
WORNING



*The Narrator*

June 2014, Volume 1.2

Edited by Emily Willis and Sam Kaufman

Proofread by Noor Hemani

© The Author(s) June 2014

Cover illustration by Lisbeth Zwerger, from the 1984 North-South Books edition of Oscar Wilde's *The Selfish Giant*. Used with the kind permission of the illustrator.

thenarrator.com

Submissions: [thenarratoryork@gmail.com](mailto:thenarratoryork@gmail.com)

# Table of Contents

Cover page .....	1-2
Editorial note .....	4
<b>Creative Writing</b>	
<i>Who Started It?</i> by Emily Gardner .....	6-8
<i>Another Father's Day</i> by Andrew Hooley .....	9
<i>For You</i> by Cherelle Johannes .....	10
<i>Architects</i> by Sam Kaufman & Stefan Kielbasiewicz .....	11-12
<i>Count the Stars</i> by Anna Murphy .....	13-14
<i>Window Lid</i> by Leonora O'Hanlon .....	15-17
<i>Happy Birthday Mouse</i> by Eleanor Bridger .....	18-19
<b>Critical Writing</b>	
<i>"They should have called it The Great Ugliness": A Reflection on Paolo Sorrentino's The Great Beauty</i> by Marta Donati .....	21-26
<i>A Review of The Importance of Being Ernest at The Drama Barn</i> by Daniel Underwood .....	27-29
<i>Diagnosing Disorder: The Autistic Spectrum and Narrative Representation</i> by Emily Willis .....	30-38
<i>"The Doubting Dane": The Deconstruction of the Danish Identity in Kongens Fald</i> by Sophie Worning .....	39-42

# Editorial Note

Throughout the process of editing the first two volumes of *The Narrator*, we have been continually astounded by the talent each submission demonstrates. The range of styles, backgrounds, and wholly intellectual approaches are equally stimulating and humbling for us.

Since the release of volume 1.1, interest in the journal has burgeoned far beyond our expectations and a small community surrounding *The Narrator* has come into being. We have had two meetings so far which have given people the opportunity to get to know each other, lending the journal a decidedly open feel, and encouraging inclusivity and discourse. We intend to carry these meetings and socials beyond the summer to expand our network of writers.

The pieces in volume 1.2 cover a lot of ground and reflect upon diverse ideas, reinforcing *The Narrator's* original mission statement of dialogue between genres and disciplines. Aside from our now regular contributors, works from several new writers have been submitted. Volume 1.2 exhibits myriad emotions and it traverses continental boundaries, from prose working through familial dispute, anxiety, poetry from Monaco and Zimbabwe, and illustration, to critical efforts dealing with autism, Danish identity, Wildean theatre in York and Italian cinema. This leaves us to say that we are grateful for the variety of contributors who have thus far supported *The Narrator* and, we hope, will continue to do so well into the future, where the journal will develop and provide a unique platform for discussion and expression.

To enrich academic learning and advancement within the department of English and Related Literature at the University of York, please read *The Journal of Undergraduate Research*, available to students on the VLE. It includes essays written by undergraduates in order to inform and inspire the work of students through their degree.

Sam Kaufman and Emily Willis, June 2014.

# Creative Writing

# *Who Started It?*

**Emily Gardner**

We both stand and look at the chair, the chair which two minutes before stood, proud, at its desk, and now lies defenceless on the floor.

The fading green leather seat is the colour of a billiards table, and its four gleaming mahogany legs wink in the fading light which streams from the open windows. A wheel has fallen off, and I hunt for it with my eyes, spot it hidden amongst a pile of his unopened mail. A deep crack runs from the amputated foot, fracturing one of the legs. Above this, another leg flails helplessly in the air, its wheel spinning haphazardly, frantically. It is, I think, I sigh, beyond repair. He has ruined everything again.

Around the room, everything else is just how it should be, just how I want it. I've tried to keep it exactly the same as when they were alive. There is still the mild smell of lavender, and the steady tick and whir of the asthmatic grandfather clock, a sound which has marked fragments of my life since I was a child. It's not too hard to imagine our mother storming into here, demanding in that tone she had to tell us who started it. Except now, there is no one to know, nobody to testify. The bookcase, with its large, well-thumbed volumes, and the desk with the handles on its side which look like eyes, are the only witnesses of this unprovoked and unfair act of violence.

I can just about muster the strength to look over to him now, see the sinews that stand out from his neck like they long to burst free. He should look angry, I suppose, but there is something pathetic in him still, something lost. A thin stream of blood runs slowly from his nose and down to his chin, and I wonder absent-mindedly if I can catch it before it hits the floor, save the carpet from its inevitable fall. I move my gaze to his eye, my hand throbbing momentarily from recent synesthesia, and I wonder if it will bruise tomorrow. His hands are clenched at the ends of arms which hang slightly out from his sides, as if controlled by some elusive string, only a puppet, not responsible for what he's done, what he's always done. It reminds me of

younger days, of mittens attached to our coats with elastic, of walks to school, of taunting, of reminders that I should always look after my brother.

He started it the day he was born. The day that he was different. The day that he didn't understand. I remember the way that, at school in the playground, they would call him names, wind him up until he lashed out at them with his fists. He had such a short temper, anything would set him off. I would beg with him not to: "ignore them, you're embarrassing me", but he never learnt, not once. Sometimes, when we got home from school, I would do the same thing, tell him how unwanted he was, force him to hit me when I pulled his hair. Then I would tell on him. Try to make my parents see him the way I did. But they never understood, and neither did I.

I caught him one day, rescuing a mouse from a trap that our father had set in the kitchen. I couldn't understand how he could be so kind to a tiny creature, a piece of vermin, and be so cruel to me. How he could save a life, when he must know, deep down, that he was ruining mine. Together, with little fingers, we prised open the trap.

I stand and look at the chair, because I don't want to look at her face. Because I don't understand what just happened. I keep balling my hands up into fists, pushing my nails into my palm, because I want the pain to take my thoughts away. Something wet runs down my face, and it is cold and makes me feel better. Something hurts in my right eye.

I stand and look at the chair, and I try to remember father in it, how he sat, with a very straight back, but I can't because father is gone and the chair is on the floor now. One wheel caries on spinning, and it reminds me of a sheep I once saw when I was walking, lying on its back, trying to get back up again. I wanted to help it, but I was too scared so I ran away. Father told me later that when a sheep lies on its back, it can't get up again. And then it just dies.

I watched a mouse die once. Father used to set traps at night, and he'd let me help, sometimes. I liked the traps. I wanted to trap something, something really big. Then it happened. I found it, lying in the wire, moving. A little tiny mouse. Not big at all. I was trying to set it free when she caught me. Usually she says lots, but then, she said nothing. Together, we opened the trap.

It took ages for the bath to fill. I peered my head over the bathtub and watched the water slowly rise up, hot against my fingers. I laughed as we watched the mouse swim, leaving a little trail of red in the water. It was only later that I saw that it was going to drown. When I tried to put my hand in and grab it, she caught me and pinched my arm. “Don’t be a baby,” she said to me. “And don’t tell. Or I’ll tell them that you started it.” She pinned my hands behind my back.

“Don’t tell.”

“Don’t tell.”

“Don’t tell.”

But she always told on me. Even though she always started it. Every single time.

This time, though, everything is wrong. Nothing is how it should be. The chair is on the floor. I don’t know who started it this time. I just didn’t want to feel like that mouse any more. Trapped. Drowning.

We both stand and look at the chair, and it seems to me that the ticking clock is demanding a confession. Who started it this time? Who’s at fault? Who’s to blame? My brother looks up, and when our eyes lock, suddenly, across the vast ocean of the room, something passes between us. A flash of recognition? A pang of understanding? An acknowledgement of the truth? And then, just as quickly as it came, the moment is stolen away.

# *Another Father's Day*

**Andrew Hooley**

My father has a black god in his chest.  
The spirit sits, fermenting, his hospice,  
Achilles' armour, Ajax's anger,  
Casting bones, an uncomfortable auspice.

Like me, he makes light of situations.

# *For You*

**Cherelle Johannes**

This is the seed that bore a bloom  
Through bitter winter's frost and snow.  
A bright, rare hope in darkness grew  
To bear this beauty we now know.  
As song from garden wildlife spills  
From nightingale and sparrow like,  
So can the sun's warm daily toils  
Touch all who turn to face its light.  
There are no letters for a word  
To capture truly what this is.  
My heart is taken with a thirst:  
For you, your touch, your voice, your kiss.  
The clock ticks here and there, meanwhile  
I think of you and simply smile.

# *Architects*

Sam Kaufman & Stefan Kielbasiewicz

Stefan Kielbasiewicz and Sam Kaufman grew up in two places which, on the face of it, have little in common. In this collaborative poem, they attempt to find the meeting place of experience in their hometowns of Monaco and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Well, that won't do.  
there's no snuffing the stars  
out, here in Bulawayo  
with only car headlights  
and power outages.

We'll have to bleed  
the Milky Way  
and transfuse it into the quiet  
façades and streetlamps,  
enough to paint the sky black  
with light.

Over there we move  
through a galaxy of constellations  
that orbits around us,  
caught in the crossfire  
of camera-flash supernovas  
and the dying red pulsars  
of cigarettes glowing in the cool  
evening.

Your imitation will just  
be a glamorous nothing  
imitating itself a glamorous

nothing on this soil, damp  
with a festering nostalgia  
for what Bulawayo was  
and what Monte-Carlo now  
is.

I lived there wondering the inside  
of that casino for seven years until  
at 18 I found tourists standing  
around the blackjack discreetly  
fingering their wallets, undecided,  
and regulars further on  
fixing themselves on the narcotic  
crank of chance in slot dens...

but I know that one night,  
here in Bulawayo,  
not long from now when this  
casino is built, some kids  
will drive up curious,  
walk into this parlour  
of the dead-eyed, and see  
wordless rapists sitting  
at the slots, bleary automatons,  
with feckless mafiosi  
watching over them.

This place will be for them  
and their rank ideals,  
standing on dead foundations  
inside forever. And that  
is my revenge.

# *Count the Stars*

**Anna Murphy**

We haven't yet met, my dear,  
I wonder if I will count,  
in your world and galaxy of stars.  
But I don't fear for I have patience.  
I hope you will notice  
For the world needs people to be seen.

I have rarely been seen, have you been seen?  
To love to the moon and back needs patience,  
surely? Well, I'm sure I will notice  
you when the time comes, my dear.  
For in the sweet, succulent milky way of stars  
To get from one to a thousand, you need to count:

Like a child in a school learning to count,  
Like a policeman training to notice  
a person needs patience.  
But a world of patient people is yet to be seen,  
as you and I are yet to meet, my dear,  
I shall try and notice, and see the stars.

Burning circles in the galaxy is the job of stars  
Lighting our way down the path, have patience  
as a fire that wants to be seen,  
is a rough circle but a circle nonetheless, my dear.  
A burning circle amongst many that count,  
But ours is the one that I will notice.

You'd think it's easy to get notice,  
But sometimes it's hard to be truly seen,  
after all, in a universe, what's just one star?  
To be told that you count,  
that is all that matters, my dear,  
In the circle of stars, have patience.

It's not easy to come by, patience,  
is it? But you are my glowing star  
lighting the way between us, my dear,  
making our circle be in the count,  
when each of us are noticed,  
we will each be counting the stars.

# *Window Lid*

**Leonora O'Hanlon**

I see sharp tendrils of light as it fractures the landscape.

I see it creep over the death of night as it electrifies the frozen land.

I see it crawl in slow motion as it tries to lighten the darkness of my vision.

And I feel it, as if it will pierce my colourless skin.

So I shut it out - quick - behind the cover of this solid window's blinds.

And the glass cracks under the weight of that determined light...I hear it...the slight whine under the power of it.

But I sit behind that window's closed lid, and I watch myself as anxiety shatters the delicate frame of my body whilst keeping in tune with the relentless light of the day.

I feel it there...tap, tap, tapping at first until it finds its way to seep into my bones.

Then it knows it has me,

and it climbs with scratching nails up my throat and it plays with the fine strings of my senses.

So I sit there, behind the closed lid of that window that shuts the socket of my own eye...

And I wait...

And I listen...

for the day to come and take my broken body and shatter it in its brilliant light.

.....

Nothing for a while.

I feign hope that perhaps this time I have finally made myself invisible.

That the eye of the window has stored me behind its gaze.

Slowly, then too quickly, the stinging poison of anxiety finds its way to my heart and I hold my breath attempting to freeze it in its vicious tracks.

But then I hear it.

The elevated crash of that overcrowded collection of keys out of sync with the rhythm of a body walking heavy steps.

I see those crafted slices of metal at each moment of their jolted crash, they are suspended before me as they electrify into the splinters of their own sound.

And I lose my grip on the poison of my anxiety.

The swollen current of anxious waves propel me to shake like a wild thing.

I curl and try to melt into the corner of this big empty room.

But the scream of those exploding jangle of keys thuds its way closer, until it becomes the movement of my heart. So I sit, and shake, and hum with the anxiety of it as my frozen eyes press themselves to that weighted wooden door.

A heavy handed knock.

And then it opens and the day slides its way over the surface of the room, stroking the walls as it comes for me with its suffocating light.

I don't see who stands there but the day vibrates their words into the consciousness of my mind.

“Breakfast is ready, come now”

And then there is the earth quake of the door as it traps me alone with the prospect of the day.

And the body of a woman who sits there at the end of my bed and stares into the blackness I created, stirs from the crack of energy that came with the day.

Her oversized, tired eyes find their languid path to the fractured outline of my body piled against the corner.

“You gonna eat today?” and without a pause;

“I'm get them to come for you and oh boy! you know they make you if you don't move”

Pause.

Sigh.

“Come on baby get up, get up! I'm goin home now, I'm tired. Let me go home. Be good and they don't make you yeah?”

And then it comes, an overwhelming flood of it consuming my body as I lay scratching at the coarse grey carpet. I breathe as if I don't know how and it hurts as I force that air in and out of my lungs.

I let it come, that uncontrollable flood and I cry purging my body of the poison.

I think those words. I let them beat brutal fists at my head.

Let me go home. I'm tired. Let me go home.

They become the screaming noise of my body as tears smother my face.

I close the lids of my eyes and wait defeated for them to come for me and force the violating nutrition of a life that isn't mine down a throat that is no longer mine and into a stomach that bloats with the pain of it.

I wait.

I wait for the day to drain away again and leave me hidden behind the closed lid of that window.



'EVERY YEAR  
I DO THIS  
MR WHALE'  
SAID MOUSE

'EVERY YEAR  
I FORGET  
NOT  
TO GROW UP'

# Critical Writing

# ***“They should have called it *The Great Ugliness*”***

## ***A Reflection on Paolo Sorrentino’s *The Great Beauty****

**Marta Donati**

### INTRODUCTION

- 1) “They should have called it the Great Ugliness. What a pile of bullshit.”
- 2) “Just watched it. It’s so boring. What the hell was the Academy thinking?”
- 3) “It made me fall asleep”
- 4) “Wait, but didn’t Fellini do all that already?”
- 5) “OMG, what are people gonna think about Italy now?”
- 6) “Oh yeah, it’s about that cool guy who wants to make parties fail, right? In Rome”
- 7) “It’s so elitist”

To clarify, it’s Paolo Sorrentino’s *The Great Beauty* we’re talking about here. Or, as some cinema *virtuoso* titled it, “The Great Ugliness”. As random as it may seem now, I would like us to bear this definition in mind, because it could indeed prove quite valuable later on.

The sentences I reported above come, as you may have guessed, from the well-known and highly populated realm of Facebook. Although I cannot guarantee for the accuracy of the phrasing, I can surely say that they’re accurate in expressing the general meaning that they conveyed at the time they appeared on my news feed.

Quote number 2 is particularly interesting, as it gives us a first insight into the audience’s reaction to the news that *The Great Beauty* had indeed won an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in the 86<sup>th</sup> edition.

These popular and quite common expressions of audience perplexity are a useful introduction for the questions that this article will try to explore. We all have acknowledged that *The Great Beauty* won an Academy Award, which means the Academy must have liked it in some way. So why is it that so many people in Italy generally disliked it or claimed they didn't understand it? What are the mechanisms that regulate this refusal and how do they work? What is so controversial in this production that makes Italy question the choice of awarding an Italian film with such an important prize? Where do we have to look for the beauty presented in the title?

Enough of questions for now. For those of you who aren't familiar with the film, it might be useful to point out that it is a bit difficult to start its insightful summary with the words "it narrates". The point is that it doesn't really narrate much, not if we stick to the usual meaning of the word, at least. Nevertheless, it can be said that it revolves around the character of Jep Gambardella, played masterly by Toni Servillo (nobody ever seemed to have objections to this), an ageing theatre critic and journalist who published his sole and incredibly successful book, titled *The Human Apparatus*, a bunch of years before, and then suddenly lost his inspiration. As Peter Bradshaw writes in *The Guardian*, Jep is "at the centre of Rome's fashionable nightlife, elegant as a vampire". Though, from the beginning of the film, it seems to be clear that Jep is affected by a rare form of *mal de vivre*. The opening sequence shows Jep's somewhat squalid birthday party, where the guests are having a lot of stereotypically portrayed good fun, accompanied by loud music, strip teases, and alcohol. They even get a middle aged soubrette in "psychophysical decay" stepping out of a fake birthday cake. Jep, the birthday boy as well as the main character, is not introduced until the end of the opening sequence. He dances for a bit, kisses a couple of women, smiles, grins at his own pleasure. Apparently, he's really enjoying it. Nevertheless, Sorrentino feels the need to stop the dynamism of the scene: he slows down the action and focuses his camera on Jep, who carelessly steps in the middle of two lines of his guests who are cheerfully dancing "La Colita", lights a cigarette and delivers his first monologue to the audience looking into the camera's eye. When Jep stands out, he's not grinning anymore. His neutral, almost blank face strikes the audience as out of place, powerful and almost desperate. One more shot of the sky of Rome, and the film starts. *La Grande Bellezza. The Great Beauty.*

I.

*A thing of beauty is a joy forever;*

*Its loveliness increases; it will never pass*

*Into nothingness (...). (Keats 1-3)*

The first time I saw the film, I must confess that my immediate reaction was: well, now, what's the point of all this?

It is one of the most common and misleading mistakes: asking oneself "what did Sorrentino mean?" doesn't lead anyone to a satisfactory answer. On the contrary, it leads to a blank, confused face in front of the mirror. Probably, even, to a slight feeling of stupidity.

Now, beauty. How can a film claim the existence of a Great Beauty without falling into extreme relativism? An article in *The Guardian* reports a part of Alessandra Levantesi Kezich's piece on *La Stampa* that reads: the characters "are nothing more than grotesque fragments of a puzzle incapable of composing a unitary design". The same article also reports Paolo Mereghetti's idea that "in the end Sorrentino has really not understood much of the beauty (and ugliness) of Rome."

Bearing these two criticisms in mind, it is still worth wondering whether *The Great Beauty* literally wants to define beauty – be it that of Rome or the concept itself - understand it and then communicate to larger audiences in order to indoctrinate them. It seems to me that, more than a statement, the film can be easily understood as a quest. A quest for beauty, whatever beauty is, in a city that is supposed to represent beauty, the triumph of classical proportions, of Roman art and history. A city that tries to hold to its beautiful image of its beautiful nostalgic past. Significantly enough, Rome and its beauty do have the main role in Sorrentino's film and they are present as something that *cannot* be understood. The city's beauty is manifold. It is decaying, because it supports and nourishes that languor which stagnates in Jep's parties, in the middle of his trashy birthday party, the product of a generation that is part of the past already but doesn't want to grow older. The beauty of Rome doesn't know how to breathe, trapped inside the corruption of politics, religion and everyday life. When it breathes, it becomes dangerous. That instant of

beauty leads to stupor and death, that of the Japanese tourist at the beginning of the film, for instance. As Letizia and Zabala write in *The Guardian*, the city seems to represent a beauty that cannot be handled. Rome is there, as hell and paradise, as bliss and damnation. But also, Rome is there as uncertainty, as lies behind a façade – Stefania and *radical chic* mask of social awareness are just one example. Rome tries to hide behind the corners and silently look for a past that can no longer be found. Rome disappears as the giraffe disappears due to some illusionist's magic in the film. Rome collapses and ruins, which are real, mental and philosophical.

It's precisely here that Keats comes in handy.

*"A thing of beauty is a joy forever [ ...] It will never pass into nothingness".*

The Great Beauty is a subtle response to this statement. Sorrentino does not seem to be stating that instants of beauty are fake, or do not exist. On the contrary, Jep Gambardella remembers his old lover as a product of that beauty he has been relentlessly looking for, as a dream of happiness, of eternal bliss that has faded. It has indeed passed into nothingness, because she is dead. There is nothing besides his memory of her, which will also pass into nothingness sooner or later. It is beauty destined to decay, as Rome falls into decadence and languor.

The character of the "Saint", the 104-year-old Christian missionary who lives her life in harshness and sacrifice, seems to find the great beauty at the end of her quest for God, when she climbs the stairs of St Mary in Rome, in a moment of extreme humility and fatigue. Nevertheless, as Federica Martiny points out in her article on JGcinema, her experience is individual. She is alone, she is not destined and does not want to share. Firstly, because the group of people she is surrounded by during her trip to Rome are the same middle-aged Roman elite that danced "La Colita" at Jep's birthday party. Secondly, because she is regarded as a freak and a sociological case, denied respect and understanding of her faith. Has she witnessed a moment of great beauty? No one will know.

II. *"Wait, but didn't Fellini do all that already?"*

*"OMG, what are people going to think about Italy now?"*

One of the biggest criticisms the film received were based on comparison. Firstly, Sorrentino was compared to Fellini. Then, Fellini's authorial status obviously

stood out. As a result, Sorrentino drowned into the sea of comparison, and the sea of comparison is a very deep and harsh one to fight against. Of course, Sorrentino paid his respects to Fellini, and even named him in his Oscar acceptance speech. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of Fellini in *The Great Beauty*. The great director's interest in oneiric activity – Mastroianni's dream of closure at the beginning of 8½ is just one example – is reported by Sorrentino quite diligently in scenes like the one in which Jep transforms his ceiling into the sea. In an article on *Il Messaggero*, Marella writes: "Of course, Fellini did it. But Fellini was Fellini, and Sorrentino doesn't have Ennio Flaiano as a screenwriter". In other words, many perceived that *The Great Beauty* copied Fellini, tried to unmask Rome's decadence (the great ugliness) with a lot of great beauty of style and then failed as a result.

I perceive that being conscious of Italy's great cinematic past is not necessarily a failure and not necessarily a statement of purpose. Sorrentino did name Fellini in his acceptance speech especially *because* his film does not recreate *La Dolce Vita*. His film distorts it, pollutes it and is conscious of the fact that the great beauty is buried under the weight of so much ugliness that it is ultimately very difficult to find and even more difficult to embrace - not even using metaphors, not even with all the beauty and power of style.

Marella argues that *The Great Beauty* has won the Oscar because the Academy has a stereotypical idea of Italy, as the home of corruption and beautiful monuments. It is very interesting to acknowledge the Italian distaste for the film. *The Great Beauty* is not a documentary. There is no naturalism in it. It is not a plain observation, and yes, it does rely on your brain. The authorial voice takes over most of it and, as a result, the film jumps from one moment of artistic contemplation to the other. Nevertheless, it is a film for Italians. It does not exclude them. It conveys all the suffering of the Italian still life, the decaying grandeur of a culture that is in love with beauty but finds it difficult to preserve. It portrays excesses, failures and decadence, but also sanctity, curiosity, and pulsating life. It also does quote Fellini, his themes and his allegories. It is, as well, a film about surface and its pervasiveness, because *The Great Beauty* is not merely about that guy who wanted to make parties fail (in Rome), but about how we approach the instants of beauty that we're given. Italians are guilty of ignoring them a little bit too much. I wouldn't complain because the Academy liked it. I wouldn't complain because abroad many people think it is

great. As a matter of fact, it is a very universal work of art. Far from only representing Italian society, it is a subtle, clever and witty insight into humanity's thirst for authenticity.

POST SCRIPTUM: Yes, Jep Gambardella actually says that he wants to have the power to make parties fail. It's not the most exciting line in the movie, but I can see why people thought it was good. Toni Servillo is so fantastic.

### **Works Consulted**

Sorrentino, Paolo. *The Great Beauty*. 2013. Film.

Fellini, Federico. *8½*. 1963. Film.

Pulver, Andrew. "The Great Beauty wins Best Foreign Language film Oscar". *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 2014. Web.

Bradshaw, Peter. "La Grande Bellezza (The Great Beauty) – review". *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 2013. Web.

Letizia, Arianna and Santiago Zabala. "The Great Beauty portrays Italy more faithfully than its new prime minister". 2014. Web.

Marshall, Lee. "I panni sporchi". *Internazionale*. Internazionale, 2014. Web.

Boille, Francesco. "Una bellissima bruttezza". *Internazionale*. Internazionale, 2013. Web.

Brogi, Daniela. "La memoria e lo sperpero. Su "La Grande Bellezza" di Paolo Sorrentino". *Between*, 2013. Web.

Martiny, Federica. "La fragilità della bellezza". JGcinema. Web.

Marella, Paolo. "Il grande luogo comune". *Artribune*. 2014. Web.

Keats, John. *A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever*. In *The Complete Poems*. London: Penguin Classics, 1977. Print.

Facebook

# ***Review of The Importance of Being Earnest*** ***at The Drama Barn***

**Daniel Underwood**

'A Handbag?!' my grandma chortles. She says this every time 'The Importance of Being Earnest' or Oscar Wilde is touched upon in conversation. I always smile in return, for the line is a worthy two-word synopsis for the farcical play. Take the word 'farce' itself: etymologically, the word derives from the French literally as 'stuffing' from the verb *farcir* 'to stuff' (itself formed from the Latin *farcire*). In the context of the plot, this is quite significant considering that John Worthing was himself 'stuffed' in a handbag and shamefully left in the 'cloak-room at Victoria Station'.

Lady Bracknell's line, usually delivered by an actress of corresponding age, was actually uttered by a young man (Sam Hill). To say that such an arrangement was comical would be an understatement. Hill gave a consistent performance, eliciting many laughs in his portrayal as the aged and imperious aunt. A personal favourite was the instance of mock-swordsmanship in which Hill twirled an umbrella and pointed it at Miss Prism (Kate Stephenson) leaving just enough time between laughs to click it to its full extension.

Such subtleties were a great strength of the performance which brings me to the occasional musical ditty that was included. I confess that I have not seen the 2002 film adaptation of Wilde's play (starring Colin Firth and Judi Dench) but after a quick YouTube search it appears that some inspiration for the musical elements of the performance were to be found there. And not a bad idea either. The music, though nervous to begin with, was a pleasant addition to the play's actions. The cast's singing was competent, incorporating a nice balance of musical interludes in the general structure of the play. Hats must be removed for Algy and Jack's duet sung by Joe Mackenzie and Matthew Roberts. The song, which takes its lyrics from the first two stanzas of Wilde's 'Serenade', was by far the musical apogee of play, boasting a comical choreography and some enthused singing. Indeed, for some days afterwards

I went around York gaily singing ‘Lady come down’ whilst exhibiting the most atrocious pirouette movements.

The unsung heroes of the show have to be the actors responsible for the roles of the butlers Lane and Merriman (Marff Pothen and Jamie Bowman). Contrary to my expectations (wry menservants redolent of Stephen Fry's Jeeves) the actors, especially Bowman's Merriman, presented a more indifferent portrayal. Such an effect was highly amusing; Merriman's irritation after toing and froing from the ‘Dog cart’ verged on the Basil Fawlty, providing a moment of hilarity when he yells ‘yes sir!’ when told the carriage is no longer needed.

I feel at this point that something must be said about the Drama Barn as a venue. I must shamefully admit that ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ was only my second outing to the barn. The first was the excellent production of Samuel Beckett's ‘Endgame’. However, on both occasions my enjoyment of the productions was enhanced by the intimacy of the theatre space which allows for such close proximity with the actors. Neither of the theatres at the Department for Theatre, Film and Television nor those at York Theatre Royal afford such a personal inclusion in the action as one experiences at the Drama Barn. Throughout, the cast is barely an arm's-length away and frequently they are sat in the audience. This has two noticeable effects. Firstly, being so close to the actors and the set, it is much easier to immerse oneself in the play because the physical and imaginary distance is practically non-existent. Secondly, and not always pertinent, if any mistakes are made the effect is less discernible. In the performance of ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ there was an instance when a member of the cast accidentally mixed-up the names. However, as opposed to creating an awkward moment, the cast's improvisation not only made for a calm recovery, but also heightened the comical effect. Despite the fact that Wilde's play is naturally one of humour and ‘bunburying’ I believe that such a swift recovery would not have been as achievable in another theatre space. In fact, I do not think this effect is exclusive to comedy for I felt the same when experiencing the more serious drama of Beckett's ‘Endgame’. Given the propinquity with the actors, one feels much more involved and actively part of the dramatic process which would be less possible in more traditional theatres where the dichotomy between actors and audience is more absolute.

Indeed, not even my numb legs and buttocks (the only apparent downside to the venue) could disturb my enjoyment of an evening's fine entertainment. Considering it was the opening night, the cast, after a slightly nervous start, soon relaxed into the play and gave a rousing performance which clearly gave as much enjoyment to the actors as it did the audience. I can happily conclude that Oscar Wilde's play was an excellent way to begin the drama barn's summer term cycle of plays and I hope to be back in the barn sooner rather than later.

# *Diagnosing Disorder: The Autistic Spectrum and Narrative Representation*

Emily Willis

The Autistic Spectrum (ASD), loosely defined as “a lifelong disability which affects how a person makes sense of the world” (*National Autistic Society*), is a wide and varied disorder resulting in neurological atypicality. Autistic people, as well as those with other disabilities, appear throughout history in literature, however before diagnosis, less politically correct descriptions were used to describe them, ranging from characters in Sophocles’ plays to Shakespeare’s. Having moved into the 21st century there is still a prevailing lack of understanding of the nature of autism and many other disabilities, and society’s persistence in classing them as other, means that even though characters are represented in the media, on programmes such as *The Big Bang Theory*, I will argue that narrative propagates misrepresentation.

The *National Autistic Society* identifies three key areas in which people with ASD have difficulty in society. The first is that of social interaction. Autism in the media has been epitomised by hypersensitivity to environmental surroundings. In *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the reader infers that Christopher has autism due to the detail he notices in everyday situations; “I see everything” (174). Upon running away from home, he describes his perception of the terrifying scene at London King’s Cross without anyone to help him. Haddon describes all the information which Christopher takes in; every detail of the adverts on every poster, minute descriptions of the other characters on the platform, of which there are hundreds, the *mélange* of sounds like white noise which he tries to separate, all of which we see through his eyes. Couser argues that characters with autism in narrative are defined by their disability, acting only as a “prompt and prop for narrative but which does not generate narrative” (603). However, Christopher is the first person protagonist of Haddon’s novel, foregrounding disability and illuminating Christopher’s struggles with society. Yet, by focusing on the negative experiences of autism, Haddon perpetuates a stereotype, situating Christopher in relation to society

rather than vice versa. In *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher goes to a special school where there is an understanding of his behaviour and a comprehension of the fact that time must be devoted to giving him one to one support, using visual teaching methods, which he finds easier to understand.

Conversely, in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome*, written autobiographically by a boy with Asperger's, without denying the difficulties he faces, Luke describes autism as a gift. Asperger Syndrome is a form of autism affecting 500,000 people in the UK, often accompanied by learning difficulties. A person with AS may have what society deems to be average or above average intelligence (*National Autistic Society*). Having first-hand experience of autism, Luke explains hypersensitivity. He suggests that although being touched by other people or the sensation of clothes can physically hurt an autistic person, heightened sensitivity shapes his ability to write. That uncomfortable intimacy experienced looking into someone's eyes for too long is, for some autistic people, painful – “a burning in the soul”. However, unlike Haddon, who focuses upon the negative aspects of the home environment, for Luke, home is a comfortable place as it would be to anyone else. By contrast, school is difficult; being abused by bullies is excruciatingly painful due to his hypersensitivity. He also refers to the fact that he likes to have a timetable, as unpredictable events make him anxious, however at school this is impossible to achieve as timetables change daily and break time represents a plethora of unknown eventualities.

However, in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome*, Luke refers to the fact that his interests and rituals evolve with time just like any other child's, disrupting the conception that autistic people must always have routines; “who says we don't like change?”, “society is more rigid than autistic people”. Both authors meditate upon the fluid dialogue between the real and the metaphorical. In *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome*, Luke says he is “very interested in commonly used expressions which seem to make little sense” and explains to the reader such idioms as “when pigs fly”. The idea of the metaphor as a lie is coupled with the hypocrisy of social rules in that people must tell white lies in order to avoid offending others, cultivating disingenuous personalities; “Cowboys and Indians or whatever else children pretend to be”. This lack of understanding of the motivations of others can be a vulnerability; in *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher

thinks people must always tell the truth just because he does, and says “she was probably a good person because she liked dogs” (50), comparing Mrs Alexander to himself.

The idea of social communication then, is the second obstacle which society poses to people with autism. Many autistic people are anxious about communication, often experiencing difficulties with language. Further to this many are happy to muse upon their own thoughts and have been perceived as withdrawn from society consequently. In *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher daydreams about being the last person upon earth and how peaceful it would be, whilst by contrast not seeing the point in the small talk Mrs Alexander attempts to make with him, giving monosyllabic answers. This lack of communication means society misinterprets his withdrawal as they do not understand it. The policeman jumps to the conclusion that because Christopher is found holding his neighbour’s dead dog, upset by its death, that he must have killed it. By contrast, in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger’s Syndrome*, Luke says that autistic people are often very good at following rules so long as they understand the stipulations; it is other people who fail to be considerate towards autistic people.

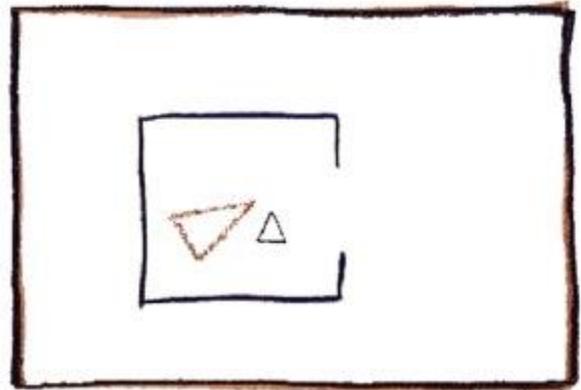
Ray argues that in *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, diverging from society’s conceptions of normality advocates the body as the most important foundation for Christopher’s existence and beliefs. She argues his belief that one lives on through their body when they die by becoming the flowers and the worms and the earth, the idea that he could feel his mother every time it rains, is an alternative way of knowing the world (7), not an inferior one. She goes further, arguing that language, and in effect society, are artificial, since they came subsequent to nature. Her views are supported by Haddon so far as Christopher loves animals and compares himself to the murdered dog (190) and in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger’s Syndrome*, Luke explains how gluten free diets have been proven to help with the physical and emotional difficulties posed by autism. However, using this critical approach is dangerous, as it seems to deny capacity for thought to autistic people, which is just another means by which to categorise them as other. Couser argues that “culture inscribes narratives onto their bodies” (605); in much the same way that feminist critics argue women have been belittled and seen as the “defective of men”, due to the cultural assumptions attached to their bodies, so too can autistic

people be viewed in society. Indeed, popular beliefs are either that autistic people do not feel at all or that they cannot control their emotions – a stereotype perpetuated by Haddon when Christopher lashes out at his father and says “and then I didn’t know what I was doing anymore” (103).

The third autistic trait, which is frequently inaccurate, is the assertion that autistic people have difficulty with social imagination. Perhaps this is why Haddon chose to end with Christopher’s remark “I wrote a book, I can do anything” (268), to dismantle reductive, underestimating perceptions of autistic people, whilst highlighting the importance of Christopher as the protagonist. However, Couser argues being the subject of a novel does not necessarily equate to subjectivity. For autistic people to be represented completely, they must represent themselves. Indeed, the fact that the protagonists of these novels, much like in Picoult’s *House Rules*, are often children, seems to link autism with childish traits. Luke in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger’s Syndrome* has shown that children with autism are capable of writing in a much more sophisticated style than Haddon portrays. “Disability is thus not located in the individual so much as it is located in the contingent relationship between the individual and social expectations of behaviour and productivity” (4) Ray argues. Disability is constructed by society, as to create a concept of normality you need a concept of abnormality to define it in relation to. Both authors turn society’s concepts of normality upside down through their philosophical thinking, suggesting it is society which is disordered. In *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher says “everyone has learning difficulties” as everyone has difficulty learning something, although Luke goes further in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger’s Syndrome*, arguing his special interest in computers renders him phenomenally intelligent in contrast to his peers.

However, Frith’s focus upon the profound talents of people with autism, for example a boy who instinctively knows the day of the week for any date in the past or future, is equally distorting and misleading. Luke qualifies his reference to his talents, saying that films such as *Rain Man* are disheartening for many autistic people who cannot live up to these expectations in society. Similarly, in *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Christopher is also interested in computers and Maths, yet says he does not want his name to be an allegory of anyone else’s story; “I want my name to mean me”. Indeed, in the programme *Living with Autism*,

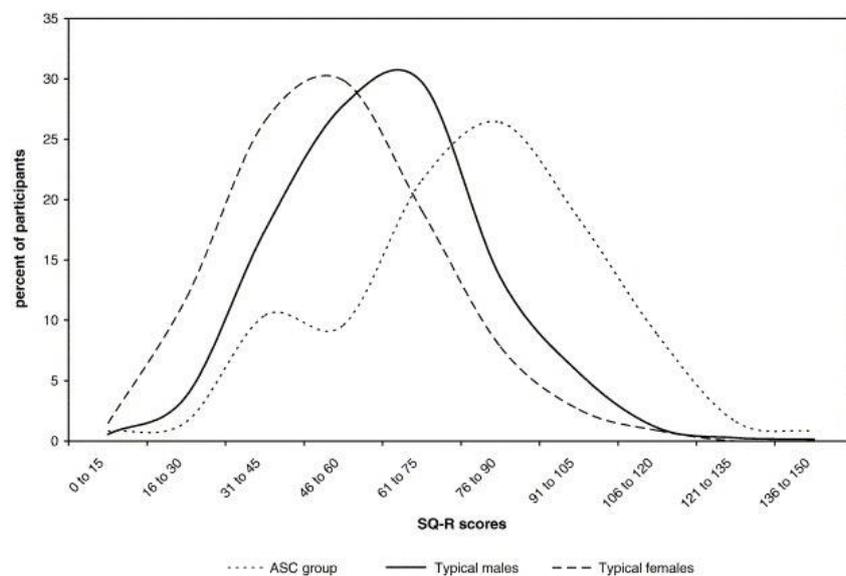
a psychologist uses moving triangles within a box on a screen to ask people without autism what they see. They all use the allegory that the triangles represent a child knocking on a door and then running away and the parent opening the door, not being able to see anyone and returning inside.



However, when autistic people were asked to perform the same task, a variety of responses were derived. One man said that the box represented a prison, and when the door opened the triangle had the chance to escape, but the other triangle outside was keeping guard.

How is this interpretation any less valid? The concept of master narrative is undercut by Derrida's argument that nothing can signify itself because everything is defined differentially; meaning always lies beyond the text, somewhere absent; there can be no single story.

Frith interviews Simon Baron-Cohen, a leading researcher in the field of studies into autism, who suggests that the Autistic Spectrum is a like a ruler going



from 0-150, with a graph showing the population's scores when asked questions relating to autistic traits. Most neurologically typical people when assessed, he argues, will get a score of around 25 - therefore it is not that they will have no autistic

traits. The diagnosis is given, he maintains, not relevant to how many autistic traits are present, but based upon how far these traits pose problems in everyday life. Surely this then suggests that the concept of autism is subjective?

I would like to take some time here to examine new developments in the field of prenatal testing for autism. The University of Tartu published research in the

*Journal of Molecular Genetics and Genomic Medicine*, detailing a new method of testing entitled Chromosomal Microarray Analysis (CMA) on 1191 patients in Estonia, examining whole genomes for genes which code for autism. They found, in two sets of experiments, 32% “abnormalities” and 24% respectively. The research was undertaken, in prenatal cases, by extracting DNA from amniotic fluid, chorionic villi or cultured cells. However, there was not a 100% success rate which suggests the science is not exact. Only 60 fetuses were actually tested, which is not sufficient to pertain to conclusive evidence. Furthermore, they were only able to make diagnoses in 15% and 10% of cases. They analysed all “abnormalities” present; even those which overlapped with a disorder’s genomic region, in addition to the genomes which had a gene from a known disorder. They admitted the results of this had “unclear clinical relevance” and that the method of testing had “outpaced our ability to understand their role in disease”, suggesting that scientists are not yet able to determine whether the “abnormality” will develop into disease.

Exempting for the sake of time, the debate over whether the term “disease” is appropriate to autism, (they tested for autism alongside illnesses like Klinefelter’s Syndrome even though autism is not life-limiting), it seems CMA testing opens the doors to the abortion of babies: first which they do not even know will have autism due to the lack of understanding of its development (the fact that in children it is often not diagnosed until 5 years of age is testament to this); second that one cannot determine through testing the severity of autism; third when whether abortion on the grounds of autistic traits should be undertaken at all is under intense debate. Although Boseley argues that testing will be undertaken in order that parents with a risk of having a child with autism might better prepare for that eventuality, most of the cases where a diagnosis was made resulted in the termination of pregnancy. And yet everyone has heard of Einstein and Curie; but who has heard of the scientists undertaking these experiments? Surprisingly, although expressing misgivings, Simon Baron-Cohen says with regard to the abortion issue, only a small percentage of children born with autism have phenomenal talents (*The Guardian*). Yet is this not true of most other people in society? Showalter argues diagnosis “depends on narrative” (24) and autism is thus the imposition of a narrative label which questions what these people can give to society, when society ought to question itself. This is

not a debate over whether the issue of abortion is right or wrong but over discriminating the nature of the child born.

Moreover, Couser argues, that since the Autistic Spectrum is so vast and so undefinable, 20% of our population display traits (602). What would be the long-term repercussions of reducing genetic diversity to such an extent for the human race? Mutation is what science argues maintains the process of evolution, keeping the human race from extinction. Perhaps I am not qualified enough to express an opinion on the subject, however I argue that scientists could learn something from the autobiographical literature of people with autism; a tolerance of professionals which Luke expresses the desire to induce in *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome*.

Indeed, perhaps science has also outpaced its ability to reconcile itself with humanity. We must ask ourselves whether the word "advance" can continue to signify progression, without being dragged back by a weight 48 million strong. What fills one with foreboding is the fact that the BMA intimated their desire for people to be forced to have prenatal testing, so as to introduce drugs which block over-exposure of testosterone to the foetus, which has been linked with autism (*The Guardian*). MMR was linked to autism, until it was discovered that Wakefield had falsified information for financial gain, taking common cases and asserting a link with little scientific evidence. As a result, the number of people preventing their children from being vaccinated and the prejudice which ensued was so great that we now no longer have herd immunity against MMR (BMJ), as the recent cases of mumps at the university are testament to.

It is clear then, that society has a long way to go before autistic people are accepted as individuals and are given equal representation in narration. Literature such as *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has gone some way towards raising awareness, however the only true representation, (if truth is a concept which exists), is that of the individuals themselves, who must be seen as individuals rather than as representative of “autistic”. Many analogies have been employed to explain how the Autistic Spectrum works. Simon Baron Cohen’s graph is too linear a representation for me. Some have suggested an equalizer, with each dial representing different traits; a person may have different levels for each trait. A definitive understanding of autism is and will remain as far away as ever despite narrative inscription. What is certain though, is their visions, intelligence and personalities are brighter and more colourful than many people can ever have imagined. Perhaps Luke’s own analogy however, is best to employ; he describes everyone with autism under a multi-coloured umbrella, however no analogy is ever really fit to describe any individual, as “some people are being rained on harder than others, and that doesn’t really happen with an umbrella”.



### Works Consulted

Boseley, Sarah. “Is Autism Screening Close to Reality?” *The Guardian*. The Guardian, 2009. Web. 07 April 2014.

“Chromosomal Microarray Analysis as a First-Tier Clinical Diagnostic Test: Estonian Experience.” *Molecular Genetics and Genomic Medicine*. N.p, 2014. <<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mgg3.57/abstract>>. Web. 07 April 2014.

Couser, Thomas. “Disability, Life Narrative, and Representation.” *MLA* 120.2. (2005): 602-6. Web. 07 April 2014.

- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Maryland: John Hopkins U P, 1976. Print.
- Godlee, Fiona. "Wakefield's Article Linking MMR Vaccine and Autism was Fraudulent." *BMJ*. British Medical Association, 2011. <[www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c7452](http://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c7452)>. Web. 07 April 2014.
- Haddon, Mark. *A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. London: Random House, 2003. Print.
- "How Many People have Autism?" *Ontario Adult Autism*. Ontario Adult Autism Research and Support Centre, N.d. <[http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/how\\_many\\_people.shtml](http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/how_many_people.shtml)>. Web. 07 April 2014.
- Jackson, Luke. *Freaks, Geeks and Asperger's Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002.
- "Living with Autism." *Horizon*. BBC. London. 10 April 2014. Television.
- Picoult, Jodie. *House Rules*. Hodder and Stoughton, 2010. Print.
- Ray, Sarah. "Normalcy, Knowledge, and Nature in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33.3. (2013): 1-13. Web. 07 April 2013.
- Showalter, Elaine. "On Hysterical Narrative." *Narrative* 1.1. (1993): 24-35. Web. 22 May 2014.
- "What is Asperger Syndrome?" *The National Autistic Society*. The National Autistic Society, 2014. <<http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/autism-and-asperger-syndrome-an-introduction/what-is-asperger-syndrome.aspx>>. Web. 07 April 2014.

# ***“The Doubting Dane”: The Deconstruction of the Danish Identity in Kongens Fald***

**Sophie Worning**

*“Vejen bøjede tilvenstre over en Bro og ind gennem Serritslev By; Grøfterne laa med mørkt Græs og gule Smaablomster, ude over Markerne hvilede hist og her en hvid Blak, en Blomstertaage, i Skumringen. Solen var gaaet under, og Luften stod kølig klar, skyløs men uden Stjerner.” (1)*

Already from the opening lines of “Kongens Fald”, or “The Fall of the King”, by Danish author Johannes V. Jensen, the tone is set for the rest of the novel. A dark and starless twilight landscape unfolds on the page, indulging the reader in what is to come – a story of decay and decline, as is already apparent in the title of the novel. Jensen published his seminal novel in three parts between 1900 and 1901, succeeding the romantic and nationalistic literature which was the staple of the 19th century in Denmark, from renowned poets such as Adam Oehlenschläger. For Danes, the 19th century was seen as a “Golden Age” of literature, with the main authors chiefly looking back on Denmark’s former greatness, due to a period of economic hardship and territorial losses to Germany and Norway, instead drawing inspiration from the Viking Age and the great kings of the past. However, “The Fall of the King” directly challenges the perceptions of the Danish national identity which were prevalent at the time, and shatters any conception of national pride a Dane could expect to have. The critique of Denmark’s supposedly “great” history is not a subtle element in the novel; on the contrary, the novel focuses on the anti-hero Mikkel Thøgersen and his relationship to the dissolute King Christian II.

The novel begins with Mikkel’s wanderings through Copenhagen, around the years of the end 1400s, where a fateful meeting with the German soldier Otte Iversen will change the course of his life. Mikkel is madly in love with the Jewish girl Susanna, but is too meek to ever approach her, instead resorting to voyeuristic spying. The charismatic Otte, though engaged to an acquaintance of Mikkel’s, the girl Ane Mette, also becomes infatuated with the seductive Susanna, leading them to a short-lived love

affair, which is abruptly halted when Susanna gets arrested for adultery, and after being treated to public humiliation in a pillory, she flees town, now pregnant with Otte's child. When Mikkel realizes the cause of Susanna's demise, his descent initiates; sworn on revenge against Otte, he rapes Ane Mette, and runs away from Copenhagen to join the young King Christian II.

This ends the first part of the novel, cementing the connection between Mikkel and the King; yet their first meeting was earlier in a bar in Copenhagen. Here, Mikkel seems almost enamoured with the handsome King, the narrator saying "*han blev varm [...] rørt og urolig*" (14), meaning that Mikkel becomes flushed and excited when seeing the King. Especially the mentioning of the shared trait of flaming red hair between the King and Mikkel shows the physical connection between them which lasts throughout the novel. Their red hair and pale skin seems to reverberate the colours of the Danish flag – white and red. This detail lays the foundation of the novel's nihilistic view on the Danish identity, that the characters in the novel representing Denmark (the King formally, and Mikkel through his story of demise) are also the most corrupt and cruel. The trail of rape and murder that subsequently follows them throughout the novel reflects Jensen's sentiments on the supposed "greatness" of past Danish culture.

The one event in the novel, based on a historical occurrence, which truly shapes the demise of both the main characters, and also of Denmark itself, was the so-called Stockholm Bloodbath of 1520. The massacre took place after a violent invasion of Sweden by Denmark, due to Sweden's unwillingness to stay in the Danish-dominated Kalmar Union between the Scandinavian countries. Though amnesty for the Swedish noblemen and clergy had been promised after the Danish seizing of Stockholm, Christian II decided to bypass the decision, ending in the execution of more than 80 Swedes (Poulsen 101), making the streets flow red with blood. This unnecessary act of violence against the captured Swedes becomes the downfall of King Christian II, ending in his own people turning against him and imprisoning him in a castle in Southern Jutland for the rest of his days. The trigger for his imprisonment, other than the Stockholm Bloodbath, was a particularly unsuccessful attempt at making a decision of whether to sail to Jutland to continue negotiations, or flee back to Copenhagen, endlessly sailing between the cities of Middelfart and Snoghøj (161) until the sun rises, before making up his mind.

The King's inability to make a decision shows Jensen's greatest contempt for the Danish people; namely, their infinite aptitude to doubt. When the King is torn between the two destinations, his doubt leads him into a frozen state, where no decision can be made at all. Mikkel shares this same trait with the King, the excessively pensive disposition which removes him from action. The antithesis to Mikkel and King Christian II in the novel is Axel. Axel is the bastard son of Otte and Susanna, and is so thoroughly impulsive that he appears to merely be a fleeting image. Running to and fro on romantic affairs with beautiful girls, Axel lives a free and wild life, ignoring any negative consequences his actions might cause. This sort of behaviour stands in stark contrast to Mikkel's brooding character. When Mikkel discovers that Axel is in possession of a treasure map, his lust for wealth ignites, and when Axel innocently promises to share his treasure with Mikkel, but not divulge its location, Mikkel's vengeful side also surfaces. In a bout of anger, Mikkel thrusts his sword through Axel in a field, leaving Axel to die alone. Though this may appear a tragic end for Axel, his flighty personality allows him to enter death "alive", as is written on p. 152: "*Saaledes døde Axel levende. Som Sne der smelter. Han levede sig ind i Døden, [...] det var ikke svært at dø.*" This quote compares Axel's death to melting snow, and explains that it was not difficult for him to die, due to his personality being so closely tied to the cyclical structure of nature. He lived and died without regrets, showing that Axel does not share the characteristic of agonising doubt with Mikkel.

When Mikkel is dying of old age later in the novel, he desperately does not want to die. Instead of the blithe attitude Axel had to life and death, Mikkel clings on to the meagre scraps of existence he has left. The unnatural and stale life Mikkel has been confined to, is not what Jensen imagines life to be; for him, life is the constant willingness to die in order to fully appreciate life, and Mikkel's crippling doubt prevents him from doing so. One of the most famous quotes from the novel explains that "those who do not die each day shall never live" ("*Den der ikke dør hver Dag, skal aldrig leve. Men Mikkel havde aldrig villet dø*", [217]), and Mikkel's stark unwillingness to die, though having led a life of pain and regret, shows that he has never actually lived. If Mikkel, and the King who suffers from the same unwillingness to unite with the continual life and death of nature, is a representative of the Danish people, Jensen truly attacks the sense of pride a Dane might have had about their "heroic" past. The legacy of degenerate bastard children left behind by Mikkel and the King's illegitimate affairs, does not show a positive imagination of Denmark's future

either. These children are Ide and Carolus, both severely crippled, Ide being both deaf and mute, and Carolus being especially revolting with his putty-like brain spilling over his brow. To imagine that the future generations of Danes descended from these children is not a particularly blissful thought.

Though it would have been easy for Jensen to merely suggest that Denmark's past was not ideal, he also ventures to say that Denmark's future is equally bleak if Denmark is to remain a country of doubters, rather than emulating Axel's impulsive, yet free, behaviour. Furthermore, the novel ends on a significantly desolate note, with Ide's companion Jacob Spillemand, a travelling bard, hanging himself after performing an ironically gleeful ditty. As we have seen from these characters, Jensen's view on the Danish nationalism is not an approving one, instead portraying Danish history as a continuing cycle of failures and weak leaders, who did not, metaphorically, have the strength to die each day, and thus could never live.

#### **Works Consulted:**

Bækgaard, Jakob. "Johannes V. Jensen – *Kongens Fald*". Litteratursiden.dk. 2010. Web. 19 June 2014. <[www.litteratursiden.dk/analyser/jensen-johannes-v-kongens-fald](http://www.litteratursiden.dk/analyser/jensen-johannes-v-kongens-fald)>.

Jensen, Johannes V. *Kongens Fald* [The Fall of the King]. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag A/S, 1916. Print.

Poulsen, Jens Aage. *Det Historiske Overblik* [The Historical Overview]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal Uddannelse, 2013. Print.