Visions of Cultural Appropriation

Zad El Bacha

There have been hundreds of years of rich, positive exchanges between cultures. When a European meets an Arab, they ask them about the patterns on their clothes, the words in their books, the instruments in their songs. The Arab asks them the same. They listen and learn, they answer in turn. Both are intrigued, they are equals and they are interested. They find the things that draw them together, they observe the differences, how their grandmothers wear their veils differently, how their string instruments have different shapes; but they are both veiled grandmothers, they both have strings. They learn, and they take what they have learnt to their respective homes. They grow something new and complex in the awareness of their cultures’ value. They thank each other. They grow each other’s wealth in the process of exchange. They are equals and they are willingly sharing and growing.

They see something lesser and dumber. They do not ask. They talk and they shout. Sometimes something pretty catches their eye, a colourful abaya, a flavoursome dish. They do not ask. It is a pretty Other, no depth or history in other than that which they can give it. They take the pretty abaya away from the Arab and force them into jeans. They wear their abayas as a novelty, careless and violent. They mock and destroy and take.

Young Reality

There have been hundreds of years of violent destruction of some cultures by others. A European knows this. When they meet an Arab they see the Other and they think, ‘ah! I see this person and think of the Other, although they are a person.’ They do not ignore this. They see colour and they face it. They approach with humility, they do not ask too much. They smile and they chat. They know and they see, and they both see healing ahead. They ask cautiously at first, they learn, they listen. Wherever they go they listen, they read and look at everything. They see more and more complexly, they understand the angles. The Other becomes just another, different (but not that different) human. Variety and meaning materialise before the learner. They ask and they give thanks for what they can take back home. They grow, and now they have prettier clothes (and maybe they are the prettiest clothes), they passed on her abaya again, and now it is bought and not stolen from her.

Grim Grim Reality

Generosity is at its greatest when the Other becomes just another, different (but not that different) human. Variety and meaning materialise before the learner. They ask and they give thanks for what they can take back home. They grow, and now they have prettier clothes (and maybe they are the prettiest clothes), they passed on her abaya again, and now it is bought and not stolen from her.

Cool night

To trees of suitability: tall, spindly, straight And branches whip at retreating cheeks.

And curved by some forgotten force

Leading through lush summer growth

Glow yellow in the waning sun.

Across epidermal brickwork.

Smudges of neon watercolour stain

The powder blue of the heavens.

Final rays claw across horizons,

Glimmering to my eye, all grey

And curved by some forgotten force -

A ceremonial graveyard.

Decaying leaves, in overhanging slabs,

Bleaching the world in one last effort…

Cool night’s breath whispers its presence

And branches whip at retreating cheeks.

Ed. relationships accelerate with time spent outside, whether looking at other, or the hearth heart of a town to use. Teams even go and rescue sheep stuck on ledges, which really shows the deep care that people have for the area and its animals.

But despite the friendship and the abundant wonder to be found, this is an imperfect place, and many of its problems have been worsening recently. Thousands of tourists are attracted by the beauty and adventure, but can be damaging in their numbers.

The shy animals and birds are displaced by the busynew, and rare plants get trampled. Mountain guides are pressured by the companies they work for into taking too large groups out, which increases the already considerable risks, and has caused serious accidents. Tours with little knowledge of the countryside’s rules trespass farms and damage ancient stone walls by climbing over them, thus turning what were once peaceful, educational interactions for both farmers and visitors into hostility from many farmers.

The now-yearly battle between the new Snowdonia of adventure holidays and DoF expeditions, and the old landscape of hard graft and traditions worsens everyone’s experience.

Deaths and bad accidents are chillingly common in the hills; far more so than their relatively low height would lead you to believe, and several people are lost every year. The landscape is so unforgivingly hostile at times that this waste of lives can happen randomly; mundane issues such as ill-fitting boots, a lost map, or an unexpectedly loose rock can spiral into big issues for the inexperienced and the expert alike, especially when the weather gets bad.

For all the slate industry’s grave and sometimes deadly - cost to its workers, their descendents are still plagued by poverty now that the quarries are shut. In villages like Deiniolen, over half of the community are still unemployed, and they have the poverty statistics to match. Blaenau Ffestiniog, a town surrounded by so much waste slate that the mountains look like they have been turned inside out, is treated as a national joke for its otherworldly ugliness, but the reality of its situation is far from funny. In the statistics on child poverty, fuel poverty, unemployment and drug use, it is shown to be a town so neglected that it has become one of Britain’s most deprived places.

These problems may not seem particularly significant, given that they relate to one small corner of the country. They are, however, manifest across the rest of the world. Random, pointless loss of life can affect anyone, and prioritising profit over people’s welfare, and the exploitation and neglect of communities and environments which results, is a growing problem throughout Britain and the world.

A proper solution to these problems requires a greater challenge than can be met in this century. But, I feel that the way we deal with the growing inequalities we face would be improved by adopting into our everyday lives the mentality that being in the hills gives us; embracing an approach to life where we look for each other, respect our surroundings, plants and animals, and, above all, make the most of whatever satisfaction and happiness we can create out of the occasionally hostile environments, be they natural or man-made, in which we find ourselves.

‘Dear Jack’

Lizzie Searle

Darling I miss you. It hurts this far away. It’s pleasurable. I know you miss me so much more than I miss you.

You’re needy and pathetic and rich. I love you.

I love the nights we sing together, huddled on the same piano stool or better still when I recline across your baby grand in Fifth Avenue.

I know you’re well – you’re seeing me tomorrow! Thanks for asking, I could not be better.

No one could.

Today I polished off my third first-class essay this week and was sent more flowers from an anonymous admirer.

Bless. They’re bonny.

With love as always and best wishes that one day I might write just one first-class essay, that I could not be better and that you might exist.

P.S. There are no flowers and they’re not bonny.

‘Catch Me If You Can’

Jenny Potter

Smudges of neon watercolour stain

The powder blue of the heavens.

Towering stems slash at bare shins,

Marooned in crimson, crossed

Across epidermal brickwork.

Fields dusted with poisoned petals

Glows yellow in the waning sun.

Rich greenery shrouds footed clay

Leading through lash summer growth

To trees of suitability: tall, spindly, straight

And curved by some forgotten force -

A ceremonial graveyard.

Final rays claw across horizons,

Bleaching the world in one last effort…

Cool night’s breath whispers its presence

And branches whip at retreating checks.

The Hills

Eleanor Harris

The view from the top is never the same, although I know every hold. One of the few things you can rely on in Snowdonia is, perhaps paradoxically, that it will always be changing; and yet, despite the dramatic seasonal changes, the ancient hills are consistently compelling.

All year, it is as if the mountains have their own kind of magic which decompresses your spine and lets you breathe easier and deeper. A snowy, snow-capped mountain, no matter how many times you have seen it before, will send a thrill through you with the promise it conveys of a place apart from the regular world, the unblemished snow making you feel like you have stumbled on a newly-created utopia.

After a spontaneous summertime swim in a cold sky lake with a dear friend, you’ll emerge muddy and half-frozen, but feeling exhilarated...
plans, gently drawn pillows of silt that at times abruptly swing into a valley as sand bars but which tend to converge between mountains to push the water into rapid streams. The beginning of this journey is permeated by the gentle simple sounds of Balti music.11 The road climbs around mountains, brown and muddy then brilliant cotton white, coming precipitously close to sheer drops as it narrows here, and there sweeps down through some perplexingly narrow gulches of emerald valley where trees like birch that shoot directly upwards line every path. And like birch that shoot directly down through some perplexing rows here, and there sweeps from the glistening rivulets and churning of the water where the churning of the water and mud. Then at times looking up into the clouds block out the light from the glistening rivulets and churning of the water where the churning of the water and mud. Then at times looking up into the clouds block out the light.