

## **Threshold to Mindfulness of Reciprocity** *by Kathryn LaFevers Evans*

*I*n a multicultural, multidisciplinary world, where humankind's common ground for communication is in the unspoken language of the heart, a leadership model of mindfulness of reciprocity empowers the literary professions as authoritative in the arts bound together by language.

Louis Montrose, in his essay "New Historicisms," challenges us to "resist the reductive tendency to formulate our conceptual terms in binary oppositions; rather we should construe them as joined in a mutually constitutive, recursive, and transformative *process*" (413).

This threshold to the process of mindfulness of reciprocity is offered perennially in teachings of sages, scholars, and artists. I propose a visual model of this process, based on "our wisdom traditions," as master philosopher-theologian Huston Smith calls religions, and on wisdom from Western culture's art and leadership traditions.

What theory has rejected from religions is the coercion inherent in their boundaries and the political power they wield against freedom. What theory needs to embrace is religion's distillation of wisdom in human values, without which we continue to seek our own largess in selfish territorial motives.

Human values such as kindness, compassion, humility and joy are the building blocks of this model of kaleidoscopic communication through mindfulness of reciprocity. Mindfulness of reciprocity is thus simply—attention to love.

I suggest we solidify the multicultural, multidisciplinary leadership role of the literary professions by acknowledging human values, commonalities of the human race, thereby crossing the threshold we have apprehended into attention to love.

From the literary tradition of early 19<sup>th</sup> Century France, Honore de Balzac reminds us that our goal is not only to instruct, but also to delight, which is a profound purpose. Droll Stories: Thirty Tales by Honore de Balzac, are satires on such passionate historical figures as Queen Margaret of Navarre. In his preface, translator Jacques le Clercq documents that critics in retrospect praised Balzac, alongside Shakespeare, as the greatest storehouse of documents on human nature (xi). Le-Clercq concludes:

Thus if the Droll Stories were but so many bawdy jokes, Balzac's good humor, his verisimilitude and his style would make them worth reading. Yet their ribaldries—the rough-and-tumble jollity of a thoroughly healthy man—should not divert our attention from the genuine pathos underlying more than one tale. (xxii)

Yet, in the “Prologue to Second Ten Stories,” Balzac discloses how this collection was received by his contemporary critics and friends. He likens himself to a favorite author past who declared he was determined never again to take his pen in hand:

Another age, but the selfsame manners...Arduous labor it is indeed to excogitate One Hundred Droll Stories under the fire of broadsides directed at him not by jealous ruffians alone, but by his kind friends into the bargain. For the latter did not fail to come to him tragically in that dark hour, and: “Are you mad?” they cried. “What on earth are you thinking of?”...In order not to discourage fine sentiments (intolerable though they are) the Author bequeaths his old openwork slippers to these friends, and he assures them, for their greater peace of mind, that within the recesses of that reservoir of nature, his brain, he holds threescore and ten fine stories, his own personal property and exempt from seizure or attachment. (175-76)

Balzac implicates the shortsighted criticism and all-around lack of friendliness of his alleged friends as the culprit in history's loss of the 70 unsung Droll Stories. These critics were not willing to look beyond their own horizon, not willing to risk losing the comfort of territory.

Figure 1; MODEL: DRAW AN ARC OF HORIZON

Through a satirical essay, “Defending Literary Studies Has Become a Lost Cause,” Michael Berube, professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champagne, reminds us that "...our junior faculty members are foremost among the department's most rigorous and most popular teachers. What they teach is what they love, namely, great literary works."

Theory and criticism are deemed unequipped to cross the threshold they themselves have apprehended—to the heart of the matter, which is love, a value central to human nature. The model to be constructed, depicting human values as a venue for sustainable dialogue, is a critical tool we may find useful.

Philip Edgcumbe Hughes relates, in Lefevre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Renewal in France—in 1492 Lefevre asks of his fellow scholars in reference to Aristotle's natural philosophy, "For what is philosophy if it is not love of wisdom? What is a philosopher if he is not a true lover of the same?" Properly understood, then, philosophers are friends. "Consequently, when they are spiteful and malevolent men tearing each other to pieces they no longer regard them as philosophers" (1-2).

This single observation embodies polarities inherent in religion: on one side is inclusion through human values; on the other side is exclusion through zeal for conformity. Clearly, I'm not suggesting conformity to cultural codes of conduct prescribed by morals, but rather, a closer look at ethical tools for healing conflict.

Hughes praises Lefevre:

His career was not stamped with the dazzling brilliance of Pico della Mirandola, the prophetic fire of Savonarola, the lofty detachment of Erasmus, the thundering impetuosity of Luther, or the polished intellectuality of Calvin, all of them his contemporaries; but, as with each of them, his genius lit up the European world. (ix)

Yet, also like his contemporaries, Lefevre denounced Islam (12), reminding us that zeal is inherent in human nature. The threshold we have apprehended is that of ethical choice towards inclusion through love. Lefevre, though a Catholic himself, sought refuge from violent religious persecution by the Catholic Church in the court of Queen Margaret of Navarre (Marguerite de Navarre).

Probably of the Fourth or Fifth Century C.E., The Yoga System of Patanjali: Or the Ancient Hindu Doctrine of Concentration of Mind, translated by James Haughton Woods, delineates the powers of friendliness, compassion and joy as "Supernormal Powers" (252). That these human values are systematically cultivated in one of humanity's oldest wisdom traditions speaks to the power inherent in the value dimension of life. Essentially, the technique expounds that attention to love enhances human communication. The *substance* of love is cultivated, not the ineffable; love is the current through which communication flows (252-253). Former MIT profes-

sor, Huston Smith, in The Illustrated World's Religions: A Guide to Our Wisdom Traditions, captures the reciprocal experience of joy in the Zen embrace of paradox, and in the Zen practice of mindfulness to life as a process.

A group of Zen masters, gathered for conversation, have a great time declaring that there is no such thing as Buddhism, or Enlightenment, or anything even remotely resembling *nirvana*. They set traps for one another, trying to trick someone into an assertion that might imply the opposite. Practiced as they are, they always elude these traps, whereupon the entire company bursts into glorious, room-shaking laughter....And though we cannot hope to capture their perspective completely, it being of Zen's essence that it cannot be impounded in words, we can give some hint of what they are up to.

We can begin with the point just alluded to, the limitations of language. We all know that menus are not meals, or maps the terrains they depict. The distinctive thing about Zen is its preoccupation—obsession even—with this distinction, and its alertness to how often spiritual nourishment (if we may put the matter this way) stops with menu reading. When the Buddha made his point by holding up a flower and Mahakasyapa got that point, no words intervened. And when (a thousand years later) Bodhidharma brought that “point” to China, he defined the treasure he had brought as “a special transmission outside the scriptures.” Zen continues this experiential emphasis. (88)

This would indicate that instruction is founded primarily in the boundaries of language, whereas delight resides primarily in the unspoken language of the heart.

How are we to reconcile this *subjective* paradox within the literary arts whose medium is language? How are we to marry the violent zeal inherent in language with the peace of silence? Smith gives us a direction: “Along with this sense of life's goodness there comes, secondly, an *objective* outlook on one's relation to others; their welfare seems as important as one's own....Dualisms dissolve...” (91).

Literary theory and criticism's leadership role as authoritative rather than authoritarian is paralleled in Thomas Cleary's “Communication of Hearts,” from his translation of Zen Lessons: the Art of Leadership. This Song Dynasty letter to the Zen master Huanglong Sheng depicts mindfulness of reciprocity through a metaphor of leader as sky and benefactor as earth:

**Figure 2; MODEL: DRAW AN ARC OF SKY AND REDRAW THE ARC OF EARTH**

...Essential to leadership is winning the community. Essential to winning the community is seeing into the hearts of people....Now if the sky is below and the

earth above, their positions are certainly contrary, yet it is called safety, because above and below are intermingling. (27)

**Figure 3; MODEL: DRAW AN ARC OF SKY BELOW AND AN ARC OF EARTH ABOVE THAT, TO COMPLETE BOTH CIRCLES**

Montrose envisions this sense of humility within our arts, a joyful sharing of lively diversity within an articulated unity: “—a ceaseless contest among dominant and subordinate positions, a ceaseless interplay of continuity and change, of identity and difference—such a perspective opens cultural poetics to history” (405).

He evokes in my imagination the impression of a kaleidoscopic vision: “to read, as in a refracted light, one fragment of our ideological inscription by means of another” (414). To further define these beams of light which support reciprocity between viewpoints, I turn to an architectural model and a leadership model.

G.F Young relates two examples of grace, prosperity, and peace under the leadership of Western culture’s great patrons, The Medici: “Brunelleschi’s sublime architectural structure, the great dome of the cathedral of Florence, “is built on this principle, one dome within the other and the two bound together so as to support each other...” (37).

**Figure 4; MODEL: DRAW TWO PERPENDICULAR LINES INTERSECTING IN THE CENTER OF BOTH CIRCLES, WITH ARROW POINTS MEETING AT THE PERIMETER OF THE INNER CIRCLE**

For our model of mutually supportive spheres in the human realm, the equalization of inward and outward forces represents balance through love. The negative force of zeal is harnessed and supported by the positive force of love.

The integrity of both spheres depends upon equal cooperation through the cohesive powers of love and trust—mutual authoritative strength, not authoritarian force. In that simple truce is the power of mutual ownership, of peaceful communication.

The Zen letter “Communication of Hearts” expounds on this in practice:

Now if those who are above other people are able to control themselves and thereby be generous with those below, those below will gladly serve those above...Thus when those above and below intermingle, then there is safety and peace. People who lessen themselves are a benefit to others; people who aggrandize themselves are harmful to others....Therefore, when a leader wins people’s hearts there is flourishing, and a leader that loses people’s hearts is abandoned. (27-8)

Lorenzo the Magnificent, the beloved de Medici ruler of Florence in the 1400’s took a unique course. Convinced that an autocratic style of government was the

only one of which the conditions of the time admitted, he yet did not follow the example of other rulers around him who in that age were erecting thrones, their methods being force, crime, and treachery. Instead he solved the apparently impossible problem of combining two things diametrically opposed, an autocracy and a democracy, and contrived to preserve the form of government loved by his countrymen and yet to wield personally an autocratic power. Unsupported by any military force, he yet exercised absolute authority; but only because his countrymen well knew that no one else could produce such happy results. The Florentines saw their city, through his abilities, raised to the leading place among Italian states, made the intellectual and artistic capital of Europe, and daily advancing in a commercial prosperity in which they each individually shared; and they had no desire to kill the goose that laid such golden eggs. (Young 151)

**Figure 5; MODEL: DRAW THE NODES OF OPPOSITION ON THE PERIMETER OF THE INNER CIRCLE; CONNECT TWO IN TRIANGULATION TO THE OUTER CIRCLE; DRAW ARROWS FROM THE OPPOSING NODES TOWARD THE PERIMETER OF THE OUTER CIRCLE, ARROWS POINTING TOWARD THE MIDPOINT OF THE INNER CIRCLE, ARROWS POINTING OUTWARD TOWARD THE OPPOSING NODES.**

Thus, oppositional zealous energy is directed toward the loving leader, not as a sacrifice in violence, but as a support for prosperity and peace within the sphere of the opposing camps. This model expands kaleidoscopically in both directions, reflecting the infinite viewpoints of our multicultural, multidisciplinary world.

**Figures 6 & 7; MODEL: DRAW SIMILAR TRIANGLES IN ALL DIRECTIONS TO NODES ON CIRCLES KALEIDOSCOPIING INWARDS AND OUTWARDS.**

Young further elucidates Lorenzo's leadership qualities:

The relation which existed between these two brothers is one of the pleasantest things in the history of the Medici. At that epoch jealousy between two brothers placed in such a position as Lorenzo and Guiliano were was the normal state of things. That it was entirely absent in their case speaks well for both of them. And it is an indication of Lorenzo's character, and of what his conduct in the minor relations of life must have been, that he should never have given cause for any feeling of jealousy in a younger brother so nearly his equal in ability, and his superior in good looks, and that, on the contrary, the latter should have "worshipped" him; or, again, that Lorenzo from his side should never have felt jealousy at the admiration

and popularity so universally bestowed upon Giuliano, and much exceeding that accorded to himself. (177)

Literary arts cannot transcend the boundary of language, but can express and inform innumerable arenas if we choose to affirm positive commonalities of the race of humankind. The model is a template upon which to assess the motivations and intentions of our theory, criticism and literary works.

It may be interpreted as depicting such theories as that described by Anne Middleton in her essay "Medieval Studies," where she describes the model of new philology as a "horizontal expanse of middle ground bracketed between the old polarities of traditional medieval history" (28).

In "Renaissance/Early Modern Studies," Leah S. Marcus' description of a text could be compared to the model of kaleidoscopic communication through mindfulness of reciprocity:

It is not a fixed entity, like the physical book that may serve as its vehicle; not something that can be specified, objectified, held in the hand, and interpreted according to the rational, linear categories of interpretation. It is instead a "field" of forces in the scientific sense of the term, that, in interplay with the consciousness of the reader, sets in motion a volatile, indeterminate, and open-ended process; always resisting the rationalizing and codifying thrust of interpretation as it is traditionally understood. (51)

Heather Richardson Hayton, in her teachings on "Sacred Texts: Dogma and Heresy," explains that proof resides in and informs only its own boundaries, even as regards science. She describes how St. Bernard of Clairvaux, an 11<sup>th</sup> Century abbot, formerly a knight, effects his leadership through crafting his discipline in the language of courtly love, which serves to delight as well as to instruct.

Utilizing the language of love in his career as abbot, St. Bernard was able to navigate and negotiate diverse boundaries successfully and gracefully. Hayton explores how the language of love acts as currency for constructive criticism, while praising and protecting the boundaries of opponents. I suggest that the methodology of apprehending cognitive structures and social forces through textual processes demonstrates this model's use in accommodating layers of polarities.

Bradford Keeney, acclaimed scholar at the vanguard of articulating the space shared by psychology and spirit, documents the healings by the Bushmen doctors of Djokhoe, Namibia: "There is a power that comes from the Big God. It starts with his love for all things....This power is in all of life" (35).

Huston Smith leads us to this threshold in his comprehensive work on contemporary reductionist philosophy, Beyond the Post-Modern Mind:

Our sun...takes...approximately 224 million years to complete one revolution around our galaxy. If these figures sound astronomical, they are actually parochial, for they are confined to our own galaxy. Andromeda, our second closest neighbor, is one-and-a-half million light-years removed, beyond which the universe falls away abysmally, range after range, world after world, island universe after island universe. Now along comes an Isaiah, a Christ,...a Buddha; along come men who are...the counterparts of Copernicus, Newton, Faraday, Kepler, and they tell us something equally incredible about the universe in its value dimension. They tell us of depth upon depth of value falling away from this visible world and our ordinary perceptions. They tell us that this universe in all its vastness is permeated to its very core by love. And *that's* incredible. (260-61)

In conclusion I ask, if our goal is for an accessible, sustainable communication, would this model of the transformative process of kaleidoscopic communication through mindfulness of reciprocity be better named simply, attention to love?



Figure 1



Figure 2

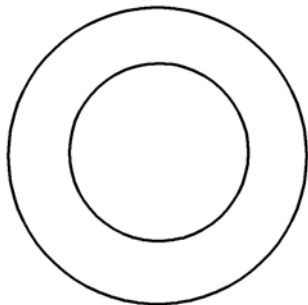


Figure 3

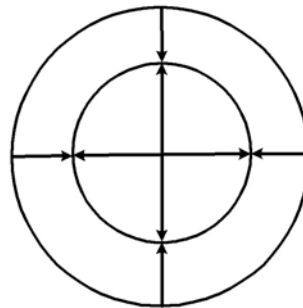


Figure 4

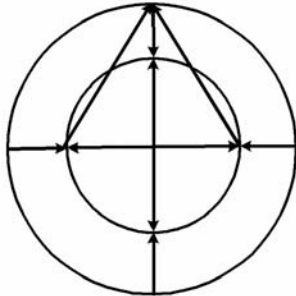


Figure 5

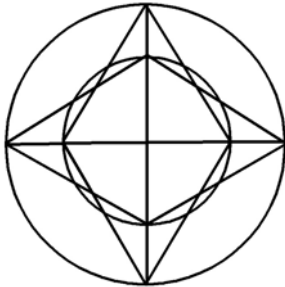


Figure 6

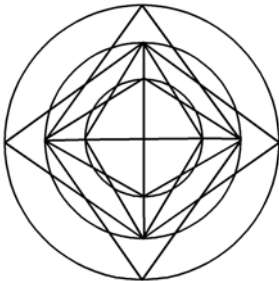


Figure 7

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