



Post-Postlude: A Study on Second-degree Metaphors

To be read, if at all, only after you have enjoyed Haldon Lockly's Postlude. This article unashamedly contains spoilers.

*If they can get you asking the wrong questions,
they don't have to worry about answers.*

VP Joe Biden, quoting Thomas Pynchon

Death will be the least of your problems.

Generic movie villain

It is a truth universally acknowledged –and by universally I mean of course in our ever expanding solipsistic bubble of western tradition– that a society with an abundance of stimuli will develop a certain kind of fascination for a few of them, a fascination that at first glance seems inexplicable, at second glance leads to a shallow explanation and at third glance can produce an in-depth critique of modern culture (or civilization, if you want to take it that far).

Haldon Lockly's *Postlude* is “moving both with and against the wind”, trying simultaneously to work along the current paradigm and subvert it in a meaningful way, turning away from a tongue-in-cheek, easy, self-referential postmodernism that has lost its bleeding edge. The themes that *Postlude* deals with are the great problems of our era, internal or external: capitalism and its cogs of varied significance, inequality and hierarchy, egocentrism and loss of individuality. However, the fascination referred to above is, in this case, one that will easily be recognized: undead.

It is not difficult for anyone remotely connected to pop culture to see the signs of this infatuation everywhere. Movies lock a group of youngsters in malls or typical English neighbo(u)

rhoods and have them battle hordes of menacing, mindless creatures, the same hordes that video gamers all over the world kill by the millions in single-player, co-op, or multiplayer campaigns (the latter having the added advantage that they allow you to actually be one of the horde – a braindead version of “we are legion”). Universities, or, rather, student bodies, organize marches where gruesome red, green, and brown makeup predominates; and if you find yourselves at a progressive (read: lax, not that there's anything wrong with that) college, they might allow you to battle it out with nerf guns – a physically harmless, child's version of paintball guns; you'll see these colleges mostly, if not exclusively, in the US. But if you ask yourselves why it is that the social narrative has embraced and integrated this phenomenon, the first explanation you'll probably come up with is that there is no guilt in killing that which is already dead and inherently evil¹. Our violent tendencies are liberated without the remorse or fictitious consequences that facing imagined, yet realistic, people could bring forth. But that's just scraping the surface; on

¹ Inherently evil alone can work as well; it is no accident that in the recent past it was Nazi soldiers that gamers all over the world killed guiltlessly.

a deeper level the hordes of undead or infected are nothing but the mirror of modern man who, outliers notwithstanding, is not necessarily indoctrinated, but at least limited within a debate that, according to Chomsky, defines a very narrow space where he can live and act. Mindlessness comes from asking the wrong questions, not knowing what the right questions are or not asking questions at all.²

In order to fully grasp the scope of *Postlude*, one needs to get past the seemingly Kafkaesque atmosphere of the beginning (the protagonist's conversation with personnel is reminiscent of Joseph K.'s inability to find out anything about why he's on trial when dealing with bureaucrats), which is, rightfully so, put aside in the second half, and delve into the heart of what it means to be a person-within-society, a nightmare that is potentially harder to stomach than Kafka's worlds, not because the Prague author wasn't innovative or a literary mastermind, but because his creations have entered, and been misunderstood by, the collective unconscious. And that's where the second-degree metaphors come up: what is usually reserved as a comment on the, say, current situation, is taken literally and at face value within Lockly's fictional world, only to be used both as a critique of modern living and as a lament on ostensibly serious, deeply rooted within realism, literature. Lockly isn't afraid to tackle genres and styles, movements and eras, to come up with something that will work as an axe which breaks the frozen sea within us (to stay with Kafka imagery).

One could go on about the protagonist's torment; he descends to the hell that is undeath, only to briefly realize that he is not alone. His either metaphorical or literal –let us ignore for a minute that we are reading fiction– condition is shared (or starting to be shared) with an increasing number of people, whose voices are heard at the fringes of the story, exiled there because of a reluctance to shift the point of view, a reluctance that is not the author's but the hero's, since even in his calamity he wants to be (or has been led to believe that he is) the center of the world. However, that which is the outer limit for him, that which is occasionally waved off as a fantasy without importance, is strategically placed in key positions within the book to take away some of his credence and give it to the voices, real or otherwise. They are the homeless, the illegal immigrants, the factory workers, the social security beneficiaries; in other words, the preterite, those who are passed over and neglected, used and

forgotten. The protagonist is unable or unwilling to represent them, they can't represent themselves; a divine intervention appears to be necessary for the job to be done, but is that what we get? The problem is that the definition of the preterite keeps expanding, keeps adding new groups and classes until it engulfs (in proverbial flames, probably) those that are in part, albeit unknowingly, responsible. The reader will need to face a chicken and egg problem here, not unlike the one that the protagonist himself has to deal with, an illusion and a delusion respectively.

Postlude is demanding, there's no doubt about that. It's not *Finnegans Wake*, though it does require a certain familiarity with various languages to be totally understood (let us say that the corner of Trotard does not have to allude to Goddard). But it does belong among the avant-garde of literature; it has tried to do things and not just say them, the "show, don't tell" doctrine faithfully followed with few, if any, compromises.

Georgios Maragos

Georgios Maragos has a PhD on Thomas Pynchon from Panteion University, and that supposedly qualifies him to write about Postlude.

Haldon Lockly's *Postlude* is now available from Pilotless Press
www.pilotlesspress.com/postlude.html

² For a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, along with other useful observations, see Kostas Kaltsas' essay in www.thezone.gr "Welcome to the Zone: 'Crisis', 'Catastrophe', 'Apocalypse' and the Unevenly Distributed Future" (Source in Greek). Unfortunately, going into detail on the issue would mean to risk falling into a feedback loop.