

‘Being International?’ Edith Campbell Berry’s Geneva in Frank Moorhouse’s *Grand Days*

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Can one be an *insider* in international affairs—or does being international condemn one to a kind of permanent outside, even within one’s original nation?

This question may not be at the top of most people’s list of priorities, unless you are Edith Campbell Berry in Frank Moorhouse’s *Grand Days*, his novel from 1993 set in Geneva in the 1920s—or me as a Dane teaching anglophone postcolonial literatures in present-day Geneva. For Edith it is an urgent matter of identity; for me more an intriguing balancing act where identity (which I really don’t understand or approve of, anyway) for all practical purposes gives way to finesse. Or for both of us, a balancing act of survival in a situation where inside and outside are completely imbricated in each other, yet still active as opposites.

Geneva, I would argue, in Moorhouse’s novel, as well as in my life, is more than a backdrop to this, as the seat of the League of Nations or the second seat of the present-day United Nations (which officially divides its work between New York as the site of peace-keeping and Geneva as the site of peace-making). In his portrait of Geneva in *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace*, Moorhouse seems to have intuited something about the place that none of its detractors from Joseph Conrad to Graham Greene or its admirers from Jorge Luis Borges to John Berger¹ have quite caught: that Geneva never made it into the nineteenth century, into nationalism; it is neutral even towards the rest of Switzerland; and its hard-fought² accession to the Helvetic Confederation in 1815 was above all to avoid becoming part of France. The official letterhead still reads ‘*République et Canton de Genève.*’ The Musée International de la Réforme next to Calvin’s cathedral interprets humanitarian internationalism as the natural destiny of this remnant of ‘*la France protestante*’ or ‘Protestant Rome’ (as English-speaking visitors described it in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries): it is a destiny that leads from the Red Cross through the League to the struggle against Apartheid.

Three of the few monuments which the gloomy Cathédrale de Saint Pierre allows inside bear powerful testimony to this: the oldest is to the Duke de Rohan, would-be Huguenot King of France, who sits enthroned in his chair looking at the crown out of his reach on the floor. Another Australian literary visitor, Les Murray, after I took him there, in his poem ‘Visiting Geneva’ interpreted this as a sign of the aristocratic pretensions of Calvinism, since Murray of course just happened to know the Duke’s motto: ‘*Roy ne puis, sujet ne daigne*’ (‘I cannot be a king, I scorn to be a subject’) (Murray 2010, 55). But it could equally be read as republican pride, the transformation from subject to citizen (so important to the proud, but often unwelcome ‘*citoyen de Genève*’ a century and a half later, Jean Jacques Rousseau) as an individual’s quasi-theocratic refusal to submit to temporal authority. This seems to be the Genevan civic reading if it is combined with two plaques on the same side of the nave: first the plaque in which the ‘extinct’ republic is said, in almost medieval rather than Calvinist fashion, to legate its spirit to the Church and then, in apostolic sequence, the plaque commemorating the first ecumenical service held in the Cathedral after the Second

World War, in the shadow of the horrors of the War and the Camps, and in the presence of both Martin Niemöller and Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury. The plaque for this service seems to lay the foundations of Geneva becoming the seat of the World Council of Churches, which combines all the protestant and orthodox churches not owing allegiance to Rome—the ecumenical against the universal.

Geneva is thus historically, by default almost, an *international* or *cosmopolitan* space, not to be confused with *multicultural*—which Geneva is not, if by multicultural one means composed of a number of visibly different, exotic cultural identities, which inhabit distinct areas of the city. When Geneva divides itself, it is between *Genève Internationale* on the Right bank of the Rhône and Geneva ‘proper’ on the Left bank. Moreover, *Grand Days* and *Dark Palace* and their heroine, I would argue, clearly see ‘international’ as different from ‘cosmopolitan’; it is the ‘international’ dimension that Edith explores in *Grand Days*. In *Dark Palace* a more mature Edith has more or less slipped into cosmopolitan mode, which perhaps is the only way to live comfortably in the *inter*.

The *inter* in *international* embodies an inside/outside dilemma, a membrane that is both national, inter- and intra-subjective. This is a membrane that the new *transnational* paradigm sweeps aside, with its apparent claim that human beings can, like capital, transcend the national, perhaps into those disembodied flows the Marxist geographer David Harvey has analysed so well. Is this where we will go when we transcend an outdated legal, political and mental topology of the world that is still predominantly *inter*-national?

An *international* world order was ensconced in the twentieth century in the United Nations, which even more forcefully than its predecessor the League of Nations posits *nationalism* as the global norm—as opposed both implicitly and explicitly to *empires*, which had been the norm of the nineteenth century, indeed throughout most of history since the rise of state civilisations. Burbank and Cooper in *Empires in World History* (2010) have argued for a kind of cyclical struggle between nations and empires as one of the driving forces of history. Burbank’s and Cooper’s book is what in political theory would be termed a ‘realist’ answer to Negri and Hardt’s Marxist prophesy of the inevitability of *Empire* (2000)—which even sceptics noted was fulfilled by the Iraq invasion of 2003. The conflict then all of a sudden was not between nations, but whether the Empire was the United States or the United Nations. The distinction between civil wars and wars between nations seemed to have disappeared.

In their book, Negri and Hardt recovered the work of the Austrian-Jewish constitutional theorist Hans Kelsen (from 1932 a refugee in Geneva and from 1940 in the US), whose thoughts underlie the United Nations, but who already in the 1910s and 20s, with a point of departure in the First World War, had argued the need for a supra-national ‘State of Rights,’ a little like an Enlightenment version of the Holy Roman Empire. In some ways this has become as much a practical as an idealistic vision. On the one hand no empire has ever been as globally dominant as the US, and globalisation and transnationalism may easily be unmasked as American imperialism; on the other the US, perhaps one of the most ideologically nationalist state formations ever, refuses to see itself as an empire (as Burbank and Cooper note) and seems endlessly fearful of sometimes almost chimerical alternative empires like China, Russia and Da’esh/ Islamic State. The US needs the UN and the liberal international world order it embodies for its own justification—and that of the transnational corporations. Yet by the time of the Snowden revelations it was clear that, because of advances in technological surveillance, the twin supports of the liberal international world order

had broken down in all but a crucial conventional sense: national sovereignty as defined by the Treaty of Westphalia (when President Obama can know from wiretaps of her private *handy* whenever Chancellor Merkel makes plumcake for her husband, Germany no longer has national sovereignty in any meaningful sense) and the relative opacity of the mind of the individual citizen for the state, which is the foundation of human rights (Google, Amazon and NSA computers can probably predict every word I write).

What will be the next turn of the screw—and who will it kill? Burbank and Cooper, in their account of ‘the repertoire of Empires,’ note how Empires throughout history have created classes and ethnicities of ‘*go-betweens*,’ who then become the victims of genocide by resurgent nationalisms, which cannot deal with ‘*in-betweens*.’ What of the *go-betweens* of internationalism?

In this essay I want to turn my attention back to a time when *being international* was trendy, as it was when Edith Campbell Berry arrives in Geneva in the early 1920s to take up her new position in Internal Administration at the League of Nations (note the double *inter*!). Internationalism then commanded, as Moorhouse shows with his peculiar mix of irony and nostalgia, much more idealism than in its successor organisation, the UN, built more on geopolitical necessities than ideals. Early on in the novel Edith is sitting in an outdoor café in the Old Town in Geneva trying to experience what it feels like to be international:

She’d attended Professor Zimmern’s lecture that week on International Man and had no doubt that was what she was becoming. She was an international man, or at least, an international woman in training.

She believed that she and the others at the League were a new breed dawning . . .

Sitting in the outdoor café . . . on a spring afternoon in Geneva, wondering if she would be mistaken for a woman from a *maison close*, Edith tested herself to see if she indeed felt international, in any bodily way perhaps, and this was not so silly, whether she was different in style of movement from, say, those at the other tables. She moved her mind to an expression of resolution, cleared her mind of self-consciousness and when her mind had settled to blankness, she let it pounce on herself. She then looked to the paws of her mind to see whether any signs of transformation had been caught by the pounce. She found nothing in the paws of her mind. Though surely such a change in the national sense of oneself and the detaching of oneself would mean a difference in the way she carried herself. Didn’t ministers of religion move in ways different to laymen? Didn’t royalty move differently? Didn’t sporting people? Surely, then, an international civil servant also comported differently.

For instance, if one were skilful enough, strangers could be detected by the way they comported themselves in an unaccustomed environment. An internationalist would never be a stranger, would belong everywhere, and yet would neither be a person attached to the soil upon which they walked. (Moorhouse 1994, 74)

Now, it would be a mistake to see Edith as naïve: ‘Of all things I hate being naïve,’ she says (Moorhouse 1994, 318). What she is doing is transferring the claim of nationalism to *an identity of*

mind, body and territory to the new international identity. This of course she cannot find, despite her diligent application of a rather predatory version of Buddhist meditation technique. She does find in herself the beginnings of a certain cosmopolitanism (drinking Italian-style coffee while reading French literature), but this appears trivial compared with what she is searching for. She also considers that diplomats representing their own country on foreign soil probably provide a better model for internationalist comportment than that original ascending hierarchy of clergy, royalty and athletes. But what kind of country is the League and how does she represent it? 'She had been straining,' she later realises, 'to become part of a lofty international community, a world of essentials and high procedure' (Moorhouse 1994, 184). And later again she asks herself, 'Had she come to Geneva to escape the 'real world' of her own country?' (Moorhouse 1994, 233) Throughout the book runs this questioning of the identitarian and the essential (which here appear somewhat opposed), not theoretically (Edith, though a natural theoriser, has read neither Foucault nor Butler), but experientially, and the answers or reformulations she develops are endearingly *ad hoc*. Moorhouse of course is the canniest of writers, among whose favourite tools are ambivalence and indirect causation.

The direct consequence of Edith exposing herself at the outdoor café in the Place-de-Bourg-en-Four is her meeting with the theatrical (or is it circuslike?) American Captain Strongbow—and her appearance, dressed as a cowgirl, in his parade to promote the creation of an Army for the League and American participation in the League. That the US refused to join the brainchild of President Woodrow Wilson is seen by everyone in the book (and most historians) as the main weakness of the League. Edith's disguised participation in the parade leads her to the political realisation that the international officers of the League often cannot be open about who they are and what they represent, because it may come to reflect badly on, or exercise undue pressure on, the organisation.

Of much more importance to the plot, however, is that her cowgirl costume becomes part of the repertoire of her increasingly cross-dressing sexual play with her lover Ambrose Westwood, an Englishman who had been a medical officer in the First World War. She has met Ambrose on the train from Paris to Geneva, and a discussion on the etiquette of dining cars (can you decently eat soup on a jolting train?) turns to a flirtation, which is continued at the League's premises at the Palais Wilson, where Ambrose works in the *haute direction*. The League is a 'modern' workplace in the 1920s sense, where relatively young men and women work together (though there are not as many women, and only one, Dame Rachel Crowdy, has risen to Head of Section) in an atmosphere of camaraderie and discreet flirtation. This also leads to 'modern' affairs, which develop in unexpected directions, as when Edith begins to wear her cowgirl costume while Ambrose wears her underwear.

Edith's meditation on being international thus feeds into both of those coordinated realms inside and outside of each other in which she comes to explore what she later calls her 'Federation of Selves' (Moorhouse 1994, 294): her work at the League and her sex life. The two are deeply intertwined, most spectacularly in her relationship with Ambrose, but after their break-up, also in a more rigidly limited way with the American journalist Robert Dole. She accompanies Ambrose to the Molly Club, heart of the transvestite underworld of Geneva, where she comes to experience how other aspects of her world, mind and body can be turned inside out. She feels on her own body the rise of fascism during a raid by a group called *Action Civique*: finding her a 'real woman' they start molesting her. This is just after she 'saves the honour' of the Deputy President of the government of Azerbaijan in-exile by slapping one of the *Action Civique*, who, acting like a police

force have become violent against Mr Huneeus and tried to deny him the right to be in Switzerland. Mr Huneeus, in gratitude for her gallant act, renames one of the rivers in his country the River Edith, to come into effect when Azerbaijan is freed of the Soviet yoke. Perhaps this is what being international really means: Mind, body and nation are still involved but no longer identical as the sides of an isosceles triangle, as they are in nationalist identity. National territories are in the mind, and the bodies and compartments of men and women inverted. Mr Huneeus has originally explained that he comes to the Molly Club not to seek sex, but as an émigré who has lost hope of ever returning to his country: 'I relax in this place because here all is lost too . . . These people are outside of it all, lost from the ordained paths' (Moorhouse 1994, 325).

Being international and sexual heterodoxy have been intertwined in *Grand Days* ever since the first meeting of Edith and Ambrose, where Ambrose makes a number of cryptic remarks about 'sexual borderlands' and the Free City of Danzig, during a flirtation that turns much on Oscar Wilde and his son Vyvyan Holland, an acquaintance of Ambrose's. I do not think it too far-fetched to argue that *Grand Days* shows that *being international is ultimately only possible as a form of cross-dressing*, and I find that a very happy conclusion. Edith speaks of her newfound joy in 'living precipitously,' away from Australia: 'She knew that French culture, or at least Genevan French culture, would shape her, not into a French person, but into a different person.' (Moorhouse 1994, 282) And further: 'Sometimes she wondered whether hidden parts of herself came to express themselves through her use of another language' (Moorhouse 1994, 289).

Edith and Moorhouse get to this point by a national-generic twist that is, as far as I know, unexplored. If Edith is not naïve, it is in large part because she never sees herself as innocent. This is indeed a characteristic of what one might call 'the international theme' in Australian literature, all those Australian writers who have set some or part of their work abroad—to mention just some of the most canonical and obvious in the generations before Moorhouse: Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead, Martin Boyd, Patrick White, Shirley Hazzard. None of them operate with the 'loss of innocence' conceit tied to the critically hackneyed 'international theme' in American literature, from at least Henry James's *Daisy Miller* (1878) onwards (though, admittedly, some of James's later heroines are more ambivalent versions of innocence). Even a superficially (in this sense) Jamesian Australian novel like Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford* (1946) exhibits no loss of innocence: Australian Lucinda fits perfectly into the English upper classes after her marriage because she is a natural aristocrat, in some ways more so than her husband. Or to move to the other side of the social hierarchy, since I have already mentioned him, Les Murray's *Fredy Neptune* (1997): innocence is the least of Fredy's problems; knowledge and knowingness are what brings him into trouble in his attempt to return to Australia. The difference may simply be that, at least until recently, Australians in international affairs could ill afford the 'ignorance of power,' which is the other side of American innocence. In fact, of the list above, it is striking that both Christina Stead and Shirley Hazzard had a background in international affairs (banking and the UN) which they used remarkably in *House of All Nations* (1938) and *The Transit of Venus* (1980). An essay or more could probably be written about the connection between these novels and *Grand Days*, but that is beyond my purpose here.

In *Grand Days* even that most 'American' of Australian fictional characters George T. MacDowell, who steps out of Moorhouse's earlier 'discontinuous narrative' *The Electrical Experience* (1974) to pay Edith a visit in Geneva, is neither naïve, innocent nor disillusioned. He is in fact almost

preternaturally shrewd and humanely wise, despite his crackpot schemes of making America join the League through the Rotary Clubs and his precise mathematical formula for disarmament.

Moorhouse's decisive twist on the 'loss of innocence abroad' conceit, however, comes in his characterisation of Edith, where the contrast with James almost seems like a conscious counter-strategy. James held almost as a dogma that a story should be filtered through the most sensitive character: for much of *Daisy Miller* this is Winterbourne, who of course first meets Daisy on the shores of Lake Geneva. Moorhouse's Edith is certainly sensitive, but it is a sensitivity that is filtered through a mesh of absurdly clear and elaborate protocols that are surely unique in fiction: her 'Ways,' her 'Aesthetics' and 'Ethics,' her obsession with etiquette, which is Moorhouse's own through much of his writing. Edith is immune to the loss of innocence, because it is tied to a loss of authenticity, of God-given identity, and Edith does not have much of that, perhaps because she was brought up a Rationalist and thus atheist. Edith instead 'suffers' a gradual sophistication of procedural intelligence.

It is highly significant that Edith, in the phrase quoted above, was straining for 'essentials and high *procedure*' rather than 'high *principle*.' When the League finally decides to build the new Palais des Nations, she breaks down crying in her rooms on the Boulevard des Philosophes, setting off much of Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, because the League is now 'affirmed in bricks and mortar': 'Until now the League's only solidity was in its procedures, the making of new files, the enlarging of the staff and the pumping out of League publications' (Moorhouse 1994, 149).

Though Edith, who with the new building sees herself as 'a new Edith,' will later be disappointed that the new building—built on the scale of Versailles to symbolise the triumph of international democracy over autocracy, or as Edith sees it 'a bulwark against human frailty'—will contain no living quarters for the new internationalists like herself, this does not change the essence: Geneva is the site of *procedure*: 'more than a town, but a method and a hope' (as it is later expressed by Mme Wiener). By contrast, Canberra, by the third volume in the trilogy, will be the site of *principle*, with all the irony that this implies

Moorhouse and Edith sustain their interest in politics over three long volumes by attention to a kind of *intimate meta-politics*: not the usual disillusionment of ideals or corruption of politicians, but protocol, procedures and the micro-politics of agendas. When she first enters a meeting of the *haute direction*, 'Under-Secretary Bartou said to her in a comradely way, "Remember, Berry, that a meeting is a diplomatic activity: exercise comity."' She is immediately caught in the dilemma of whether to sit next to the Under-Secretary, Ambrose or Dame Rachel and chooses Dame Rachel:

'You'll find it a little like a football scrum,' Dame Rachel said, and Edith smiled at her, not quite understanding, worrying that Under-Secretary Bartou would be wondering why she was sitting with Dame Rachel when she had said she would sit with Ambrose, thinking maybe she had simply refused to sit beside him for no good reason. Oh well it was one of those things that would go into history unexplained.

She glanced down at the agenda:

Germany's entry into the League
Filming in the Assembly

Behaviour of Journalists

Esperanto

Purchase of Furniture

Emergency Procedures

Complaint from NZ

Calendar Reform

Lighting of Coasts Committee Meeting in Stockholm. (Moorhouse 1994, 125)

The agenda strikes the reader as inconsequential or arbitrary in the way of Borges' fictional Chinese encyclopaedia. But as it turns out the item on 'purchase of furniture' will become part of a solution to the most consequential: the entry of Germany. A horseshoe shaped table could resolve the questions of hierarchy between permanent members and the new category of semi-permanent members, which may resolve the problems with both Germany and Brazil. A horseshoe shape combines the advantage of a round table—that everyone is equal—with the advantage of no one sitting with their backs to the auditorium.

The micro-politics of seating is of course something Edith herself has already experienced. It is one of those questions of etiquette which have obsessed Moorhouse throughout his writing, and which he has used as a plotting and characterisation device from the paedophile cinema owner in 'The Proprietor of Darkness,' who lectures school kids on how to behave when the lights go out, to the academic conference-goers in *Conferenceville* working out their own micro-politics through seemingly trivial gestures and movements. Moorhouse's writing in this form of micro-attentiveness recalls not only Henry James, but Marcel Proust and Proust's disciple Albert Cohen, who wrote the classic novel in French about the League of Nations, *Belle du Seigneur* (1968). I cannot find, despite his attention to sources, that Moorhouse ever acknowledges Cohen's novel, but *Grand Days* in a gently postcolonial way is clearly 'written against' it. *Belle du Seigneur* is a superb study of *hierarchy* within large organisations, which is also made to reflect on the almost mythical hierarchy of traditional Genevan society, which again may derive from Calvinist notions of 'the Elect' (the aunt of the female protagonist certainly makes a spiritual discipline out of confusing hierarchy and morality). The male protagonist only acknowledges as friends those officials who are one grade above himself, and one long scene shows in excruciating detail his agony in the corridors before a meeting with his superior.

For Edith, on the other hand, protocol is about procedure rather than hierarchy. Being in Internal Administration, she is told early on, she is 'in charge of walls'—and tables. It is through the horseshoe table that she, though only a Class B officer, becomes intimate with Sir Eric Drummond, the Secretary General, and an unofficial adviser of his on ceremony: "You have something of a feel for this," Sir Eric said . . . "Didn't think you Australians went in for it" (Moorhouse 1994, 213). As a perhaps peculiarly Australian combination of a very practical and a very idealistic woman she becomes his main support (in private: she is also in charge of back doors) during the huge crisis over Germany's entry into the League.

If procedure and protocol for Edith are not about hierarchy, it is because they are questions of inside/outside. The *inter* has no hierarchy, except inclusion or exclusion, or in its more liveable forms, ambiguity. This takes over language, sex and psychology in *Grand Days*:

The work at the League was often a use of language that wasn't argument or even the making of negotiation—it was a way perhaps of expressing a presence. Affirmative noise, questing without knowing the questions . . . (Moorhouse 1994, 181)

Edith, because she is so sensitive to the *inter*, not just in international politics, but in all ranges of experience, links this to the 'scat singing' she hears in the jazz club in Paris:

Although she must have 'heard' it on records, she now heard for the first time the way the Negro woman used her voice, a rhythmic use of syllables. It was the voice trying to say something which was beyond words. A sort of warbling. The woman was not singing words at all. She was singing sounds in between the music and the words of the song. (Moorhouse 1994, 187)

The jazz club is where she comes into physical contact with a black man for the first time in her life and ends up sitting in his lap: 'She could not do anything, but allow herself to seethe pleasantly . . . an observer of her own perspiring, delightfully nervous body' (Moorhouse 1994, 186). But with her ability to move between levels, which more hierarchically-minded people would miss, her *frisson* with interracial sex makes her think of a scheme more daring than Esperanto:

Esperanto she didn't support. Scat singing was different—maybe this was a language to express things not yet internationally expressible and which would, at the same time, be comprehensible to all people regardless of their language. Maybe a vocabulary of sounds could be compiled. The way the League was an instrument to achieve what had never before been achieved. (Moorhouse 1994, 191)

Edith becomes such an attractive character in no little way because her procedural intelligence in tackling questions of etiquette (so often a balancing act for women in novels from Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen on) leads her—or an observer inside her—to such unexpected freedom of mind. Her proposal about scat-singing at the League leads the most unlikely of her companions, the morosely silent drunk Liverright to quote Blake: 'If only the perception could be cleaned—correction, cleansed—all things could then be seen as they are, as they truly are—infinite' (Moorhouse 1994, 193).

As the novel progresses Edith becomes more comfortable with the outside observer of change inside herself: 'When she coupled with Ambrose, which sex was she loving? Where was she in all this ambiguity? Did she make love to his ambiguities?' (Moorhouse 1994, 324–25) When they first cross-dress for sex, Ambrose says 'Give a person a mask and they will tell you the truth,' but said it 'softly in a new more effeminate voice' (Moorhouse 1994, 113). In public with Ambrose 'dressed so appealingly, even voluptuously' as a woman in 'the Netherworld' of the Molly Club, Edith finds her sense of etiquette challenged:

Here in this club her own etiquette seemed inapplicable, rules of behaviour were either nonexistent or they were 'unspoken.' What, she asked herself, are 'unspoken rules,' and from where do they come? No, she was sure that even in this inverted world, there were rules. (Moorhouse 1994, 326)

Of course, transvestism (in the sense of cross-dressing, as opposed to trans-gender surgery) is pure etiquette. The *inter* perhaps always is and then opens a possibility for *trans*—or death. (I am profoundly reminded here of the recent translation of Bradley into Chelsea Manning—and all the etiquette involved.) It is Ambrose who will say, ‘We could die of etiquette’ (Moorhouse 1994, 356). What Edith will retain is the memory of the meeting in the Club some evenings after the incident with the *Action Civique*: ‘The weirdness of the evening was heightened because of the formal seriousness of the discussion by men dressed as women and a couple of women dressed as men’ (Moorhouse 1994, 348). But even more perhaps, ‘she felt glad . . . that she had ventured into that dark world not as a place to live, but a locale she had now visited and where she’d been able to glimpse more of the nature of things. Or perhaps, the de-naturing of things’ (Moorhouse 1994, 356).

The real crisis in *Grand Days* for Edith comes when Ambrose is exposed as a spy, passing information on the League back to the Foreign Office in London. Edith then takes up with the American journalist Robert Dole, a principled but pragmatic negotiator, with whom flirtation becomes a dance of negotiations. He is not of the *inter*, but precisely for that reason appears to Edith a combination of dependability and worldliness. Marriage to him, however, turns out to be claustrophobic in the extreme, and it is only later when, in *Dark Palace*, she takes Ambrose back as her lover, that she feels a sense of space, of being able to breathe even in her own apartment.

What ‘saves’ Edith more than anything are her extremely idiosyncratic ‘Ways’ and ‘Aesthetics’ and ‘Ethics,’ which constitute her theory of life and come in such apparently arbitrary numbers of principles and maxims, a little like Theravada Buddhism. But like Buddhism they become a perfectly coherent system once you regard them a little more closely: the procedural guide to the spirit of comedy.

The first that Edith applies is ‘The Way of Open Doors’ in the dining car of the Paris-Geneva train. The second is when she first goes to work at the Palais Wilson and finds that the entrance is at the back, facing away from the Lake: this, to Edith, transgresses ‘the aesthetics of Inside and Outside’—and it is quite possible that this is the deepest critique of the League and its failures that can be offered, though it is also possible that such a confusion of inside and outside was inevitable. How could a League open to all nations conceive of an outside to impress its members that it has an inside?

Edith’s principles may be a little too systematic, as a result of her Rationalist background: ‘Governing and arranging our lives, from the art of the domestic to the universal, was what life was all about’ (Moorhouse 1994, 430). But they do allow her to sum up the spirit of the League and all international negotiations in ways that find virtue where others might find failure: ‘Always adjourn, never give up’ (Moorhouse 1994, 430). She dismisses ‘the politics of impatient outrage’ in connection with the Sacco and Vanzetti trial:

She could sympathize with those emotions but they were driven by a belief that there was a dramatic and violent solution. Or any sort of solution. She had a deeper conviction that procedures and attitudes could be evolved that extracted the poison from disagreement. (Moorhouse 1994, 429)

Her Aesthetics follow a trajectory from ‘the Aesthetic of Happy Latency’ through ‘the Aesthetic of Elemental Surface,’ ‘the Aesthetic of Play Within Unequivocal Boundaries,’ ‘the Aesthetic of Many Shapes and Spaces,’ ‘the Aesthetic of Touch Within an Object’ to ‘the Aesthetic of the Outside in the Inside.’ The application of these is trivial in her listing of them (Moorhouse 1994, 468–71), but could not form a better system for living in the *inter*: conservative on the one hand, open-minded on the other.

When Ambrose is exposed as a spy, she has a revealing conversation with the Swiss Under-Secretary Bartou about loyalty and ethics and ‘what happens to our souls when we are transplanted to Geneva.’ The Under-Secretary, ‘seemingly still on . . . native soil but legally in a diplomatic nether region’ (Moorhouse 1994, 516), finds that the Six Ethics of Edith’s Rationalist parents—such as ‘the Work Ethic,’ ‘the Study Ethic,’ ‘the Obligation to Participate,’ not excluding the ‘Bush Ethic’ of self-reliance—makes her ‘a Calvinist sans Calvin. I see why you are at the League of Nations’ (Moorhouse 1994, 518). But in her painstaking post-mortem on her relationship with Ambrose she does find that he has taken her beyond her rule-bound self to ‘the third level of existence’: ‘the life of methodical subterfuge’ (Moorhouse 1994, 541). By the end of the novel she is reconciled with him on the tram to Palais des Nations, her arms full of files.

It is her forensic balancing of guidelines and experience that gives her the strength Ambrose diagnoses at the end of *Dark Palace* when in the dark moments after the League has ceased to exist and is in limbo before the transition to the UN Edith asks whether there will be a place for them. Ambrose says, ‘Edith you have lived, *fully*—that’s not affected by considerations of success or failure.’ It is Moorhouse’s achievement to have made the fate of the League in Geneva during the War seem heroic rather than the pathetic failure it is usually seen as by the warmongers. But it is Edith who answers her own question: ‘We will *make* ourselves a place’ (Moorhouse 2002, 657).

ENDNOTES

¹ In this canon of modern commentators Joseph Conrad, or rather his narrator in *Under Western Eyes*, dismisses Geneva as having no horizon and sees the breath-taking view of the Lake from the Pont de Mont Blanc as expressing the tawdriness of democracy; Graham Greene in *Doctor Fischer of Geneva* associates the city with the narrow-mindedness and gratuitous cruelty of the rich; while Borges in *Atlas* sees Geneva as the city ‘most propitious to happiness’ (on the plaque of the house in Grand Rue where he died) perhaps because it does not, as he says elsewhere in the same book, always insist to the visitor and resident, ‘I am Geneva,’ as say, Paris or London do; John Berger, finally, in *Here Is Where We Meet*, sees Geneva as the archive of the endless well-founded prophesies of the disastrous consequences of the policies embarked on by the nations of the world; it is perhaps much more than Oxford (and with a totally different political slant) the Home of Lost Causes.

² Pictet de Rougemont, the chief negotiator for Geneva at the Congress of Vienna, allegedly inspired Talleyrand, the chief French negotiator, to quip, ‘It seems the world consists of five continents, and Geneva’ (the story does not say whether he counted the Americas as one continent, or missed out Australia).

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