

**Second Language Learning and Teaching**

Issues in Literature and Culture

David Callahan

Anthony Barker *Editors*

# Body and Text: Cultural Transformations in New Media Environments

 Springer

# **Second Language Learning and Teaching**

Issues in Literature and Culture

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David Callahan · Anthony Barker  
Editors

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# Introduction: All that is Solid Changes into Something Else



David Callahan and Anthony Barker

**Abstract** Contemporary culture is at present producing a bewildering array of texts and practices in which bodily transformation and the limits of bodies lie at the heart of what is being represented and staged. This volume explores a range of these phenomena in terms of what they might mean and how they are being enacted in the twenty-first century, in terms of both their practitioners and their readers. The “Body” section focuses on depictions of extreme or limit bodies and bodily practices, such as undead or alien bodies on the one hand, or bodies which skywalk dangerously, have permanent images carved into their skin, or who contest hegemonic male power via liminal bodily practices and performances. The “Text” section looks at the creative and commercial possibilities of source materials moving, unlike in the past generally from high to low status forms, but rather in all conceivable directions. The “Transformers” franchise has been the model for the sort of dynamic movement across digital platforms and in various media packages that we find today—in toys, games, publications, films, cartoons, fansites, tie-ins, even razors. New technologies and market-savvy globalised business interests are clearly driving this process. Samples of these transformations are examined in young adult and fan fiction, in big screen to small screen transfers, in that computer-based hybrid, the live-action animation, in movie-themed video games and in the way adaptation for video game and online formats affects the very nature of contemporary storytelling.

**Keywords** Bodies · Adaptation · Media studies · Transformation · Liminality

## 1 Body

Transformation of bodies is an ever-present theme in contemporary culture. The seemingly endless appetite for hero figures whose identities and bodies are unstable

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and improvable, whether desired or not, continues unabated with the release of a seemingly unstoppable series of films and television series drawn from the Marvel cinematic universe. While the MCU is now one of the principal concentrations of body transformation narratives, it is but one spoke in a wheel in which others might be made up of infected and zombie narratives and tropes, the influence of genetic and reproductive systems research, a galaxy of fantasy fiction featuring magic, wizardry and witchcraft, and loosely related dystopian scenarios in which bodies are experimented on, altered and transformed according to the designs of the authorities. Not for nothing has the term “biopolitics” become such a productive theoretical resource in the examination of the operations of power.

Bodies may develop special abilities through forms of cod-scientific causes, such as being bitten by a spider developed in a scientific experiment, or through forms of more plausibly scientific explanation, such as current research on genetics or prosthetics extended into imagined future possibilities, or actually present technologies in the realisation of gender affirming surgery. From superheroes to cyberbodies to transsexuals may be yoking together disparate phenomena. On the other hand, they may also be different points on a paradigm in which the stability of bodies has been overtaken by logics of choice associated with varying possibilities, real or promised, in a battle of not just warring super and enhanced figures, but of the models of desire they embody, and which we have come to feel should be our right and even can be our right.

All of these things have naturally been the concern of speculative fiction, media studies and cultural studies for some time, and such narratives have not, after all, suddenly been invented from nowhere. Nevertheless, their unstemmed vigour, spreading like an out-of-control virus released from a government facility, warrants continued academic attention. No-one is now able, for example, to dominate such a specific trope as that of scenarios involving bodies which will not lie down and die quietly. Whether infected and flesh-eating, or risen from the dead and flesh-eating, the number of novels, comic series, television series, films, and video games featuring the trope, not to mention the scholarly and fan-centred response to and critical analysis dealing with it, are beyond any one person’s ability to cope with. To this may be added similarly sprawling transformational tropes which no one person can adequately cover, from superbodies or bodies with extreme powers (not just Marvel, but any number of video game figures, not to mention certain characters in that central text of the century so far, *A song of ice and fire/Game of thrones*), technologically altered bodies (*Robocop*, *Iron man*, *Mass effect*, *Deus ex*), genetic intervention (*Never let me go*, *Orphan black*, the *MaddAddam* trilogy, and indeed Atwood’s *Angel Catbird* graphic novel trilogy), cyborg bodies which call into question what it is to be human (*West-world*, *Humans*, *Ex-Machina*), and body alteration and intervention (as within more realistic genres, such as *The Danish girl*, *Transparent* or *52 Tuesdays*). Moreover, many of these narratives could belong to more than one of these tropes.

Accordingly, this volume attempts in its first section to deal with certain very specific examples of contemporary culture’s processing of the limits of bodies and what this might mean, both to practitioners and to consumers. The initial article’s focus on the decaying and yet dangerous bodies which throng in many contemporary

narratives takes the ways in which they are read as symbolizations of a range of threats to white, middle-class Western life and sets these readings against how the rotting bodies are visually presented in infected and zombie narratives. Using as principal examples the graphic novels and television series *The walking dead*, the television series *Fear the walking dead* and the video game *The last of us*, the article points out how ethnicity appears to be visually and narratively evacuated from such narratives, re-entering via the priorities of some of their interpreters.

In Elsa Andrade's investigation, we see how Scarlett Johansson's very differently coded body both inhabits the scenarios of three recent films in which bodies and embodiment are themes, and strains against aspects of the narrative on account of the existence her star's body has across the media in general. Through readings of *Under the skin*, *Her* and *Lucy*, Andrade demonstrates the ways in which heterosexuality and women's melancholy are intertwined despite the putative promise of heterosexual sex as pleasure, so that even an apparent escape from the weakness of women's bodies in both *Under the skin* and *Lucy* is undermined by the melancholy of the ineradicable traces of those trajectories in which women's bodies are coded as loss, sacrifice and availability.

Martin Boszorád's article, on the other hand, is somewhat of a celebration of the identitarian possibilities enabled by the contemporary fashion of tattooing. Indeed, tattooing's presumption of permanence might be said to operate athwart the overall line of this volume, in which nothing much is stable, and everything is liable to be changed into something else. With tattoos, it is true, bodies are transformed, but as Boszorád shows in prose verging on the defiantly personal scripting of tattoos itself, tattoos may be seen as attempting to make clearer an interpretation or presentation of the self rather than change it. Enacting functions that are more than simply decoration, tattoos become vehicles of the history of the self, efforts to stabilise memories and presence over against the inevitable change the body is heir to.

Luís Branco also deals with a manifestation of identitarian intensification through the actions of the body, in this case the highly dangerous practice of scaling extremely tall buildings unaided, as well as performing perilous feats when on them. What is being defied in this body-endangering activity is not just the limits of the activities which the everyday person is expected to carry out, but the meanings of the spaces and volumes which are being created around us, decisions about which are generally totally removed from the public who are going to have to live underneath and next to them. Endangering the body as both personal and political expression takes a spectacularly contemporary form here, and ultimately Branco supports the interventionist laying of the body on the line in such causes, even if, seemingly inevitably, the activity has been co-opted by some of the very political and commercial forces which it was destined to challenge.

Maria Sofia Biscaia's article on Hans Kang's *The vegetarian* is oddly related to Branco's article, in that it interprets another practice of defiance, in which a Korean woman's decision to become vegetarian is caught up in a network of gendered and cultural power relations which transform her decision away from the success of defiance to yet more brutal subjection. Biscaia's employment of theoretical lines drawn from Deleuze and Guattari, and Derrida, places the protagonist's acts in a transcul-

tural context in which the enacting of male power over women means that there is no sphere in which women's bodies may be their own. Given this scenario, Biscaia posits that the protagonist's ultimate trajectory could be seen as that of becoming a vegetable herself, following a hint in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. For most, this will hardly count as a victory, and it does not in Kang's novel either—depending on your interpretation—but Biscaia's analysis intensifies theoretical debate on this widely-translated novel.

Finally, Raquel Espada's article links forward to some extent to the material introduced in Aline Ferreira's exploration of transformations of *Frankenstein* at the start of the next section: bodily enhancement to the point where it could conceivably be considered bodily re-creation. This feature of many contemporary texts has been much debated, and one arena in which many lengthy and thoughtful narratives have been developed focusing on such transformations is that of video games. While novels, films and television series which deal with the theme receive a substantial amount of academic attention directed at the interface between human and machine, or human and created-by-science being, video games in which the theme is central have not received as much attention as might be expected, given the popularity of the medium. To this theme within video game narratives might be added the fact that in playing a video game the gamer is controlled by the text to a greater extent than with other media. This is to turn on its head the conventional wisdom among gamers that video games are uniquely acted upon by their players. Playing a video game is to be commanded, and hindered, in ways which do not happen with a book or film. The player is plugged into the technology in a lower-grade fashion than a human implanted with cyborg features, and yet a video game cannot be played without a connection to a machine. Espada's reflections upon one of the most highly regarded video games among academics, and gamers, the initial *Mass effect* trilogy, explores what the protagonist Shepard's status might be after she (or he) is resurrected at the beginning of game two and set to work for a human supremacist organisation. With recourse to classic philosophical arguments about the nature of a human self, Espada outlines clearly how video games are able to provide thoughtful examples of imaginative speculation on the directions of current technological developments. That *Mass effect* does not tell us what to think on this issue, and indeed problematises it repeatedly and acutely during gameplay, entitles it to be considered alongside other texts emanating from so-called elite or high culture. And that, indeed, is one of the central intentions of this collection.

## 2 Text

The movement of narratives and characterisations across forms, conventionally understood as adaptation, has been commonly carried out from the high-status classical forms (drama, epic, novel) to recorded and broadcast media (film, radio and television), or from the older recorded media to the newer ones. The advent of new convergent digital platforms has further transformed hierarchies. Now source texts

can move in any direction and take up any configuration, as emergent interacting fan bases drive innovation and new creative and commercial possibilities are deployed. “Transformers” is the guiding metaphor for this publication, as the Transformers toy franchise gave impetus to an animated TV cartoon series, which itself morphed into big-budget FX live-action cinema, now careering past *Transformers 5* (2017) and *Bumblebee* (2018). The Hasbro official site has 9 *Transformers*-based games ready for online play. In these media packages, technology is both content, theme and delivery system, and transformation is both theme and product, not to mention response and reception.

In one view, the playful or even recriminative energies directed by fans at cultural products revealed on the internet have always been latent, and are now simply facilitated by digital technology. The work of scholars such as Henry Jenkins has outlined how such energies are mobilized in the turbulent world of fan fictions, slash fiction, and mash-ups of all types. It may be, however, that transformation is not just a technology-driven creative practice and response, but at the very centre of the thematic memes developed in those forms of story-telling which are currently popular: television series, video games, film, and novels for both adults and children.

The formation of global conglomerates (delivery systems like AT&T attempting to swallow content providers like Time Warner, as Comcast has swallowed Paramount) has created the commercial conditions for ever more lucrative exchanges between different media. Hardware, software and entertainment generation are now in lock step, and they are like this because it makes it easier to function in global markets, working the magical transformation of your money into their money. In this regard, Sony-Columbia’s exploitation of its hoary 1950s product *Godzilla* is a quaint example of a practice now brought to considerable refinement. The franchise, the sequel and more recently the prequel, are now industry norms, lurching fastly and furiously into online multiplayer gaming after-life. But cultural products are not identical; that which delivered success must be repeated but not replicated. It is still the case that nobody can predict what will succeed and by how much. However, we do know considerable energy and talent goes into this process, with pre-existing forms possessing a publicity value that can be exploited: stage to screen transfers, musicalisations, cartoon to live-action and back, narrative linearity to interactive polysemy, 2D or not 2D (that is the question?), screen to toy and cereal packet transfers. Consider the casting challenges posed by long-running franchises and the fan responses they generate. Consider the risks of repositioning and reconceptualising in Tim Burton’s *Alice* films or of monkeying with a classic in Sam Raimi’s *Oz the great and powerful* (2013)—the mountebank as hero and redeemer, clearly a tale for the age of Trump. Consider the newly revamped “Pirates of the Caribbean” ride (2016) in Shanghai Disneyland carried out in the light of the 3.7 billion-dollar-earning movie franchise that appeared to hit the buffers not so much with *Pirates 4* but with the Johnny Depp/*Lone ranger* debacle. Some of the most dynamic transformations have been in cable television, where filmic worlds (*Bates motel*, *Blade*, *Westworld*, *Hannibal*, *Nikita*, *Twelve monkeys*, *Minority report*, etc.) have been opened up to serial or anthology narratives, branded as it were like *Alfred Hitchcock presents* in the 1950s and yet not exactly like it. The film’s “universe” is recreated but not necessarily its plots, nor its original

characterisations, maybe not even its visual styles. So what exactly are these “parallel universes” of the telescreen and the web? Moreover, how has our greater opportunity and speed of response to them fed back into the production chain?

The Text section of this collection looks at specific manifestations of this contemporary phenomenon. Aline Ferreira’s essay on young adult fiction’s reworking of the Frankenstein story shows how particular audiences can make over aspects of a classic original to meet the needs and anxieties of an age when cybernetic and prosthetic body alteration has become a reality. Indeed, Ferreira’s piece is a perfect bridge between the body-focused first section and our secondary focus on text, showing how modern concerns with the body can find a parallel in textual fecundity, where franchises, sequels, remakes, spin-offs and transmedia applications mimic the plasticity of the originating body. She uses three popular novels published this decade by American, Irish and Indian authors to demonstrate how the foundational story of a creature given life from assembled dead body parts by an insufficiently caring creator can be repurposed to address concerns about body image in young adults and about delinquent parenting. These young adult fiction dystopian novels also tap into disquiet about organ harvesting. Teenagers, at a stage of life when they are challenging their parents and uncertain about their futures, find in the Frankenstein archetype a model for their fears of being both unloved and unlovable. The ubiquity of social media has made the relationship between authors and their readers, and between technology and its possible applications, all the more immediate. The fictions even imagine euthanasia in the form of retrospective abortion for unwanted or disposable adolescents.

Science and fantasy fiction has been one of the growth areas of television serials and series, as the technology for generating magical illusion pioneered in the film industry has reached television. There is general agreement that since the Millennium, something of a golden age has established itself in this industry. Hungry for ideas and rich in programming hours to fill, multi-channel television has raided movies for inspiration and the television series based on a movie original has become a mainstay. The essay on *Fargo* looks at one particularly successful example of this practice: Noah Hawley’s adaptation of the Coen brothers’ movie for (at present) three ten-episode serials for the FX channel. Since the shows, unlike other adaptations (cf. *Hannibal*), do not use the characters from the film, what exactly does it mean to claim to be making *Fargo*? The article problematises the series’ implicit claim to be occupying the Coens’ creative universe, to be able to generate new stories with a distinctly Coenesque flavour. More generally, the article looks at questions of authorship in an age of proliferating and ramifying narratives, as if it makes little sense to see creation (particularly in television) as possessing a unitary vision. Beyond its location in the Minnesota heartland with its “Minnesota-nice” citizenry, TV *Fargo*’s claims of sharing the Coens’ style and philosophy eventually lead us to questions of pastiche and whether Hawley and his team have something of their own to offer. The show’s critical and popular success suggests that it does.

Schlögl and Zagalo’s article looks at another manifestation of creative energies: the remake. Their focus is on the updating of the Disney animated classic *Sleeping beauty* (1959) in the form of the same studio’s live-action *Maleficent* (2014). As well

as addressing the social changes that occurred in the half century between these two films, their essay also considers what it means to remake the story in the computer-generated live-action format. Central to their argument is the casting of Angelina Jolie as the main character Maleficent. Having the bad fairy brought from the periphery to the centre, the *Sleeping Beauty* story is recast as a *soi-disant* mother-daughter story, relegating male figures to lesser villainous and accessory roles. Clearly the feminism that has pushed for the reappraisal of traditional narratives, in this case fairy stories, is at work here. Indeed, Disney has been at the forefront of this process with its provision of movie fare for the young female market (*Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *Frozen*, etc.). A clear antecedent for this film is the stage musical Holzman and Schwarz's *Wicked* (2003), based on the 1995 Gregory Maguire novel *Wicked*, which reappraises Frank L. Baum's *The wizard of Oz* from the perspective of the Wicked Witch of the West. Both *Wicked* and *Maleficent* offer a backstory which explains and extenuates malevolent intentions, allowing subsequent events to be reinterpreted as the consequence of being a victim. They also pave the way for the act of redemption, which is traditionally great box office. The essay accordingly addresses the commercial logic of these transformations as well as their cultural and social implications.

Commercial success is the chimerical objective of movie versions of video games. Bartosz Stoppel's piece on botched video game-sourced movies explores the problems, both theoretical and practical, that have made so many such adaptations fail with both the public and the critics. He looks at the satisfactions of the original games and the aesthetic and interactive pleasures which they deliver. He then sees what limitations are encountered when this content is transferred to the emotionally denser world of cinema. Stoppel gathers data from specific websites and blogs to pinpoint the dissatisfactions of both fans and critics when these highly valued source materials have been translated into movie narratives. In particular, he looks at the *World of Warcraft* and *Assassin's Creed* film adaptations taken from two immensely popular video games. He finds these rich storyworlds traduced by heavy background exegesis, over-plotting and shallow characterization. The greater space and time of videogaming, and the natural investment that comes with immersive interactive forms, cannot be adequately reproduced in the 90-min movie. The problems are found to rest not on any preponderant technological factors but on "significant differences concerning narrativity in games and films." In the author's view, the most successful adaptation to date is that of *Angry birds* (2016), and that is because it has striven to largely stand alone from the video game.

The last article by Martin Kudláč addresses the very nature of transmedia storytelling, and how its polysemic form has informed video game narratives. Looking at the question from the perspective of technological innovation, which has mainly consisted of ways to facilitate convergence and synergy on digital platforms, Kudláč theorises modern forms of seriality as arriving at the single hybrid supertext, a storyworld simultaneously available to multiple forms of exploitation. Video games are a crucial domain where this plays out, with their perennial updating and their openness to new hardware and forms of delivery. Big data, artificial intelligence and the internet of everything will lead, it is claimed, to an inter-connectedness where full reciprocity will obtain between the teller, the tale and the recipient. They will



blend into each other and out of this immersive environment will come ever more engaging experiences.

Taking the two sections together is to ask a related question about contemporary culture's relationship with the identity of anything. Writer, popular culture scholar and gender rights activist Roz Kaveney accordingly begins the collection with a freewheeling exposition and exemplar of radical transformation in both personal life and in cultural life in general, ending up emphasising translation as at the centre of how human beings process each other, and, more unexpectedly, how we process ourselves. As a trans woman who refuses to be assigned an identity by others—an ongoing battle—translation serves well as a practice reminding us that human creativity and inventiveness circulate thanks to breaking down borders and boundaries, and they always have.

Nonetheless, it seems undeniable that this situation has vastly accelerated in our time. The fixed status of our bodies was once more or less accepted, with any prosthetic addition being perceived as a response to loss or decay, while the fixed status of our creative efforts was also more or less assumed, with no more thought being given to *The trial* Part Two than to a remake of the book of Genesis. A version maybe, but not a sequel. Now anything is up for grabs, from investigation into brain transplants to self-mutilation as art, from respectable professors and politicians with tattoos and piercings to the achieved dream of changing one's sex, from visual media forms of classic texts becoming their principal cultural iterations, such as *Pride and prejudice* or *The lord of the rings*, to the sense of entitlement on the part of both fans and detractors to every type of creative production via forms of modification placed on the internet. The identity of anything seems to have realised a postmodern postulate as it becomes less and less fixed to its origin. Whether this constitutes the vertigo of ontological loss or the thrilling multiplicity of human possibility is, as ever, up to the reader.

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# Gender Genre Transition Translation



Roz Kaveney

**Abstract** There is a particular sort of feminist who really really doesn't like those feminists who happen to be trans. Feminist publishers I've worked for have been threatened with displeasure; feminist encyclopaedias I worked on got told that important contributors would refuse to contribute. In the context of talking about transformations, it is not just that my writing tends to be about what changes and what remains the same. It is that one of the things art does is take an occasion—a series of unpleasant insults—and turn it into something else, partly through wrapping it in formality and partly through treating it as a metaphor for something broader. When we make art, the personal and momentary becomes less transitory. This essay talks about how the perception, the consciousness of change, the sense of my self as provisional and constructed, yet as a continuity, is what has made me the artist, the scholar, the activist that I am.

**Keywords** Trans · Transformation · Translation · Creation · Identity · Memoir

Always best to start with a story.

One of the great things about being trans and some sort of public figure is the hate mail—I'm not all that public, so I don't get all that much of it but when it does arrive, it offers some sort of insight...

As some of you will know, there is a particular sort of feminist who really really doesn't like those feminists who happen to be trans. Feminist publishers I've worked for have been threatened with displeasure; feminist encyclopaedias I worked on got told that important contributors would refuse to contribute. More recently, things got said on social media such that I had to retain a libel lawyer and have long conversations with the police about whether I was the victim of hate crimes.

One particularly unpleasant American plastered photos of me when I was young and cute all over the internet because somehow my having been good looking when I was twenty-eight disqualified me from being a serious person forty years later. And a lawyer in Baltimore sent me disobliging remarks about my genitals—it's odd

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they really care about trans women's genitals. Even if you've got a cunt... Serious scholarship, here. Germaine Greer complains that our cunts aren't smelly enough; Sheila Jeffreys that we stink. Some times you just can't win—the lawyer in Baltimore was fond of the phrase “hibiscus and pus” which I think is rather poetic.

Anyway, when life hands you a lemon... Always own your fear, always turn back an insult.

The surgeons left me with a patchwork cunt  
stitch-marks and scars, and smooth skin flayed from thigh.

I bled. I oozed. With speculums, I'd try  
to burn new keloids off. I'd grope and hunt

for small hard bits I'd missed. That now are smooth.

Things levelled out. You'd never know the sore  
torn places that were there. For an old whore  
it's sweet and neat and innocent as truth.

I paid in blood and pus. Here's what I got.  
Not some mere hole, but tenderness. A maze  
of flesh love's fingers have explored for days  
and found its spring, gushing and furnace hot.

I dared not hope. Yet my reward was this –  
to hang in ecstasy on sweet girl kiss.

I sent that to the lawyer in Baltimore in answer to one of her more unpleasant e-mails. I've not heard from her since, not even a writ.

In the context of talking about transformations, the point of that story is not just that the poem is about what changes and what remains the same. It is that one of the things art does is take an occasion—a series of unpleasant insults—and turn it into something else, partly through wrapping it in formality and partly through treating it as a metaphor for something broader. When we make art, the personal and momentary becomes less transitory—and yes, by saying that, I am instantly aligning myself with one of the central tropes of, at least, Western art. Which is a thought to which I shall be returning.

Two statements about change.

Turn and face the strange  
Ch-ch-changes  
Time may change me  
But I can't trace time  
(David Bowie, “Changes”)

If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.  
(Giuseppe Tomasi de Lampedusa)

What I am going to talk about today is how the perception, the consciousness of change, the sense of my self as provisional and constructed, yet as a continuity,

is what has made me the artist, the scholar, the activist that you are in this room to hear. I shall be talking about my work—my poetry, my translations, my cultural commentary, my fiction—as ways in which I have drawn on my experience and my sense of self, and about them as aspects of what that sense of self has been built from across time.

Gender—because my life and my work has been formed by sex and identity.

Genre—because my poems are love sonnets and narrative ballads and elegies for dead friends and loves I miss. Because of the noir jazz and baroque strumming and passionate arias that are the soundtrack in my head. Because I study genre and genre of various kinds has given me tools for moving in the world.

Transition—not just for the obvious reason but because so much of my work is about movement between states that turn out to be largely the same on both sides of that river.

Translation—because one of the changes we see around us every day is language and moving between languages is one of the most interesting of transitions.

I am trans.

I was young and am now old.

I was once healthy and am now sick.

I have been a civil servant and politically engaged, a teacher and a student.

I am a scholar and a critic and a writer.

I was a poet, and then I was someone who had been a poet, and am now a poet again.

I am a translator, which means that I spend much of my time creating a bridge between my head and the head of writers long dead.

I am all of the things I ever was, except for the things that I never was, even a bit.

I learned to embrace change and love it.

I am a twenty-first century writer who uses old forms and tries to do what Pound said, make them new—sometimes shattering grammar, using whole lines of other texts, taking tropes two thousand years old and arguing with them, subverting them and, yes, sometimes just inhabiting and celebrating them.

A lot of my work is a repurposing of found material—translation is one of the most obvious ways in which I do this, but there are many others. I'm fascinated by the ragbag of myth and superstition and by the way there is always something new to say about them. Equally, the genres of the novel and film over the last century have generated a number of new myths that I also use—the lone righteous person pursuing clues down mean streets finds echoes in all of my fiction and some of my poems, but it's also an archetype that's been emotionally useful to me when doing activism.

Some change is evolution; some change is making use of things or of bits of oneself. Come on in the water's fine but it will never be the same water twice.

The argument of what follows draws on both these perceptions—we live in a world that was always one of constant flux—that we never step into the same river twice is one of the oldest philosophical perceptions in the Western tradition—but which had speeded up immeasurably in the life time of the oldest among us. And