

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND  
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NATIONAL TAIWAN UNIVERSITY

# Project +

OCTOBER 2021 ISSUE

WOMAN AND MADNESS



# Project + October 2021

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## On the cover

Morgan Le Fay  
painted by Pre-Raphaelite painter  
Frederick Sandys  
1864

Source: Unsplash

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# WOMAN AND MADNESS

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# EDITORS' NOTES

**Quorra Lu, Karen Dellinger, Alison Chen, Sonia Chang**

The 17th issue of Project + examines the notion of mad women in literature and film.

The newsletter includes an interview with Dr. Yi-cheng Weng on female madness, an overview of the COEDA conference recently hosted by National Taiwan University, the poems “The Woman” and “淵,” and, lastly, a movie review of The Mad Women’s Ball (2021), a film analysis of The Bird’s Nest (1954),

## **Interview: Dr. Yi-cheng Weng**

For this issue’s faculty interview, we are treated to Dr. Yi-cheng Weng’s discussion of the “mad woman” archetype, with a focus on her research fields: British literature, the Gothic, and women’s fiction. She unpacks the complex, provocative trope of the madwoman, including stereotypes regarding gender and mental health, and how they play into larger themes of containment, boundaries, marginalization, and transgression. Dr. Weng also proposes some directions for examining this trope in the future, and how themes that were highly prevalent centuries ago continue to hold relevance today. Finally, she shares some personal book recommendations, should we want to explore this theme for ourselves.

## **2021 COEDA Conference**

We are proud to report this year’s COEDA conference was hosted by our own department here at National Taiwan University. In this article, we detail the events of the entire day and reveal all the insider information: From the preparations starting from a year ago, to the panels and discussion of the conference.

## **“The Woman”**

The poem celebrates one of the most unforgettable characters in the BBC series Sherlock: Irene Adler, commonly known as “The Woman” or “Dominatrix.”

The poem concentrates on her intelligence, audacity and strategic skills, which she exhibits in a world dominated by powerful men as well as in her brilliant match against the Sherlock brothers and the entire nation of Great Britain.

### **凋 (The Withering of Us)**

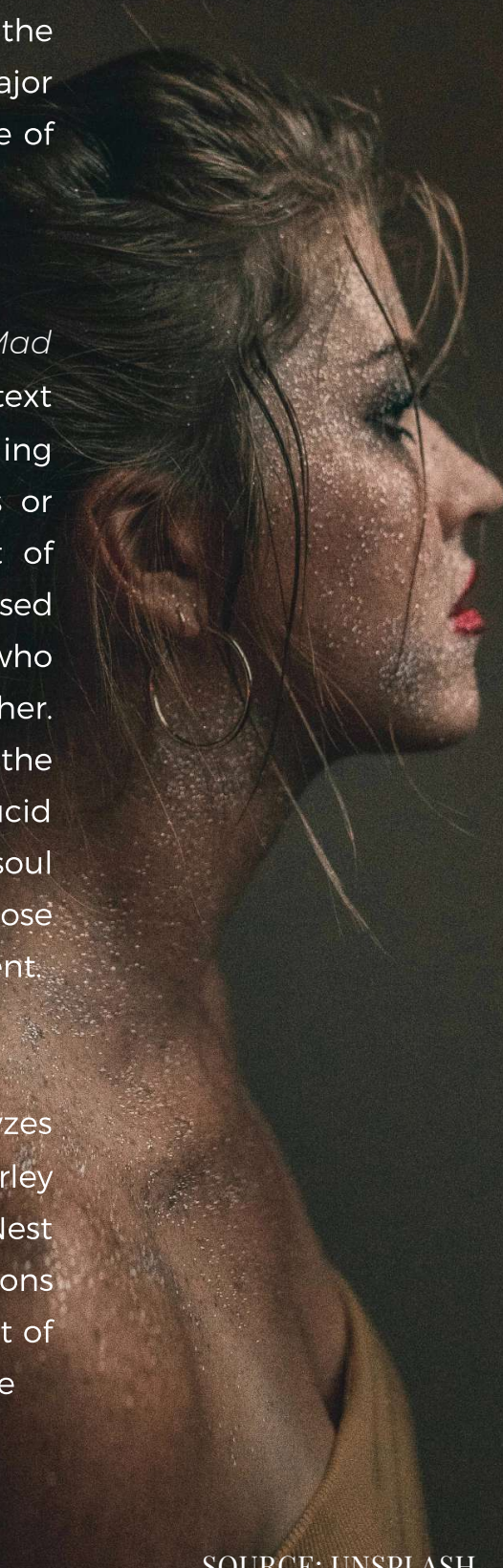
“凋” is a feminist, transformative reworking of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Intertwined with the songs sung by Ophelia in Act 4 Scene 5, this piece explores Ophelia’s tragic story from the perspective of a flower. Both marginalized by major discourses, the pansy laments their impotence in the face of a cruel fate.

### **The Mad Women’s Ball**

This review of the French film *Le Bal des Folles (The Mad Women’s Ball)* centers on how madness is used as a pretext to avoid and punish socially undesirable women, including those who suffer from psychological or physical illness or those disobedient to patriarchal authority. The pursuit of freedom, which is another theme of the film, is also discussed through the perspective of the protagonist Eugénie, who rebels against the restraints that patriarchy imposes on her. The climax, the annual Mad Women’s Ball, tears up the hypocritical split between the so-called lunatic and the lucid minds. With the progressive exploration of body and soul throughout the film, the ending provides answers to those who desire to fly away yet are bound to worldly confinement.

### **They All Took One and Left Four In**

The article “They All Took One and Left Four In” analyzes the portrayal of dissociative identity disorder (DID) in Shirley Jackson’s lesser known psychological thriller *The Bird’s Nest* (1954), referencing psychiatric and psychological descriptions of DID and comparing them to Jackson’s fictional account of a young woman who suffers from this condition. The article



discusses Jackson's depiction of DID's symptoms and manifestations, the possible origins of DID for the protagonist(s) Elizabeth (a.k.a. Beth, Betsy, and Bess), and the ethical implications of "integrating" a patient's individual identities in order to cure her. It also seeks to shed more light on *The Bird's Nest* as a work of fiction, arguing that it deserves much more attention for its innovative narrative techniques and for defining the multiple-personality-thriller archetype. While it's now often overshadowed by Shirley Jackson's more well-known Gothic horror novels, it's well worth a read.

We would like to express our gratitude for the support and advice of our professors and peers. Firstly, we thank Professor Hsin-ying Li, the head of the Department, Professor Shan-yun Huang and Professor Manuel Herrero-Puertas, editor consultants, for their suggestions and comments. Also, thanks to Dr. Yi-cheng Weng, whom we've interviewed, and Teaching Assistant Xin-ping's provision of help.

Enjoy the 17th issue of Project +!

October 2021



# PROFESSOR INTERVIEW: DR. YI-CHENG WENG

INTERVIEW BY KAREN DELLINGER

Q1: Could you please briefly introduce your research fields, your favorite experiences at/aspects of NTU/DLL, and anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

Of course. I am committed to widening the field of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies, and advancing our understanding of the period's exuberant literature and culture. My doctoral study lays the foundation for my ongoing fascination and interest in women's writing, in particular the peripheral. It really set me on my way. I hope to integrate more interesting work into the purview of literary studies of this period.

Recently I published an article on the mechanisms of celebrity and the logics of celebrity culture in the eighteenth century. It considers the rise of celebrity and the environment in which women's bodies were consistently sexualised in this period, and examines the process of cultural intermediaries, gendered concerns about celebrity. I am also interested in the interplay between literature and visual culture in Britain in the last two decades of the eighteenth century (roughly 1780-1800), in particular the ways in which visual images translated concepts such as female authorship, agency, and subjectivity at a time when women's public profile was relatively

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constrained. I am currently carrying out a research project on Sino-British relations in the early 1800s. The surge of research addressing Sino-British cultural exchange and its implications in recent years has been invigorating and extensive. I want to bring to fore new questions about British preoccupation with China in the early nineteenth century, and offer a more nuanced understanding of the interlocking issues raised during my research.

Q2: This issue's theme is female madness and transgression, a topic that has been at the center of much discussion and controversy for several centuries. The trope of the madwoman has long been a loaded symbol of sexist societal anxieties, or alternatively, of female liberation and subversion. What are some instances within the Romantic and Gothic subgenres that you find interesting and pertinent to this trope? How do you think this theme gets explored (or exploited) in literary, artistic and cultural discourses?

The representations of madness or female insanity can be identified in literary texts across periods and areas. Women who have strayed away from conventional roles and gender norms are consistently associated with madness in texts of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many cases, female insanity is closely linked with the condition of women, sending out messages that women were fragile and need to be contained and controlled. On one hand, women's imprisonment in domesticity (or in marriage) can be viewed as their subjugation and submission to patriarchy and social norms. There seems to be no space for women's emotions, weakness, and madness in society. On the other hand, women's escape into madness can be seen as their navigating a way to tell stories and be released from patriarchal constraints. In their famous *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that women

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writers in this period consistently portrayed female characters as insane as a way to show resistance. One particularly rich field of analysis is the relationship between women and mental disorder, bodies and minds. In the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- centuries contexts, madness and morality are closely brought together in discussions.

Some of the novels that portray madwoman in this period include works by canonical writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Brontë, and Walter Scott, and also those by marginalised writers such as Lady Caroline Lamb. For example, Wollstonecraft's unfinished novel *Maria; or, the Wrongs of Woman* (1798) portrays a woman imprisoned in an asylum by her husband. Insanity and madhouse are important elements of Gothic literature, and are usually gendered. The Gothic mode and elements were employed particularly by women writers to show social injustice and to explore themes such as female insanity, gender norms,

patriarchal constraints, and the female body. Notable examples include Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853). Female madness continued to fascinate later writers who followed the lead of their predecessors and used the Gothic mode as a means of articulating the relationship between gender and insanity. The depictions of Gothic madwoman in literary texts show different constructions and understandings of femininity and to some extents reflect women's own sense of confinement and their lack of autonomy. Gothic literature continues to blur our understanding of the boundaries between sanity and insanity, and the constantly shifting definition of madness.

Q3: With the growing prevalence of discourses surrounding both gender equality and mental health, stereotypes about gender roles and mental health issues are still present but are being tackled and dismantled by those who seek to spread awareness. How do you see the theme of female madness and

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transgression developing in the future? Do you think the trope still holds a subversive power and influence in our time?

For me, one of the most important, or should I say, rewarding, things about literary studies is to understand how literature accommodated diverse and sometimes conflicted ideas and promoted women. In the past few decades, the study of women has received increasing attention and shaped scholarly approaches to the literary landscape. Female insanity can also be seen as a way of responding to the idea that women were defined and controlled by men and subject to patriarchal rule. Scholars have shown the ways in which women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found ways to voice their opinions and, in a way, free themselves from social constraints and gender scripts.

One of the ways we could do in the future is to look at the theme of madwoman and the representations of female insanity in literary texts that have been neglected or marginalised,

and to engage with more works from other areas (non-European) on a worldwide scale. In addition, in order to understand the current world and the twentieth century, it can be very helpful to look back in time. In terms of where to go in the future, I believe that literary studies can show us the way. So it is important that we continue to explore the theme in literary studies, for there are questions that still need to be answered. Further exploration of textual representations of female madness across periods and in different areas, as well as how madness continued to be gendered in literature and popular culture, can help us know more about the shifting relationships between gender, class, stereotypes, and society from earlier periods to the contemporary era.

Q4: The concept of transgression implies boundaries or entrapment, either physical, mental, or societal. What are your thoughts on the presence or collapse of boundaries that continue to influence people today (particularly women) as they navigate

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their familial or professional roles? Do you believe the Gothic aesthetic and tradition has the potential to speak to modern anxieties and address contemporary issues despite its roots in the Romantic tradition?

That's a good question but very difficult to answer. Experiences (especially those of different periods and cultures) can be incredibly different from one another. As a Taiwanese scholar studying British Literature, I find that Romantic literature offers windows into other lives and experiences. Research on Romantic tradition and literature teaches us how to look at our modern world with a different eye and from a distance.

Studying literature of earlier periods (in my case, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), you can never be sure if you have understood what the writers want to pass on through their writings and how this can be linked with contemporary issues we see in the world today. A lot of what bothers and haunts us in our current political and

social state can in fact be traced back to a sense of the relationship between women and society, which was revealed in encounters with other forces (nationalist, political, and cultural). So there are more things to say about female madness, transgression, and resistance if we can trace them back to their forms in earlier periods. One reason I've hung on to women's writing so tightly is because of its diverse, rich, and fluid texture. The field today includes different genres and art forms from both the canon and the margins. Through the lens of literature, we can identify and appreciate the expanding literary criticism surrounding the issues that are paramount to our current world.

Q5: Finally, we'd love if you could share some of your favorite books, poems, or films that incorporate the themes of female madness into their narratives, regardless of genre or style. Our readers are always interested in good recommendations! Thank you so much for your time and thoughts!

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I've been reading some good works by scholars of women's writing, mostly historians and literary critics. A few books I always want to return to are Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*. Both examine and experiment with different models of madness. One thing I have learned and understood is that literature can speak to people across disciplines and outside academia. It allows people to hear other stories and to make sense of their own feelings and experiences; it also encourages us to think beyond the limitations of our own perspectives and explore other possibilities and ways of interpretations.

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# COEDA 2021

Alison Chen

**READING**

**HEALINGS**

**WRITING**

**CURES**



COEDA 2021  
National Taiwan University

<https://sites.google.com/view/coeda/2021-coe-conference/2021-program>

24 SEPTEMBER 2021

9:00 - 17:00

On Cisco Webex

COEDA (Coalition of English Departments in Asia) holds an annual conference for graduate students of five universities: Seoul National University, The University of Hong Kong, National University of Singapore, The University of Tokyo, and National Taiwan University. Participants exchange ideas and present their research. The fourth annual COEDA conference was hosted online by National Taiwan University on September 24th, 2021. The theme of this year's conference, "Reading Healings, Writing Cures," focused on the healing and curing potential of literature and cultural studies during these turbulent times.

## Preparation

Under the guidance of Professor Ming-Tsang Yang (Hamilton), Professor Yashih Liu (Sophia), and Professor Lilith Acadia, the graduate student team of the organizing committee was formed in November 2020. The team was composed of graduate students who had previous experiences: Yu Xuan Chong, Ker Hsu (Constance), Ning Lee (Rebecca), Wan-Tsz Wu (Vanessa) along with newcomers Ron Chang (Sonia) and me.

Considering the ongoing pandemic and building upon the theme of “Writing in Times of Crisis” from Singapore’s conference last year, the graduate student team proposed several themes relevant to the current era. Every graduate student in the NTU Foreign Languages and Literatures department got the chance to vote for their preferred theme and eventually decided on “Reading Healings, Writing Cures.” We were excited to explore how both reading and writing literature could potentially heal. Additionally, we were eager to learn more about interdisciplinary approaches that combine health discourses with cultural studies. Our Call-For-Papers was therefore designed to include all fields within the five English depart-

ments: literature, linguistics, and cultural studies. In May 2021 we were delighted to receive a diverse variety of paper proposals, ranging from nineteenth-century British novels to modern theatre in China.

Due to the nationwide Level 3 epidemic alert, the rest of our preparation meetings were held online. The circumstances also gave us a chance to test different video-conferencing software and troubleshoot any problems before-hand. Many hours were spent familiarizing ourselves with the pros and cons of various software options.

## Conference

Due to its online format, the conference lasted only one day with two simultaneous panels in each session and three sessions in total. Asian English and postcolonialism remained prominent areas of discussion during the opening remarks. There were six one-hour panels in total: “History of Crisis: Colonialism and Reconciliation,” “Accounting for Crisis: Language and Form,” “Words in Motion: Art, Theater and Performance,” “Refuge out of Bound: Gender and Sexuality,

”“Class, Capital, and Countryside: Revisiting Nineteenth-Century British Novels,” and “Reading Beyond Anthropocentrism, Beyond the I.” Each panel had three to four presenters and one moderator, with each paper being presented for roughly fifteen minutes and followed by a Q&A session at the end. Each panel counted more than twenty participants, including professors and students from every school.

### **Graduate Roundtable and Professionalization Workshop**

In the afternoon, the conference had two roundtable discussions, one for the faculty and the other for the graduate students. As the moderator of the Graduate Student Roundtable Discussion, I had an enjoyable time coming up with topics for discussion. We talked about our research topics, with PhD students giving advice to first-year MA students, and our lives during the pandemic. It was comforting to know that we are not alone in our struggles, and even in these turbulent times there are still ways we can connect with and help each other.

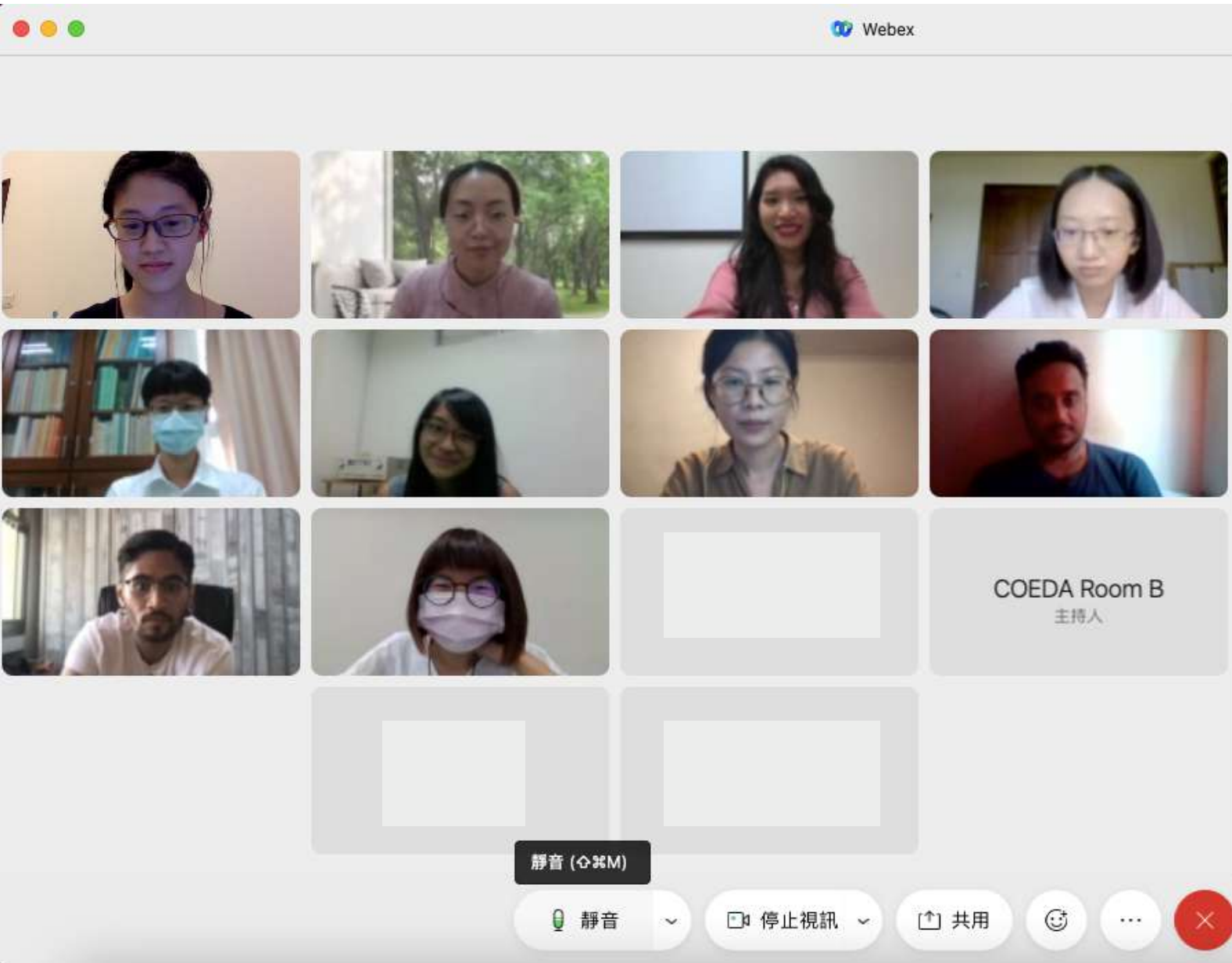
The packed day ended with a professionalization workshop held by Professor Lilith Acadia, with topics ranging from personal branding to time management.

Organizing and attending the COEDA conference was an incredibly rewarding experience. I am very grateful to have had such an opportunity. Everyone was incredibly supportive and encouraging. I highly recommend COEDA to graduate students who aim to broaden their horizons.

For more information on this year's COEDA conference, check out our website:

<https://sites.google.com/view/coeda/home?authuser=0>

## Graduate Roundtable Group Photo



"As the moderator of the Graduate Student Roundtable Discussion, I had an enjoyable time coming up with topics for discussion. We talked about our research topics, with older Ph.D. students giving advice to first-year MA students, and our lives during the pandemic. It was comforting to know that we are not alone in our struggles, and even in these turbulent times, there are still ways we can connect and help each other."



# THE WOMAN

Quorra Lu

A single figure, she strides on the path of peril,  
On bed of danger, in darkness, in the world of men;  
As passionate roses grow on thorny way, blaze a trail of her own.  
Fatal secrets surrendered under the whip of Dominatrix,  
One side power and fortune, the other eternal doom.  
Crimson smile, raven locks, formidable grace,  
She walks in with daring manner and enchanting confidence.  
The game begins, with love and trickery, snares the innocent man,  
Bewitches the clever detective in a funny hat.\*  
Sensual sighs on the phone, unanswered dinner dates,  
A seductive yet enigmatic shadow dwells in the virgin's heart.  
The promise of love, the pain of lost, the joy of redemption,\*  
An act to bring the scheme to completion;  
Last piece of puzzle to dance on, to the hall of destruction,  
The dominatrix who brings a nation to its knees.  
One step, one move close to success, a game nicely played, lost.  
She loses at the irresistible sentiment, a chemical defect found on the losing side.\*  
Betrayed by her uncontrolled heart,  
Eventually locks herself in the elaborated plot.  
The Woman, a salute to the respectable foe,  
The well-matched game comes to closure as the last note fades.

\*: lines quoted from the BBC series Sherlock, A Scandal in Belgravia

# 凋

## The Withering of Us

By ALICE TSAI

死寂的花園裡，那日迴盪起空靈悲傷的歌，音符擊在瓣上，使我渾身一顫——多麼哀婉的旋律。

*He is dead and gone.  
He is dead and gone.  
At his head a grass-green turf.  
At his heels a stone.*

歌聲越來越響，年輕婀娜的身影朝我走近——她的皮膚好白，白似遠方山頭的積雪，我看見精緻的五官、彎彎的柳葉眉、密密長長的睫毛，和柔美的輪廓，只是薄薄的嘴唇沒半分血色，空洞的眼中時不時滴出淚，沾在我的苞葉上，冰冰涼涼，像秋日清晨的露。

唱完一曲，她將我從花叢中摘起，口中呢喃：「三色堇……象徵情思。」

她沒有錯認。我是一株三色堇——澆灌我的人是如此說的，一株河畔上隨處可見，凋萎了也不會有人注意的三色堇。

被強行摘離土壤，失根之後，壽命想必剩下不了幾天，而我竟不覺得悲哀。如果這份死亡無人哀悼，我似乎也不認為，自己需要對這份生命留戀珍惜。或許能在美人掌中凋謝，對三色堇已是極大的尊榮。

少女將我捧在胸前時，我彷彿能聽見她心裡的声音，看到她腦海中的畫面，一些反覆迴轉糾纏的，將她推入瘋狂的經歷。

「這代表記憶。」她摘起一束迷迭香，讓青綠的葉子和我擠在一起。

*Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day.  
All in the morning be time.  
And I a maid at your window.  
To be your Valentine.*



「不要懷疑我的愛」，她正想起男子富有磁性的溫柔聲線；「你不該相信我——我不愛你」，同一個男子，語氣突然又變得殘酷決絕——她是帶來不幸的蕩婦，該滾去尼姑庵或妓女戶；美麗與貞潔不可並存，標緻的容貌將使她變得姦淫，並使愛她的男人變成怪物——曾對她吐訴愛語的俊美男子，這樣對她罵道。

原來美麗善良的女人，不必然受到情人的珍愛，就如花園中最美的花，也可能一世受不到人們駐足觀賞，得不到半句關愛的話語，便在荒煙蔓草中寂寞凋零。

但少女魂牽夢縈的愛人，若曾對她付出過真情，又為何要背叛她？是怪罪她羞紅臉收下深情的書信，卻不多做回應嗎？女性的矜持、父兄的告誡，使她不敢對尊貴的王子展露熱情，便因此怪她嗎？他的瘋狂，是因為她的拒絕，或是什麼理由？我問迷迭香，但他的記憶裡，沒有問題的答案。

不可輕信男子的誓言！對方想要的恐怕僅是肉體而非靈魂，雙方的愛意，或許都是一時慾火焚身，是被對方清秀的容貌迷了心神——她的父兄曾如此諄諄告誡。

*Then up he rose, and donned his clothes,  
And dugged the chamber door.  
Let in the maid that out a maid  
Never departed more.*

迷迭香和我都看見了：俊秀的愛人將她辱罵一番後，不過數日，便躺在她腿上看戲，少女怨他話鋒犀利，而他戲言：「要讓這犀利退去，夠你浪吟一陣了。」像是又一次被對方的言辭破去處身，滾燙的熱度燒上她的面頰和身體，為什麼聽聞父兄教誨後、被這愛人狠狠羞辱後，淫穢的笑話仍能勾起歡喜而非憤怒？

她感到羞恥，而羞恥最終成為了愧疚。愛人最終將劍犀利地，刺進她父親的心——她是這樣聽說的，那可怕的畫面，我們都不願去想像，但幻夢之中，彷彿有鮮血的噴泉從老人的胸口湧出，淹沒了她最後的理智。



愛人的瘋因她而起嗎？不知道。愛人是因為她才殺死她的父嗎？不知道。愛人真愛過她嗎？不知道。悲劇有她的責任嗎？我不知道，迷迭香不知道，她更不知道。

*By Gis and by Saint Charity,  
Alack, and fie for shame!  
Young men will do't if they come to't  
By Cock, they are to blame.*

重來一次，是否能改變什麼？我們都想知道。迫於父親的壓力，只能拒絕王子的示愛——至少表面上如此。王子瘋狂後，也只能照父親寫的劇本，前去試探愛人，然後一切都會走向同一個結局。

如果只有這條路，難道就能怪父親咎由自取？還是怪愛人心臟過於脆弱，竟會瘋狂著殘殺父親的性命？


*Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me,  
You promis'd me to wed.  
He answers: 'So would I 'a' done, by yonder sun,  
An thou hadst not come to my bed.'*

但她不能怪他們：愛人是高貴的王族，父親更是不可違逆的。也許她該更貞潔、該更常待在閨房中，最初就不該勾引曾經優異聰敏的王子——處女對月展露美貌，就足夠被安上誘惑的罪名。所以她的下場，便如歌謠中失貞的女子，被殘忍地拋棄，甚至賠上父親的性命。

所以是她的錯嗎？不知道，但或許，搞不好。

*White was his shroud as the mountain snow,  
Larded with sweet flowers:  
Which to the grave did go  
With true-love showers*





死去的是誰，是嚴厲的父親，還是情郎的愛？她唱着歌曲，微笑着看向我，笑裡沒有一絲喜悅，微風幾乎將我吹離她的掌，也彷彿要將她吹倒在地。

*His beard was as white as snow.  
All flaxen was his poll.  
He is gone, he is gone. And we cast away moan.  
God ha' mercy on his soul.*

用歌聲為父親靈魂祈禱著，但她自身的安寧也已死去。我想為她祝禱，但我白中帶紫的花瓣，更已染上枯萎的褐色。我只能靜靜陪伴，讓她輕柔地撫摸，承載她落下的淚。

微不足道的花草，注定是個旁觀者，而不是參與者；不曾期待能改變什麼，不曾有情，甘於小配角的宿命，或許就不會失望。哪怕三色堇象徵著情思，有情也不過徒添蕭索，我已想得太多、感嘆得太多，無能作為的草木該像迷迭香一般，沉默背負記憶，無思無想，沒有不甘、沒有怨言、沒有控訴。

如果她是一株迷迭香，或許就不會陷入瘋狂，既然同是隨風擺盪的宿命。

少女遠在異鄉的兄長接到消息回國，懷著一腔憤怒的熱血，想要拯救美麗的妹妹，想為一切討回公道，於是他想出惡毒的計畫，要用沾了劇毒的劍殺掉仇人，殘殺妹妹曾經的愛人。

兄長的選擇是那麼的理所當然，但妹妹的心該向哪一邊呢？向著兄長，便背叛了愛情；向著愛人，便背叛了家庭。

*They bore him barefaced on the bier.  
Hey, non nonny, nonny, hey, nonny.  
And in his grave rained many a tear.*

是給父親的葬歌，或給自己的安魂曲？眼淚似要匯成溺人的川。

一雙美眸似乎比從前更空洞，膚色也更蒼白，年輕善良的女孩，該唱浪漫美好的歌，而非痛苦哀戚的旋律。我們相遇至今，她從不曾笑得開懷，慣穿的洋裝一直這麼寬鬆嗎？

過往恍若困於枷鎖，甩去鏽鏽的今日，雪色的衣裙猶如此沉重，素白一如父親的屍衣，一如愛人的臉色。衣衫吸取透明的河水，波光粼粼中，長長的金髮散成扇形，與片片花瓣相依著，載浮載沉——我的身軀支離破碎，卻感覺不到痛。

迷迭香已然漂往遠方，她的歌聲還在持續，但越來越弱、越來越弱。花開花落，又有多少個誰，能將生命活至燦爛處？無人會認為，花草擁有怨嘆生命不公的資格，她的一生卻與我如此相似。旁人的同情擁有限制，哪怕流淚悲嘆他者的凋亡，若她終於將壓抑的怪罪傾洩而出，或許也無人願意承擔。

一部分的我被魚蝦吞食，一部分的我沉入河底的土中，一部分的我則附在她衣襟上，伴隨她入了棺木。恍如己在世間輪迴無數次的命運，我們無能改變自己的悲劇，花期尚未結束，而我們已一同凋零。



# LE BAL DES FOLLES THE MAD WOMEN'S BALL

Quorra Lu

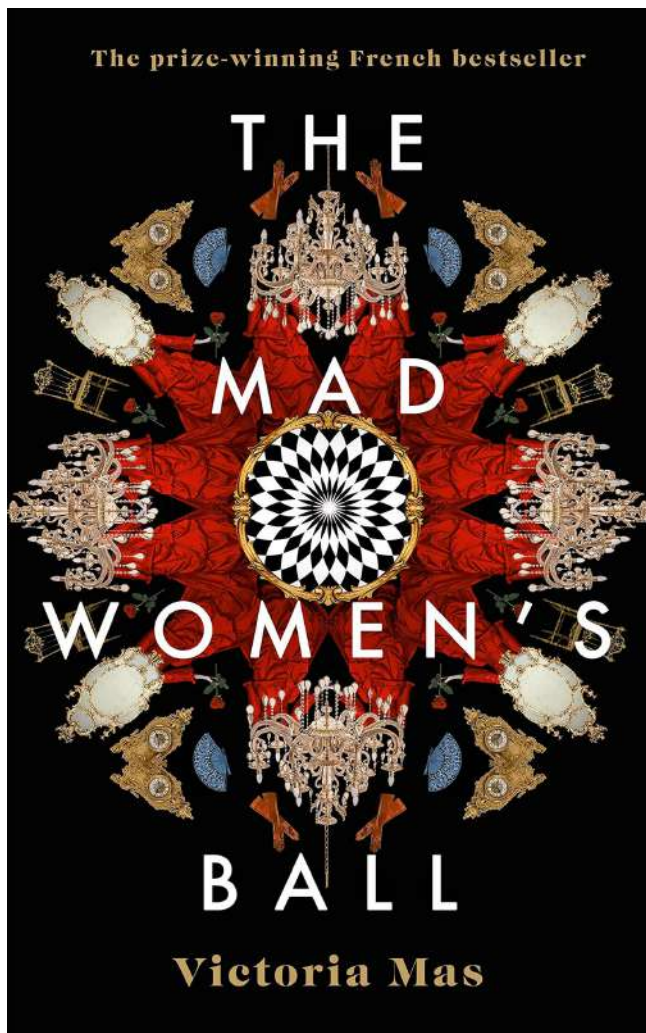
« Il y a dans l'homme trois choses :  
1° le corps ou être matériel analogue  
aux animaux, et animé par le même  
principe vital ; 2° l'âme ou être  
immatériel, Esprit incarné dans le  
corps ; 3° le lien qui unit l'âme et le  
corps, principe intermédiaire entre la  
matière et l'Esprit. »

-- Le Livre des Ésprits

Adapted from Victoria Mas's historical novel *Le Bal des Folles* (English translation: *The Mad Women's Ball*) published in 2019, the same-titled film, directed by Mélanie Laurent, tells a story of freedom and friendship between Eugénie, a passionate, intelligent, and unyielding young woman, and Genevière, a foe turned friend.

Set in 1885 Paris at the time of Victor Hugo's death, the story follows Eugénie Cléry (Lou de Laage) a well-educated lady of an upper-crust family in Paris who possesses an unspeakable superpower to communicate with the spirits, which is at once a curse and a gift that frightens her from time to time.





A rebellious and enthusiastic heart lies beneath her beautiful and calm appearance. From her conservative father's perspective, Eugénie's yearning for knowledge and daring manner are unladylike and constantly bring disgrace and embarrassment to his reputation. She would go to Montmartre alone against her father's orders and question the lady who might be betrothed to her older brother on the meaning of the debutante ball. In Eugénie's eyes, as a social ceremony, this ball is more akin to a marriage market where young ladies are dressed as goods and sold to the highest bidder. Her fierce interrogation demonstrates her resistance to leave her life and future to anyone's mercy.

Eugénie brings back a life-changing book from her trip to Montmartre: *Le Livre des Eesprits (The Book of Spirits)*, from which she learns to reconcile with

her superpower, finding comfort and companionship in facing spirits. "Men is made of three things. Firstly, the body, the material being, similar to an animal and animated by the same spirit. Secondly, the soul, the spirit that the body contains. Thirdly, the connection between body and soul." (Translated from French to English by Amazon Prime's subtitles.) Eugénie starts to consider the spirits less as ghosts that haunt her from the grave but as souls of people who require assistance or desire to deliver a message to the living. However, her frightened reactions to their appearance are deemed craziness and intolerable by her father, who sends her with indifference and cold blood to La Pitié Salpêtrière Hospital, an infamous madhouse under the rule of Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot, who is a real historical figure with a celebrated reputation for his achievements in neurology.

Upon being committed to the psychiatric asylum, Eugénie is examined by the head nurse Geneviève, who concludes that she is indeed in good health, an ironic remark against her claimed sickness. Moreover, Geneviève responds to her attempts to assert her lucidity by explaining that, at home, Eugénie's life is in her father's hands, while now she is at the mercy of Dr. Charcot. In other words, Eugénie has never been given the power to speak her own will but has to submit to male authority.

In the film, the psychiatric ward, a large white room where female patients are settled, is called *dormitory* by Geneviève, showing that, in her opinion, these women are humans who suffered from mental or physical misfortune rather than being *crazy* as they are often thought of. Unlike ward scenes in many other films, those patients seem rather calm and are not hostile to the newcomer; little hysterical shouting or fighting are displayed on the screen. According to Louise, one of Eugénie's room-



mate, there is always a story behind everyone admitted to La Pitié Salpêtrière. Apart from visible psychological or physical disabilities, many are thrown behind bars for their family's convenience, families who show little interest in their madness or the horrid causes behind their abnormal behavior. For example, Louise herself is gotten rid of by her aunt because of her resistance against her uncle's intended rape, which also triggered her epilepsy. In an interview at Toronto International Film Festival, director Mélanie Laurent talks about her discovery of those women's conditions when reading Dr. Charcot's medical record for the preparation of the film. In the background setting of the story, "any melancholic woman was considered mad," Laurent told the interviewer. Madness was a convenient diagnosis for mental or physical illness such as hysteria, egomania, or epilepsy, as craziness was easily labelled on a woman who was furious about being raped or underwent a crisis, according to the interviewee.

Throughout the film, making the spirits only visible to the protagonist is a clever design utilized to leave the audience wondering whether Eugénie is delusional or mad as others think or whether something exists beyond the vision of ordinary human eyes. Eugénie refers to them as spirits rather than the dead, regarding them as souls of people who have transcended worldly constraints—not just corpses. She refutes the diagnosis of psychological abnormality on the grounds that seeing spirits is analogous to mortal humans seeing God; however, the former results in being committed to a madhouse while the latter is considered a miracle.

Eugénie's ability to communicate with the spirits is the turning point for her relationship with Geneviève, who is regretful for losing her younger sister in an accident. Eugénie asks Geneviève's assistance in her escape, in return promising her a chance to communicate with her sister. Unsurprisingly, her request is denied in the first place. Even though Geneviève is sympathetic to the girls' suffering, she is dubious about her power and the prospect of the prison break; she thinks Eugénie will, like herself and other patients, gradually assimilate to the environment. Nevertheless, Eugénie's thirst for freedom is unceasing and unstoppable. In her eyes, Geneviève sees the inextinguishable fire of freedom and passion that will not succumb to any authority. Eugénie's firm and contagious belief in personal, female freedom eventually persuade Geneviève to aid in her escape.

*Le Livre des Esprits* plays an important role in the transformation of the relationship between Eugénie and Geneviève, who later comes into possession of this book from Eugénie's brother. It brings not only peace of mind to Eugénie, but also Geneviève's acceptance of the existence of spirits and Eugénie's superpower. Throughout the book, they learn that, although their material being is confined to earthly matters and mortality, inside this literal madhouse or in this mad, unjust world, their mind and soul ultimately resist incarceration.

The film culminates in the annual party known as The Mad Women's Ball, where patients are dressed in colorful costumes as if they were circus animals while be-



ing put on display as Dr. Charcot's medical achievements and peculiar objects of entertainment for aristocratic guests.

As the introductory speech by one of the doctors indicates, these patients are no longer considered to be human beings when admitted but emotionless objects for examination and study. On the dancing floor, the mad mingle with the sane; as Geneiève says, "Il est bien difficile, Jeanne (Geneiève's enemy), de savoir qui est fou ce soir. (It is hard to know who is mad tonight.)" The scene unveils the artificial separation between lucidity and mad-ness, the latter legally used as an excuse to shun away and to punish socially undesirable women. The night is also when Eugénie's brother and Geneiève arrange for Eugénie's escape. Even though Eugénie has suffered inhu-

mane treatment and imprisonment designed to drive people mad in La Pitié Salpêtrière, she has never given up the hope for freedom and the belief that she is not to be caged. As they are one step away from liberty, Geneiève scarifies and surrenders herself to the guards to earn them more time to escape. She says her last words to Eugénie with a relieved smile, "Je suis libre. Je suis libre." ("I am free. I am free.") She understands that though they can lock her up in this psychiatric asylum for good, they cannot incarcerate her mind and soul. As Eugénie's secret letter to Geneiève in the final scene tells, she is with her and vice versa, for their souls know no earthly bounds.

Le Bal des Folles tells an affecting story that bears a modern meaning, despite its setting in the late 19th century. People

are inclined to believe appearances and established knowledge instead of inquiring about the truth or more profound causes that lie underneath. The clear distinction between the mad and the sane is blurred on the annual ball when the hypocritical facade of those who claim a moral high ground is shattered. Furthermore, to some extent, the spirits in the story represent the boundary of our knowledge as well as our fear and reluctance to acknowledge such a limitation. Eugénie's arrival at La Pitié Salpêtrière reveals that the label of mad woman is not only reserved for those of lower social class but use to condemn whoever is disobedient to patriarchal laws and authority. The distinction between body and soul and the union of the two bring hope for those whose worldly beings are in confinement

; the body might be caged, but the soul and mind can never be barred.

**Interview source:**

<https://www.filmink.com.au/melanie-laurent-the-spirit-of-the-mad-womens-ball/>



KAREN DELLINGER

# They All Took One and Left Four In: The Portrayal of Multiple Personality Disorder in Shirley Jackson's *The Bird's Nest*

*"Elizabeth, Elspeth, Betsy and Bess,  
They all went together to seek a bird's nest.  
They found a bird's nest with five eggs in,  
They all took one, and left four in."*

Few literary genres fascinate and frighten as deeply as the psycho-logical thriller, and few authors are more skilled at creating unsettling mind-benders than Shirley Jackson, a proven master at crafting suspenseful, unnerving atmospheres with deceptively simple language. Somewhat overshadowed by her numerous Gothic horror and mystery stories, Jackson's lesser-known novel *The Bird's Nest* gives an absorbing account of a young woman's life with multiple personality disorder. With the appropriate use of multiple narrators, the novel vividly explores her imbalanced,

shattered mind as well as the effects of her condition on her personal relationships. Though certainly not the only work of fiction to feature the theme of mental illness, *The Bird's Nest* is remarkable in its own right for creating the model for the multiple-personality story as well as its ingenious narrative structure (Coates). Upon approaching this story, the most pressing question is whether the depiction of multiple personality disorder, now more commonly referred to as dissociative identity disorder (DID), is accurate. This question can be discussed from three perspectives.

Firstly, let us examine how *The Bird's Nest* depicts the symptoms and manifestations of DID. One of the main points of criticism the novel received was that the various personalities were too simplistic. Elizabeth Richmond, a plain, timid orphan girl living under the care of her aunt Morgen, is discovered to possess three additional personalities: the sweet, affection-craving Beth, the childish, impertinent Betsy, and the bossy, self-absorbed Bess, who is under the impression that everyone is out to rob her of her inheritance. With the drastic differences and total shifts in persona, the multiple personalities living within Miss Richmond may seem more like sketchy caricatures than a complex web of identities woven together.

In reality, people diagnosed with DID seldom manifest such sudden, obvious twists in personalities. Most of the time, “switching between alters can’t be identified by a casual observer at all” (Peisley). It can be seen, therefore, that this aspect of the disorder is much exaggerated in *The Bird's Nest*. As psychiatrist Dr. Wright administers hypnotic therapy to Elizabeth, his description of his first encounter with Betsy, or “R3,” as he labels her, is lurid enough to leave a lasting impression on the most passive, unengaged of readers:

...and as I watched her in horror, the smile upon her soft lips coarsened, and became sensual and gross, her eyelids fluttered in an attempt to open, her hands twisted together violently, and she laughed, evilly and roughly, throwing her head back and shouting, and I, seeing a devil’s mask where a moment before I had seen Miss R.’s soft face, thought only, it cannot be Miss R.; this is not she. (Jackson 49)

The author has evidently taken the liberty of hyperbolizing the symptoms of multiple personality disorder for the sake of dramatic effect.

As for the origins of Elizabeth’s condition, however, it seems that Jackson incorporates some truth into her narrative. While the precise cause of DID is widely debated, the majority of patients have experienced some form of trauma or stress in their early childhood (Spiegel et al.), including abuse or neglect from someone close to them. “In an attempt to cope with the traumatic experiences...the child ‘dissociates’ – it splits itself into parts” (Young). The fracturing of identity is a coping mechanism that enables the child to survive difficult experiences and carry on with life. Throughout *The Bird's Nest*, it is implied that Elizabeth has been the victim of abuse and neglect. When Betsy runs away from home to search for her (long deceased) mother in New York City, she experiences flashbacks of a man called Robin, with whom her mother was romantically involved. Betsy recalls overhearing Robin openly voice his hatred of Elizabeth. Though Betsy makes herself believe that her mother loved and defended her, she cannot fully remember just how her mother responded. Robin may have been the perpetrator of both physical and emotional abuse in the early stages of Elizabeth’s life, thus playing a part in triggering her mental condition. In addition to this vague memory, Aunt Morgen, who bears a strong grudge against Elizabeth’s mother, reveals that her sister was always frivolous and irresponsible, at one point even describing her as a “brutal, unprincipled, drunken, vice-ridden beast” (Jackson 178).

Elizabeth was presumably the victim of maternal neglect, and it is even suggested that Elizabeth might have been responsible for her mother's death, physically attacking her in a fit of rage brought about by this neglect (Rubenstein 313-314). In this aspect, the depiction of multiple personality disorder is engaging and interesting without compromising accuracy. Jackson "persuasively portrays the disintegration of Elizabeth's personality into four distinct and partial 'selves,' which act out either excessive concern with good behavior or the guilt and rage she feels toward her unavailable mother—feelings that the previously undissociated Elizabeth has repressed" (Rubenstein 314).

But the most fascinating part of the story is undoubtedly Elizabeth Richmond's recovery, i.e. the integration of Elizabeth, Betsy, Beth and Bess. The novel ends with the successful solidification of Elizabeth's personality, and she announces that she is quite happy, despite confusion regarding her past life. What significance does the integration of multiples hold, in real life cases and in this work of fiction? A prevailing question concerning DID is whether "curing" it, or eliminating multiple persons in the process of combining them into one, is an act of homicide. Dr. Elyn Saks states that there appear to be several reasons the answer is negative:

First, doctors cannot integrate multiples without their consent, so doctors are not committing homicide, but at worst assisting in suicide, when they integrate multiples. Second, the term "homicide" may refer only to the act of depriving a human body of life—turning a live human body into a corpse; and doctors do not do that when they integrate multiples.

Finally, multiples' alters are preserved in a new form when they are integrated: union does not mean death. (173)

However, she goes on to say that the above arguments are not necessarily sound. For example, assuming the "alters," i.e. the other identities, have the capacity to consent and it is indeed an assisted suicide, the crime in question is still a very serious one (174). Moreover, "alters undergo drastic changes when integrated with other alters" (175).

In a very real sense, we lose many unique individuals when multiples are integrated. Thus integrating multiples is more like combining ingredients to bake a cake...and if we value eggs in their unmixed state, mixing them with sugar and butter may well be to commit "egg homicide." ...The elimination of a unique locus of consciousness is a loss to the bearer of that consciousness herself, even if the locus acquiesces...Thus integration is clearly homicide (or some equally serious crime) if the alters are persons. We will not punish doctors who treat multiples successfully, however, if the homicide is justified. (175-176)

Therefore, in a sense, the successful recovery of multiple personality disorder inevitably involves the homicide of unique beings. This seems to be sufficiently conveyed in *The Bird's Nest*, in which "Jackson's solution to the problem of personal integration...illuminates the predatory element she identified within family relationships" (Rubenstein 314). Dr. Wright expresses this sentiment toward the end of the story, saying that every life "asks the devouring of other lives for its own continuance; the radical aspect of ritual sacrifice, the performance of

a group, its great step ahead, was in organization; sharing the victim was so eminently practical” (Jackson 254). This rather “invites comparison with the laws of the jungle—‘eat or be eaten’” (Rubenstein 314); Elizabeth herself concludes, with a somewhat inexplicable gaiety, that she has “[e]aten them all” (Jackson 238). Jackson adheres closely to reality in this aspect, perhaps in order to create a sense of unease. The apparently satisfactory conclusion to the novel is only achieved through an act of sacrifice; homicide is the necessary evil that makes a peaceful resolution possible.

This inevitable slaughter leaves the reader slightly disturbed. It is even uncertain as to whether Elizabeth’s recovery is permanent. Have the identities sharing Miss Richmond’s body truly been consumed for good, or is this merely a deceptive calm before they are resurrected in a more tumultuous relapse? Under the happy ending of *The Bird’s Nest* lies yet another Shirley Jackson trademark: a mystery that is almost intangible yet none the less unsettling.

A novel, or any work of fiction, eschew representing the world with absolute accuracy per se and instead reveal something else about reality by telling a story that is moving (or, in Shirley Jackson’s case, disturbing and thought-provoking). While *The Bird’s Nest* does contain exaggerations and twists just like most other works that portray mental illness, the misleading exaggerations that Jackson creates for the sake of a good story are more than made up for by her brilliant, appropriate use of the truth. Besides its groundbreaking role in establishing the multiple-personality archetype, *The Bird’s Nest* is worth celebrating for the quality of the narrative itself. It showcases Jackson’s genius as brilliantly as her other more well-known works, and certainly deserves as much attention.

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# RECENT EVENTS

## 客座講座

- 日期：11/7 (日)
- 主講者：Prof. Dongshin Yi (Seoul National University)
- 主題：To What the Bell Tolls: An Ethics of Indifference for Human-Animal Relations

## 第二十六場尖端講座

- 日期：11/9(二) 10:00-12:00
- 主講者：David T. Goldberg (Professor, Comparative Literature, School of Humanities, University of California, Irvine)
- 主題：未定 (預定談他的新書The Futureless Future)
- 主辦單位：國立臺灣大學人文社會高等研究院
- 合辦單位：國立臺灣大學外國語文學系
- 主持人：廖咸浩 (國立臺灣大學外國語文學系特聘教授)
- 地點：文學院2樓會議室+YouTube線上直播串流  
(視疫情調整)

## 第二十七場尖端講座

- 日期：11/23(二) 10:00-12:00
- 主講者：Alain Brossat (Professor emeritus at the department of philosophy of Paris 8 University)
- 主題：未定 (預定談Fake Bilingualism)
- 主辦單位：國立臺灣大學人文社會高等研究院
- 合辦單位：國立臺灣大學外國語文學系
- 主持人：廖咸浩 (國立臺灣大學外國語文學系特聘教授)
- 地點：校史館外文系會議室+YouTube線上直播串流  
(視疫情調整)

## 第二十八場尖端講座

- 日期：12/3(五) 15:00-17:00
- 主講者：梁孫傑 (國立臺灣師範大學歐洲文化與觀光研究所教授、中華民國比較文學學會理事長)
- 主題：未定 (預定談Finnegan's Wake及翻譯倫理)
- 主辦單位：國立臺灣大學人文社會高等研究院
- 合辦單位：國立臺灣大學外國語文學系
- 主持人：未定 (因講者主題和愛爾蘭文學有關，希望能邀請相關研究領域的教授主持)
- 地點：文學院2樓會議室+YouTube線上直播串流  
(視疫情調整)



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