

Roman Holiday and Individuation

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Individuation

Maturity, becoming and adult, is individuation—the ability to carve out freedom through compromise, rather than rejection, of what the world expects of you. Childhood pendulates between unquestioned obedience and giddy abandonment. There is no middle path for children, either submit or rebel, and they will do both, often within moments of each other. A day in the life of a child is blessed with every emotion expressed at the extreme, from joy to rage, as the pure freedom that only a child can enjoy beckons just beyond all the inane adult commands and berations. But we grow out of this, and become adults, able to stride between rules and freedom, letting neither destroy the other. We become individuals.

And language is where this individuation happens. Children are born with the innate ability to master language, and they will acquire at least one language perfectly by a very young age. But how to use language, how to say things in a language that sound proper—this takes eons upon mountains of trials and errors. The movie *Roman Holiday* is the story of one woman who undergoes the journey to adulthood in the city of Rome attaining individuation as she learns to control language and say both what she wants to say and what she is meant to say. It is the story of subconscious archetypal female initiation rites made concrete in the edifices and sidewalks of Rome.¹ It is the story of falling in love with your psychoanalyst and how Freudian transference is the purest type of romantic passion.

Roman Therapeutics

At the beginning, Ann is a child, taking milk from her vicarious mother, the Countess, as she is told her schedule for the following day (p. 12–13).² Ann's

every public word is to be scripted (“yes, thank you”, “no, thank you” (p. 13)). Unable to cope with the suffocating conformity, she reacts with adolescent hysteria, screaming “Stop, stop, stop!” (p. 13) The doctor, Bonnachhoven, is called to deal with these “hysterics.” (p. 17) He administers a sleep-inducing injection but also tells her that “the best thing I know is to do exactly what you wish for a while.” (p. 18) This Laingian style advice will send Ann off into the depths of Rome and her own inner divided Self, torn between public control and private urges. She will reemerge from it all with a new maturity and sense of purpose in life which will successfully integrate private desire and public demand. To help her through this therapy is Joe, the American journalist, who takes over from Dr Bonnachhoven, inviting Ann to “tell the doctor” (p. 48 and p. 82).³ It is Joe that directs her to go “down all those steps” (p. 53) into the city of Rome that acts as the Jungian consciousness layered as it is into personal wishes (“having your haircut” “eating gelato”), and collective desires (the wall of wishes), Id impulses (seen as jouissance on a motorbike), and disciplinary Superego (in the guise of prowling secret service men). After releasing her alone into this city, he reappears on her journey to chaperone her through the charades of roles and disguises that all adults must learn to play for real. Eventually, she ends up jumping into the Tiber, with Joe, a baptism of self-affirmation, and after struggling with intense subconscious emotional transfer directed at Joe, her therapist (oh! that sounds so unromantic, let me say it again), after falling in love with Joe, she faces up to destiny and responsibilities, which will involve the sacrifice of that love. The voice of her superego, represented in the tones of a radio announcement about her disappearance “which is causing alarm and anxiety among the people of her country” (p. 88), calls her back to her responsibilities and duties, which she will now face as a fully individuated woman that can follow the willful *madhyamika* between the calls of both the Id (the hum of a motorbike engine) and the Superego (the drone of a radio announcer).

Language and Individuation

Roman Holiday makes clear that the striving for individuation is played

out in our struggles to master adult control of language. To be an adult is to know when to say what to whom in whichever context. It is not about following a script nor indulging in unrestrained speech. It is knowing enough to say enough.

All adults inhabit different spheres in their daily lives, shifting between the formal and the informal. Moving between spheres must be accompanied by swift switches in the way you talk. This is true for all of us, but even more for a princess. Her job as royalty is to hide the raw absolute power of the crown behind a veil of bromides and sound-bytes. When Joe asks her what her father does, still incognito she thinks for a second, and says “I suppose you might call it public relations.” (p. 68) Her father is a king of course, so her answer is not actually wrong.⁴

Ann, at first, is unable to use language properly. Her private words are that of a shock-seeking adolescent probing the limits of acceptable confabulation in polite society: “Did you know there are people who sleep with absolutely nothing on at all?” she asks the Countess like an impish schoolgirl, to which the Countess coldly replies “I rejoice to say that I did not.” (p. 12) Her public words are mindless clichés clacked out by her handlers about “youth and progress” or “sweetness and decency” (p. 13).

Talking Cure

When she first encounters Joe, still in her pre-therapeutic semi-mesmerized state, she is incapable of saying what fits the scene, instead posing like a princess (“charmed”) or collapsing into random speechifying (“What the world needs is a return to sweetness and decency in the souls of its young men”). (p. 26–27) The next morning, more awake, she lays off the speeches but still speaks in the formal tones of aristocracy when chatting casually with Joe. She remains a few notches more than she should be up the hierarchy of formal English. She says “and you are” (instead of “who are you”) and “you may sit down” (instead of “please, sit down”). (p. 48–49) And yet it is in these scenes that we also see her burgeoning grace and maturity. She tells Joe, “I only waited to say goodbye,” an act of kind consideration, and when

Joe offers to go with her, she resists with polite panache and independence, “that’s alright, I can find the place.”(p. 53)

But it is when she descends into Rome that her transformation truly hits. She meets Joe again and has to quickly invent a new Self to disguise her princess identity. Through this role play she begins to learn that certain freedoms are granted in the adult world to those who can ad lib their script at each moment, saying what is meant to be said, rather than what you have been told to say or would personally want to say. Adult conviviality is all about acting and pretending and playing and lying. At one point Ann says to Joe, “I’m a good liar too, aren’t I Mister Bradley,” to which Joe replies, “The best I ever met.” (p. 79) Lies spoken well, with joy and laughter, nourish a perfect day with friends in a city.

Returning to the palace from her day of existential psychotherapy in the city of Rome, Ann is now a grown woman, “completely aware of my duty to my family and my country” (p. 88). “No milk and crackers” she tells the Countess, obvious symbolism of the completion of her passage to maturity. (p. 89) At the press conference the next day, it is clear that she commands language as an individuated adult. She can keep to a script and veer off it when needed. When asked which of the cities she had visited did she enjoy the most, she begins to reply, as proscribed, “Each [of the cities visited] in its own way was unforgettable” but then breaks off into her own words, “Rome! I will cherish my visit here in memory, as long as I live.” She is off-message, but it is no disaster. In fact, it is a wonderful statement of closure both for herself and Joe. She has truly learned and grown.

VALEDICTORY AFTERWORD

I cannot count the amount of times I used the textbook *Roman Holiday: DVDで学ぶ『ローマの休日』* in classes at Aichi Prefectural University over the years (I only stopped using it a year or so ago). But it has meant that I have seen the movie perhaps a dozen or even two dozen times. It is unusual to watch or hear the same story over and over again in our modern times, but it was probably quite normal in ancient times. Stories do not have to be new to

still move us, they just have to be properly crafted, told in a way that touches every desire for narrative archetype within us.

When I first came to APU, many years ago, I taught classes in English “reading” (these were later renamed as “Academic English.”) I tended, at first, to use textbooks that centered around topics that provided safe and predictable discussion points, things such as CO₂ in the environment, or education and development. The classes were ok. But somewhere along the line I started to realize that it is stories rather than discussion topics that really move the soul. With that, I began to use novels and graded readers. Classes became more joyful then, for me and (I hope) the students. I still did discussion topics but only in the context of the story (such as discussing Peircean abduction in the case of Sherlock Holmes or transhumanism in the case of *The Invisible Man*.) There were many glory moments for me, the teacher, as students got totally caught up in the tales. I remember once, when we had to go online, doing the Sherlock Holmes story *A Scandal in Bohemia*. Towards the end of the story, a mysterious person passes Holmes on the street and says hello to him. I told the students that this person was probably an assassin sent by the King to kill Irene Adler. When we came to the final section of the book, where Holmes and the King call to Adlers house, I kept up the tension, telling the students that there is a chance they will find Adler killed or kidnapped. But of course, as readers of the story know, this does not happen. It ends happily. And so, when all was well, and all had ended well, I finished the class and logged out of MS Teams. And then, about half an hour later, I got an email from a student telling me that her internet connection had gone during the class, and could I *please* tell her what happens at the end of the story. Her genuine engagement felt so good. Another time, when I did the Jane Austen novel *Persuasions*, we got to the bit where Frederick writes Ann a letter. We then finished the class and the students started to shuffle out. But a group of them, about three or four girls stood huddled around the door, (blocking entry and exit!) for a long moment, animatedly chattering about what had just happened in the story (why had Frederick written the letter? What did it mean? What about Mr Elliot?) The hand of Jane Austen had reached out across centuries and continents to poke that lovely natural instinct in those young ladies to gossip

and chat. Of course, such glory moments of teaching did not happen every time, and some stories were hard to rev up (*Northanger Abbey* was tricky to get going) but, either way, such moments would never, ever have happened had I just stuck to those topic discussion textbooks I had started out with.

Stories are not just entertainment but mirrors of our own consciousness and the way we do, in daily life, understand our world through narrative. Everyday we are doing things because we have given those things meaning. They are part of the story of our life that we consciously or not are telling ourselves. Other stories just feed into our own story, giving more color, more expanse, a higher definition. As I watched *Roman Holiday* all those times, it wove itself into my own narrative as a teacher at APU. Each semester would start with meeting a new cohort of students, and as with Joe and Ann, there would be that initial unfamiliarity as we were getting used to each other's company. Midpoint in the semester would coincide with midpoint in the movie: Joe, Ann, and Irving happy out in Rome, with drama and complications eased, the story sailing on smoothly, as was the semester. Towards the end of the movie, the pace picks up, and Rome becomes the site of drama and new adventures. APU used to be generous, compassionate, and unfussy about its foreign teachers going home or elsewhere between semesters, and so as the end of each semester would approach, so too would the excitement again for me of airports and travel. This, I would project onto the ending scenes of *Roman Holiday*. There they are in an elegant and enormous Roman chamber. There's Ann greeting the press reporters in many different languages. The big world with all its sites and babel is out there, still out there, waiting.

And then there is the very final scene, where Joe strides alone across the massive floor, camera angle from below to make it mythic. Ann and her world have retreated behind closed palace doors and all that lingers for Joe are happy memories. But on he strides, his tale still unfolding. I am now teaching my final semester at Aichi Prefectural University, and so too I must stride away, leaving behind years of mellow and merry memories.

Notes

- 1 All page numbers are from *Roman Holiday*—DVDで学ぶ 『ローマの休日』 (NAN'UN-DO, 2009)
- 2 Ann's linguistic traumas and need for rebirthing is foreshadowed by the Countess remarking on how “schedule” can be pronounced (*fed-*) or (*sked-*), acknowledging that either version is fine. This faux freedom seems to mock Ann's confined life. When Joe later uses the word “schedule” it sparks a subconscious reaction in Ann: “Oh, no, not that word, please!” (p. 74)
- 3 On Page 82 he actually says, “Make a wish? Tell the doctor?” (Make a wish! Tell the Doctor!—I cannot think of a more succinct way to summarize Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice.)
- 4 As Joe's boss, the hard talking, cynical Mr Hennessy points out elsewhere, sarcastically but shrewdly, “They fool you, you know, these royal kids. They've got a lot more on the ball than we suspect.” (p. 38)