

A decorative banner at the top of the page. On the left, there is an orange rectangular area containing the text 'Center for the Study of Writing' and '2013-2014'. To the right of this area is a collage of images: a quill pen, a fountain pen, a pen nib, and a portion of a manuscript page with large, ornate letters.

Center for the Study  
of Writing  
2013-2014

# SAGES First Seminar Essay Awards

2013-2014

# **The SAGES First Seminar Essay Awards**

**2013-2014**

*The SAGES First Seminar Essay Awards highlight the best student writing produced in SAGES First Seminars each year.*

*The essays included in this booklet were selected from those nominated by SAGES faculty for this award in fall 2013.*

April 18, 2014



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*Written for FSNA 149, “Brain, Evolution, Darwin”; James Zull, Biology (Seminar Leader); Paul Jaussen, English (Writing Instructor)*

**Assignment Description:** Students were asked to write an essay in response to the question “What was Charles Darwin’s greatest intellectual challenge in developing *On the Origin of Species*?” Students were required to use an academic biography of Darwin by Peter Bowler and one secondary source.

**Instructor’s Nomination:** This essay argues that Darwin’s greatest intellectual challenge was accounting for instinct in his theory of natural selection. The author explains the problem clearly and intelligently, with lively and readable prose. This essay, while not perfect, exemplifies many of the skills that we seek to cultivate in the First Seminar Program.

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*Written for FSSY 149, “Arts of Adaptation”; Christopher Flint, English (Seminar Leader)*

**Assignment Description:** Students were required to submit a 7-page researched and revised essay on some aspect of “adaptation” (biological and/or literary) that contained, at a minimum, three secondary sources meaningfully incorporated in the body of the essay.

**Instructor’s Nomination:** For a paper at the first-year level, this essay coordinates complex but relevant philosophical issues and Darwinian theories of evolution in an effective manner and provides an insightful extension of existing scholarship on the nature of human reason. It also nicely executes the course’s aim of integrating humanist and scientific discourse. It is crisply written, well-organized and lucidly reasoned.

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### **“A Modern *Fairy Tale*: Miwa Yanagi and Recasting of Young and Old”**

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*Written for FSSY 152, “Identity and Activism in Chinese & Japanese Contemporary Art”; Noelle Giuffrida, Art History and Art, (Seminar Leader); Christopher Strathman, English (Writing Instructor)*

**Assignment Description:** Write a short essay in which you discuss and analyze Miwa Yanagi’s *Fairy Tale* (2004-2006). Your thesis should make an argument about the artwork that you can support with visual and textual evidence from primary and secondary sources in conjunction with your own thoughtful analysis. Your paper should incorporate two direct quotes from the artist and two ideas/comments from another author. Be sure to introduce each quote or comment and follow it up with an explanation of why the quote or comment supports a point you are trying to make in your essay.

**Instructor’s Nomination:** Very strong and sophisticated thesis that propels the essay. Excellent integration of quotes from the artist and summaries from other scholars. Alex chooses appropriate material, introduces it well, and then truly joins the conversation with his explanation and analysis, even convincingly challenging a reading by another scholar. Smooth transitions from discussions of Yanagi’s *Erendira* and *Rapunzel* and evidence of close visual analysis to support his arguments. Wonderful concluding paragraph to wrap up the essay and Yanagi’s *Fairy Tale* series itself. All in all, Alex demonstrates a level of engagement with Yanagi’s photographs and writing prowess that is well above most of his peers.

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*Written for FSSY 119, “Art, Music & the Museum”; Georgia Cowart (Music), Seminar Leader; Joshua Ware, English (Writing Instructor)*

**Assignment Description:** The essay guidelines began with two current assumptions: first, the criticism of the concert hall as a “museum,”

ensconced in rigid, outmoded canons and rituals, and second, the recent observation of a spectacular “hip factor” within the museum itself. Students were asked to engage with (agree, disagree, challenge, elaborate on) these assumptions, by focusing on some aspect of their own experience of Severance Hall and the Cleveland Museum of Art. Readings included essays by Adam Gopnik, Christopher Small, and Charles Michener.

**Instructor’s Nomination:** I admire several things about this essay. It represents a substantial improvement over this student’s previous writing, most notably in the expression of a carefully argued point of view. It also offers an attractive alliance of reason, passion, and insight. The student’s personal investment in the topic brings a warmth and liveliness to what could have been a dryer, more formulaic exercise, and his spirited contrarian argument encourages the reader to rethink some artistic stereotypes.

# Darwin's Intellectual Challenge: Understanding Instinct in Insects

Cheshta Dhingra

Charles Darwin developed the crux of his theory of evolution by 1839. However, it took him two decades to publish his “Big Species Book” (as he called what later became *On the Origin of Species*). Even in those days, this was an exorbitantly long gap, so scholars inevitably speculated about the cause of this delay. Some said that the hypothetical-deductive method of science simply took time (Gillispie, 312). Others said that Darwin could not pen his theory due to his critical illness (Colp Jr). Still others claimed that Darwin was hesitant to expose the notion that there were remnants of animality in man and human mentality in animals—a notion that was heretical, to say the least, in the intellectual climate of the time (Gruher, 202). While these factors certainly contributed to the delay, I believe the predominant reason for this delay was a great intellectual challenge—one that prevented him from fully formulating his theory of evolution through natural selection. Specifically, it was very difficult for him to integrate into his theory the concept of “instinct”—actions in which animals are proficient from birth—in certain varieties of insects. This was no simple stumbling block; it was a difficulty that, if left unresolved, even he recognized as “fatal to [his] whole theory” (Darwin, 175). It is interesting to note that although Darwin overcame his general challenge in order to publish his book, he still struggled with its specifics even after publication (Correspondence vol. 8).

The cornerstone of Darwin's theory is that living beings have flaws that are selected against and strengths that are selected for over time. However, certain varieties of ants and bees performed tasks so elaborate with such efficiency to produce results so seemingly *perfect*, that it seemed at first inconceivable that their behavior had been evolved through the inheritance of minute but profitable characteristics over time—the foundation of Darwin's theory. Further, some of the creatures in question were *sterile*, which meant that the favorable traits

that they possessed could not have been inherited by subsequent generations through the mechanism Darwin espoused. Thus, Darwin set out to establish that instincts, just like anatomical structures, were in fact subject to evolution by means of natural selection. As mentioned earlier, one of the first claims he had to prove was that instincts, just like other traits, *vary* among populations. Second, that those instincts are never exhibited for the exclusive benefit or harm to *another* individual, but always for some slight evolutionary advantage to the individual who expresses them. Thirdly and perhaps most compellingly, instincts which prove to be advantageous to the individual's survival will be passed on to its offspring. Darwin had to prove that the saying holds true for instinctive and physical characteristics alike: *natura non facit saltum*, or “nature does not make leaps,” rather it works gradually—another fundamental piece of his theory (Darwin, 346). Indeed, Darwin's study of insects proved incredibly helpful in these goals, as he writes: “it may not be a logical deduction, but to my imagination it is far more satisfactory to look at such instincts [...] not as specially endowed or created instincts, but as small consequences of one general law leading to the advancement of all organic beings—namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die” (The Project Gutenberg, “Instincts” summary).

While Darwin could formulate a basic explanation for the evolution of instincts, certain insect species gave him serious trouble. One of the families of animals whose instinctive behavior baffled Darwin was the *Formica* ant family. These ants showed a distinct slave-making behavior that was not common among insects. The *Formica sanguinea* are a species of ants that themselves are primarily sterile, but they raid the pupae of ants of a different species, *F. fusca*, which become their slaves upon hatching. These slave ants bear part of the burden of the *sanguinea*'s day-to-day work. They provide food and help protect the larva if there is an imminent threat to the nest. Another closely related species to the *F. sanguinea* is the *Formica rufescens*, which, unlike the *F. sanguinea*, relies *completely* on the slave species for its survival (Darwin, 165). The males and fertile female members of these master ants are incapable of doing any work other than procreating, and the

sterile females are responsible for raiding colonies of slave ants and bringing back their pupae, which eventually hatch into slave ants. The *F. rufescens* habitats are principally inhabited by the captive species, which provide food, protect the larvae, and even carry the master ants during migration from nest to nest. Upon seeing this variation in behavior, Darwin concluded that the slave-making behavior of some ants arose from ants that were not slave-makers at all. These ancestors must have collected pupae as raw food, but when some pupae hatched, there was unintentional rearing, and over time they found that enslaving the hatched ants was more advantageous than simply eating them as food. With time and minute changes, the species of *F. rufescens* ants became so dependent on their slaves that when given their favorite food but no slaves to serve them, they perished (164).

Another instinctual behavior that astonished both scientists and theologians alike was the way that bees built hives. For centuries, people marveled over the gorgeous geometric patterns designed to accommodate the most volume using the least building material—natural engineering. In fact, the beauty with which bees built their hives was often used as proof of the existence of God. William Kirby, the “Father of Entomology,” described hive bees as “Those Heaven-instructed mathematicians, who before any geometer could calculate under what form a cell would occupy the least space without diminishing its capacity, and before any chemist existed to discover how wax might be elaborated from vegetable sweets” (Kirby 1852 2:246). Darwin, on the other hand, spent years studying bee behavior and saw that indeed there was variation; not all beehives were perfect and bees did indeed make mistakes. The “humble bee” formed very simplistic hives of irregular circles to store honey, while the “hive bee” created perfectly hexagonal cells with sophisticated beveled edges. At the intermediate stage between these two bees was the “*Melipona* bee,” which created cylindrical cells with extremely thin walls. Darwin was so enamored by hives that he formulated an equation that described the perfect conditions for wax optimization. He deduced from his equation that “if we could slightly modify the instincts already possessed by the *Melipona*,

and in themselves not very wonderful, this bee would make a structure as wonderfully perfect as that of the hive-bee” (Darwin, 169). One of the modifications was to place a bee at the exact distance from another so that the wall of one cell would merge into the wall of its “neighbor.” Because it takes about 12-15 pounds of raw sugar for a bee to produce 1 pound of wax, it is extremely important for bees to be conservative (Darwin, 174). Bees that made cells close together and regularly shaped would have an evolutionary advantage. The motive being economy of wax, and the mechanism being slight modifications over time, bees evolved to make cells closer and more regular until they evolved into the perfectly optimizing hive-bee. Once again, this time without a doubt, Darwin proved that natural selection could be applied to instinctual behavior just as well as to anything else: “that individual swarm which wasted the least honey in the secretion of wax, having succeeded best, and having transmitted by inheritance its newly acquired economical instinct to new swarms, which in their turn will have had the best chance of succeeding in the struggle for existence” (175).

Darwin had proved that instincts were just as viable as anatomical traits when it came to natural selection, but his troubles were far from over. The real kicker was that the slave-making ants and the worker bees were “neuters”—*sterile* members of their colonies. They tended to be morphologically and instinctually different from their parents, yet sterility prevented them from propagating their own kind. Furthermore, the neuters tended to vary even among themselves. Darwin struggled to reconcile these facts that were seemingly at odds with his theory. Eventually he suggested a *subset*, so to speak, of his theory of natural selection—natural selection as it applies to the community (or what later became known as “kin selection”). The slight genetic modification that caused some members of the community to become sterile had been advantageous to the community as a whole (177). Had there been no sterile members of the *F. rufescens*, there would have been no ants to capture the much-needed slaves. Because that slight modification was advantageous, “the fertile males and females of the same community flourished, and transmitted to their fertile offspring a tendency to produce sterile members having the same

modification” (177). It was not difficult to reconcile this fact with natural evolution when Darwin understood that “this process has been repeated, until that prodigious amount of difference between the fertile and sterile females of the same species has been produced” (177). Darwin analogized the variation between fertile and sterile individuals to division of labor. Indeed, certain specialized forms prospered because that was evolutionarily advantageous to the *community as a whole*.

Looking back on Darwin’s exploration of instinctive behavior in social insects like ants and bees, it may seem strange that he felt his entire theory threatened if these concepts weren’t resolved. It is interesting to note that the practice of raising bees for honey and wax was becoming more and more popular in England around this time, so people were naturally curious about these creatures (Prete, 272). Moreover, Darwin’s theory was inherently all-encompassing, and could not simply leave out entire species because they did not seem to fit at first glance. For a scientist to doubt his lifelong brainchild theory (which was already nearly impossible to sell to the community at large) was greatly troubling. Further, to directly address those concerns in *Origin* was extremely courageous. During the two decades preceding the publication of *Origin*, he tirelessly contacted entomologists, mathematicians, and beekeepers to better understand the remarkable phenomena that he simply could not explain on his own. At the conclusion of *Origins*’ chapter 8, titled “Instinct,” Darwin confidently states, “With all my faith in this principle, I should never have anticipated that natural selection could have been efficient in so high a degree, had not the case of these neuter insects convinced me of the fact” (Darwin, 180). However, even after the publication of *Origin*, Darwin continued to write to other scientists to further elucidate the wonder of these instincts (Correspondence vol. 8). This, I believe, is indicative that understanding instinct was indeed Darwin’s greatest intellectual challenge. It contributed to the delay in publication, but that was a mere by-product of a major intellectual hurdle, traces of which persisted long after the pages were in print.

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# **The Adaptation of Reason**

**Benjamin S. Fletcher**

Western philosophy has perennially struggled to determine the merits, bounds, and properties of rational thought. Our ability to think rationally—in accordance with the laws of reason—has fascinated a variety of philosophers, who have alternately disregarded and enshrined this capability as the defining characteristic of human beings. By the eighteenth century, the divide between different conceptions of the role and nature of rational thought had become so contested that Immanuel Kant devoted much of his writing towards reconciling and amending the two dominant philosophies of the time, rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism, favored by many continental philosophers, such as René Descartes, Benedict de Spinoza, and Gottfried Leibniz, holds that rationality defines the human experience. According to a rationalist, true knowledge can be obtained only through the use of reason, and without the aid of sensory input. In contrast, the most influential proponents of empiricism—John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume—argue that knowledge can only be obtained through sensory input of external phenomena. Despite Kant’s attempt at reconciling the two modes of thought, philosophers remain largely divided between the rationalist and empiricist traditions. To resolve this opposition, I suggest we approach the concept of rationality through the lens of evolutionary biology. Emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection revolutionized our understanding of humanity’s development. By applying evolutionary theory to human behavior, one can ascertain much about the causes and essence of human traits, including rational cognition. In all, the evolutionary account of rationality vindicates the account of reason given by David Hume and the empiricists.

In his philosophy of human understanding, Hume squarely represented the views of the British empiricists. Hume conceived of rational thought solely as a means of interpreting external phenomena. Reason for Hume was a means to an end,

as opposed to a cause in itself. In *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume describes a dichotomy within human thought, between sensations caused by sensory input, which he refers to as “impressions,” and ideas, which arise through the combination of recalled impressions (Hume 27). Speaking on the origin of ideas, he states, “all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inward sentiment; the mixture and composition of these belongs alone to the mind and will, or, to express myself in philosophical language, all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones” (Hume 28). This meant that knowledge of the world could only be obtained from sensory input of empirical phenomena, since a person’s ideas are either the direct manifestations of empirical phenomena or some later recombination of those impressions. According to such precepts, rational thought is merely a method of organizing and evaluating data we have accumulated from the outside world. Reason alone cannot be employed to determine anything, since reason in isolation, without any grounding in material phenomena, does not exist. Instead, the laws of logic upon which reason relies are grounded in observation of the outside world. Hume summarizes this view in saying, “it seems evident that animals, as well as men, learn many things from experience and infer that the same events will always follow from the same causes” (Hume 112). Connected to this concept of rationality is Hume’s belief that our emotions, as opposed to rational deliberations, drive human action. Importantly, this means that one cannot base a moral law on reason alone, as Kant would famously attempt to do.

Kant sought to create a unified metaphysics that would correct and reconcile the views of rationalists and empiricists. To do so, he argued against the rationalist tenet that all true knowledge can be derived from reason alone. In fact, Kant agreed with Hume that humans can only obtain knowledge of the realm they perceive. However, Kant differed from Hume and the empiricists in his belief that many notions, such as that of cause and effect, could be proven through the use of reason alone. These propositions, which he termed “synthetic a priori,” were true by virtue of the fact that they are necessary for cognition of sense perceptions to occur. Therefore, because sense perceptions

occur, cause and effect, and all other synthetic a priori propositions as well, must be valid. In short, Kant believed that, although reason cannot be used to determine every truth, it can be used to determine some truths. In this respect, Kant esteemed rational thought more than Hume. Kant is perhaps most famous for his ethics, in which he posits that there exists a universal moral law applicable to all rational beings. This moral law, the Categorical Imperative, states that one should always “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law” (Kant 39). By universal law, Kant means one followed by all rational beings. The justification Kant gives for the Categorical Imperative is that it is the only law consistent with reason, and therefore the only one that a rational agent should adhere to. Following the tradition of the rationalists, Kant regards reason as the highest mental faculty of humans, and therefore the source of its moral law. Although Kant disagrees with some traditional tenets of rationalist thought, he conforms to it in his beliefs regarding the role of reason, in stark contrast to Hume.

Darwin first published his theory of evolution by natural selection in *The Origin of Species*, but it wasn't until *The Descent of Man* that he examined carefully the evolution of humankind in particular. In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin analyzes the relationship between the mental faculties of humans and those of other animals, theorizing how such characteristics could have evolved from a primitive form to their current state. Lacking detailed knowledge of the features of cognition of different species, Darwin is unable to formulate a specific series of adaptations with the same specificity that characterizes his account of human physiological evolution. However, he does claim that “few persons any longer dispute that animals possess some power of reasoning” (Darwin 46). Darwin does not speculate as to how the first inklings of rational deliberation may have developed in the early animals, and indeed he compares any attempt to do so to the difficult act of determining how an initial single-celled organism may have arisen. These intellectual pursuits were impossible in Darwin's day, but have advanced in the years since. The essential contribution that Darwin made to our concept of reason was to argue that its genesis could be

found in the gradual process of evolution by natural selection.

Much of the work that Darwin alluded to, but was unable to accomplish in his own busy lifetime, has been taken up by modern evolutionary biologists. For example, Professor Leslie A. Real performed research on the cognition of bumblebees during the 1980s and 1990s while at Indiana University. In his work, he examined the analogues of rational mental faculties in bumblebees, as manifested by patterns in decision-making during flower pollination. In one experiment, Real tested the ability of bumblebees to distinguish between different flowers available for pollination (Real 1992, 117). When faced with a choice between one flower color yielding a set amount of nectar and another flower color yielding three times the set amount one third of the time, and no nectar the rest of the time, the bees preferred the former, even though both flower types have the same average nectar yield. As Real states, “If bees are risk-neutral, then they should show no preference for either color type,” and their preference indicates that “bees appear to be risk-averse” (Real 1992, 117). Real then demonstrated with further experimental evidence that bumblebees consistently show risk-aversion. These findings differ from those of other scientists concerning human risk-aversion, and Real suggests such dissimilar tendencies in each species’ rational thought are due to differences in the environments in which they developed. According to Real, “The economic, social, and political definitions of rationality are all ‘consistency in choice behavior.’ What it means to be rational is that an organism shows a consistent pattern of choices. There are definable rules that underlie that consistent pattern of observed choices” (Real 1994, 1). These definable rules, however, are not the same among all animals, contrary to Kant’s notion of transcendental reason. Instead, they are dictated by environment, and beholden to it. As Hume argued, reason is merely a process, in this case employed by animals to adapt more readily to their environments.

While Real demonstrates empirically that rationality is determined by environment, the ecologist Williams S. Cooper argues that reason itself can be reduced to evolutionary theory. In *The Evolution of Reason*, Cooper draws together a narrative in

which evolutionary theory implies decision theory, which in turn implies inductive logic, deductive logic, and finally mathematics. In doing so, he directly addresses the theories of Darwin, Real, and a host of other evolutionary biologists and philosophers. Cooper confirms the relationship between reason and natural selection, writing that “reasonableness is relative to evolutionary circumstances,” but he reverses the orientation (Cooper 16). Contrary to Kant, Cooper posits that human rationality is a posteriori, in that it has developed through natural selection, a process entirely beholden to empirical phenomena. Again, as with Real, Cooper’s work in evolutionary biology vindicates Hume’s empiricist perspective, showing that human cognition has no objective order and is directed solely by environment.

Although much of the work done by scientists to investigate the evolutionary origins of rationality jeopardizes Kant’s understanding of reason, some aspects of the overall structure of his theory are supported. For instance, Darwin’s own beliefs concerning instincts give credibility to Kant’s concept of a human mind structured by reason. For Kant, the pre-structuring of the mind manifests itself in the form of synthetic a priori propositions, whereas for Darwin this pre-structuring accounts for the existence of instinct. In *The Philosophy of Human Evolution*, Michael Ruse summarizes Darwin’s view as, “We are born with innate knowledge that was forged in the struggle for existence” (Ruse 139). If Darwin is to be accepted, one could say that, while Kant was wrong to argue that the mind is structured according to a universally rational blueprint, he was right that our beliefs and methods of cognition are subject to some predetermined structure. The presence of instincts and other instructions in our genetic code proves that our mental faculties are not entirely the product of empirical phenomena experienced in one’s own lifetime, as Hume and his empiricist predecessors believed.

A further mirroring of Kant can be found in Elliott Sober’s “The Evolution of Rationality,” where he addresses the question Darwin declared unanswerable, of how rationality itself could have been favored by natural selection. To do so, he defines rational thoughts or decisions as those that “yield beliefs that are general, nontrivial, explanatory, and simple” (Sober 97).

In other words, rationality must be both correct and applicable. As an example of this, he introduces the case of two propositions, GREEN and GRUE. GREEN states that “All emeralds are green,” and GRUE states that “All emeralds are green until the year 2000, and thereafter are blue” (Sober 102). Assuming the evaluation took place sometime prior to the year 2000 (“The Evolution of Rationality” was published in 1981), GREEN and GRUE would be equally valid if tested empirically. Therefore, it is uncertain why natural selection might have favored rational cognition of the type characterized by GREEN, even though this carries no immediate selective advantage over the GRUE alternative. Sober’s answer is that, as long as both are empirically correct, axioms of the GREEN variety confer an adaptive advantage in their comparative conciseness. To provide a real-life example of this advantage, Sober examines the altruistic behavior exhibited by a herd of baboons when attacked by a predator. It is likely easier and more concise to encode the axiom “If a predator attacks a member of the herd, attack that predator,” than to encode “If a predator attacks one’s progeny, attack that predator” (Sober 104). The increased risk incurred by adherence to the former, more general instruction could conceivably be balanced by the greater ease of acquisition and adherence that such an adaptation represents. In this case, altruism would arise not from any inherent sympathy one creature may feel for another, but by that creature’s inability, from an adaptive point of view, to differentiate between its offspring and other members of the herd. While this sort of altruism is certainly not the same as that dictated by Kant’s Categorical Imperative, both result from a point of view in which one avoids differentiating between members of a species. This once again indicates the greatest fallacy in Kant’s philosophy from an evolutionary point of view: that rational thought in humans has its basis in a transcendental reason, independent of the empirical world.

An evolutionary interpretation of rationality, in which rational thought is defined on a rudimentary level as adaptation to one’s current environment, largely vindicates Hume’s perspective. Certainly, in the case of the bumblebee, the decision making that Real claims mirrors rationality is nothing more than

taking in sensory input and evaluating which of several options will yield the most energy in its environment. According to an evolutionary interpretation of rationality, rational thought is just a sophisticated response to stimulus. It is not the source of anything like a moral law, but merely a means to an end, the end being to conform to one's environment. Furthermore, as Real showed, rational thought is variable in its development; different environments produce different thought processes. According to Cooper, the tenets of reason as we conceive them can be reduced to evolutionary theory. All of this evidence provided by an evolutionary account of rationality stands in stark opposition to Kant's understanding of reason, and in support of Hume's. However, Hume is not entirely vindicated by evolutionary biology, either. While Hume may have been right in arguing that humanity's mental faculties have their basis in the empirical world, his extension of this concept to the individual was misplaced, to which the presence of instincts and other inherited mental traits can attest. Kant was right in arguing that there is a structure inherent in the human mind, but mistaken in providing transcendental reason as the source of this structure. Both Hume and Kant held correct notions regarding the nature of rational thought, and both overstepped intellectually in applying these notions. Philosophy is and will surely continue to be an important and worthwhile discipline; however, because of its theoretical nature, it is prone to overgeneralization. By applying evolutionary biology and the other sciences to philosophy, we can tie the theoretical to the empirical, and achieve a more complete understanding of rationality and the nature of human beings.

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# A Modern *Fairy Tale*: Miwa Yanagi and Recasting of Young and Old

Alexander Grabanski

Different generations of individuals share different beliefs, ideals, and accepted behavior. Often, the forces of change in culture through youth uproot the expectations of aging generations to create radical deviations in opinion and interpretation on societally central themes. Against this, it is common to react with a sense of traditionalism, and a sense of a need to uphold the values and morals of an illusory golden age located somewhere in the past. Parables and tales provide a very effective means to do so. Fairy tales in particular have run the gauntlet of history and survived, leaving intact the values of the generations in which they were conceived. Interestingly, fairy tales are primarily intended to be told to children, in a sort of intergenerational exchange of cultural information. With this aspect of fairy tales fully in mind, Miwa Yanagi seeks to demonstrate the visual power of cultural and generational contrast in her *Fairy Tale* series, with a specific focus on modifying values and traits commonly associated with young girls to demonstrate a modern clash of generational values and in the perception of young and old.

IMAGE 1: Miwa Yangani, *Erendira* (2004)<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00057.jpg>

*Editor's Note: image removed because copyright permission could not be obtained before publication.*

Yanagi began her *Fairy Tale* series in 2004 with *Erendira*, a scene inspired by Gabriel García Márquez's *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless*

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<sup>1</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "Fairytale." Miwa YANAGI.  
<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00057.jpg> (accessed November 18, 2013)

*Grandmother* (1972). In Marquez's original story, 14-year-old Eréndira lives alone with her grandmother until she accidentally burns down her grandmother's home. In "heartless" ire, her grandmother forces Eréndira into prostitution to repay the debt.<sup>2</sup> While Yanagi's *Erendira* appears to give life to the original story upon first appearance, even capturing a sense of innuendo about the situation with the grandmother's vaguely phallic staff, her choice in the casting of the grandmother herself radically deviates from what would be expected. Instead of an old woman cast as an old woman, Yanagi substitutes a young girl wearing a mask. In doing so, Yanagi creates a physical dissonance in viewers' characterization of the grandmother's body, leaving viewers uncertain whether it is a youthful antagonist or an old hag who subjects Eréndira to her societally perceived loss of "innocence." Yanagi does not seek to answer this, but rather to demonstrate a duality between generations in mutual darkness. Of this, in her interview with Christopher Philips, she states, "I started off thinking about the work in terms of binaries—innocence and heartlessness, old age and youth—that absolutely exist in all women, and decided to blend those binaries together."<sup>3</sup> Yanagi's juxtaposition of a girl's body with the face of an old woman combines the perceived innocence of youth with the cruel heartlessness of the grandmother in order to shatter the boundaries between traditional archetypes ascribed to females of different ages, and with *Erendira* as an intermediate step, she delves deep into the realm of more traditional fairy tales by the brothers Grimm.

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<sup>2</sup> A plot summary may be found on: Wikimedia Foundation. "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother" Wikipedia.org. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Incredible\\_and\\_Sad\\_Tale\\_of\\_Innocent\\_Eréndira\\_and\\_her\\_Heartless\\_Grandmother](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredible_and_Sad_Tale_of_Innocent_Eréndira_and_her_Heartless_Grandmother) (accessed November 18, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "A Supremely Comfortable Place to Be," *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 212-221.

**IMAGE 2: Miwa Yangani, *Rapunzel* (2004)<sup>4</sup>**

<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00055.jpg>

*Editor's Note: image removed because copyright permission could not be obtained before publication.*

The Grimm brothers' version of Rapunzel paints Rapunzel as simple, innocent, and beautiful, not the subject of horror as in Yanagi's "retelling." Her long hair oozes down from the ceiling, almost as if it were a jet of blood in a particularly low-budget horror film. Yanagi's use of a wide-angled, distorted lens adds to the overwhelming sense that Rapunzel's hair is dominating the scene. Even more disturbingly, Rapunzel appears in the image, her hair draped down through a hole in the floor, creating a continuous cycle that is reminiscent of drawings by M.C. Escher.<sup>5</sup> The "witch" of the original story combats this with rage and comically fake-looking scissors, dressed in white.

While this piece contains another clear example of Yanagi casting a young girl as an old woman, much more is added through the corresponding text Yanagi provides. "Grandmother, why are you so heavy?" "What did you say?" In rage the witch cut off Rapunzel's hair. She cut and cut all she could, but it became no shorter."<sup>6</sup> In the original version of the tale, the witch is not at all related to Rapunzel, but in Yanagi's version of the tale, the witch is Rapunzel's grandmother. To give better insight on this choice, it is necessary to understand the differences in editions of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*. In the original edition, at this point in the story, the witch learns of Rapunzel's meetings with the prince through Rapunzel's statement that her dress was growing tight around her belly, indicating pregnancy.

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<sup>4</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "Fairytale." Miwa YANAGI. <http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00055.jpg> (accessed November 18, 2013)

<sup>5</sup> See "Mcescher.com" M.C. Escher Foundation, <http://www.mcescher.com/> (accessed November 18).

<sup>6</sup> Miwa Yanagi, Images and texts from *Fairy Tale* series (2004-2006).

In the second edition, the witch finds out after Rapunzel asks a question similar to the one Yanagi scripted.<sup>7</sup> By choosing the second edition of the story, no association is created between the grandmother's hatred and bearing children, but instead an association is created that suggests the grandmother's hatred of Rapunzel's sexuality. No matter how hard the grandmother may try to stop Rapunzel from seeing the prince, her hair becomes no shorter, nor does her expression become less defiant. This reversal in Rapunzel's reaction from that of the original creates the impression that Rapunzel is no longer helpless, but instead imbued with a rage of her own. Yanagi states in an interview with Christopher Philips that "In *Fairy Tale*, the young girls have no innocence at all. They are self-aware and determined, and struggle to win any way they can."<sup>8</sup> The extensive outgrowth of Rapunzel's hair provides her with her own way of winning this round in a cultural battle with her grandmother.

**IMAGE 3: Miwa Yangani, *Gretel* (2004)<sup>9</sup>**

<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00053.jpg>

*Editor's Note: image removed because copyright permission could not be obtained before publication.*

Yanagi's *Gretel* also features a reversed role resulting in a sort of victory for the title character. Instead of the original plotline, in which Gretel is nearly consumed by the witch, the witch is now the one who is nearly consumed. The caption for this image contains dialogue that initially appears ambiguous in

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<sup>7</sup> See Wikimedia Foundation. "Rapunzel" Wikipedia.org. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rapunzel> (accessed November 18, 2013), and the citation to Maria Tatar (1987) *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, Princeton University Press, p. 18, ISBN 0-691-06722-8

<sup>8</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "A Supremely Comfortable Place to Be." *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 212-221.

<sup>9</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "Fairytale." Miwa YANAGI.

<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00053.jpg> (accessed November 18, 2013).

interpretation, which Linda Nochlin casts as “disturbing ambiguity” in her essay’s analysis of the scene.<sup>10</sup> “You look like a dry twig. Why don’t you fatten up?’ ‘So I will never be eaten by you.’”<sup>11</sup> However, based upon the reference to a “dry twig,” it is clear that Gretel is the first speaker. This change of roles paints Gretel as equally, if not more disturbing than the witch, as is also reflected in her almost blank expression. What is more immediately disturbing about the image as a whole is its vaguely Freudian composition, enhanced by the viewer’s inability to see the rest of the witch, only her arm as it protrudes from between the bars aligned along the wall. This also creates a sense of disembodiment in the image, almost as if the witch did not exist at all on her own, but as a part of the room itself. Overall, these effects enhance the disturbing sense of contrast between the youth of Gretel and the age of the witch, advanced to a point where the witch no longer seems human, and neither does Gretel. These effects create an almost demonic antagonism between young and old which neither party seems to be satisfied with.

**IMAGE 4: Miwa Yangani, *Little Red Riding Hood* (2004)**

<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/fairy/img/00056.jpg>

*Editor’s Note: image removed because copyright permission could not be obtained before publication.*

In counterpoint, Yanagi’s *Little Red Riding Hood* portrays the title character and her grandmother in a somewhat caring embrace. The corresponding text reads, “The two, rescued from the wolf’s stomach, were newly born twins,” which suggests a deep, inter-generational connection between the child and her grandmother. This emotional connection would not

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<sup>10</sup> Linda Nochlin. “Black, White, and Uncanny: Miwa Yanagi’s Fairy Tale.” *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 232-241.

<sup>11</sup> Miwa Yanagi, Images and texts from *Fairy Tale* series (2004-2006).

ordinarily be surprising, as they have both just emerged from the belly of a wolf, but compared to Yanagi's other works in the series, there is a surprising lack of antagonism pictured. The action in the scene is already over, with the wolf zippered open and its blood pooled on the floor, stationary. It is almost as if the grandmother and grandchild have just woken up from the nightmare of being inside of the wolf's stomach. Linda Nochlin interprets this scene as a depiction of what it takes for young and old to interoperate in her essay on the *Fairy Tale* series. "Only through rebirth, a sea change wrought within the belly of the beast, can reconciliation be achieved, and if the expression of the little girl inside the charmed circle is any indication, this reconciliation is, at best, provisional."<sup>12</sup> However, neither Little Red Riding Hood nor her grandmother gives any indication of deviation from this peaceful state, and their expressions indicate that they have endured sufficient horrors to have lost all desire to do so.

While this image may bring to mind scenes from the endings of horror films in which the protagonist slays his/her tormentor, often at great psychological cost, Yanagi states of the *Fairy Tale* series in general that "it may seem like a horror movie, but I don't really think of it that way... I use a lot of organic materials in my work, and it produces an incredibly female image. It's an image of the womb."<sup>13</sup> The image of being born out of the wolf's stomach provides an almost perfect conclusion to be drawn from the series as a whole, just as the images of survivors of natural and man-made disasters indicate both the original horror and the path to resolution. Both Little Red Riding Hood and the grandmother have shared the experience of being antagonized by the other, as part of a general figure and atmosphere of antagonism represented by the wolf. Only once they recognized the artificiality of this antagonism and found the zipper, could they escape.

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<sup>12</sup> Linda Nochlin. "Black, White, and Uncanny: Miwa Yanagi's Fairy Tale." *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 232-241.

<sup>13</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "A Supremely Comfortable Place to Be." *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 212-221.

Overall, Yanagi's characters in *Fairy Tale* are incredibly nuanced, and Yanagi herself describes their relationships as "really rather complicated."<sup>14</sup> However, the complications in demeanor and relationships in themselves provide a contrast with the overly simplistic nature of fairy tales. The depth that she adds to her characters lays bare the shallowness of the original tales, and her characters, though disturbing at times, have relations with the real world and with real conflicts between perceptions of young and old and the perceptions of the young and old. The only way to escape the disturbing conflicts between generations is to emerge from the artificiality of it all and to be born again, to forget generational prejudices, and act almost as twins, only frozen in time.

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<sup>14</sup> Miwa Yanagi, "A Supremely Comfortable Place to Be" *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan*. New York: International Center of Photography, 2008: 212-221.

# **The Diverse Musical Repertoire of the Cleveland Orchestra**

**Jonathan Kim**

If you were to go on the website of the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) and look at the musical repertoire of its Performing Arts Series, you would find a wide range of cultural diversity from country fiddling to unique Carnatic music. When comparing this diversity to the seeming homogeneity of the neighboring Severance Hall, you might mistakenly assume that the musical assortment of the Cleveland Orchestra, with its canonic works from nineteenth-century Europe, is inferior. But contrary to appearances, the Cleveland Orchestra, which primarily performs at Severance Hall, showcases an immense diversity rivaling that of the CMA. In this essay, I argue that the Cleveland Orchestra offers both historical and stylistic diversity, from the Baroque elegance of Bach to the western and contemporary dissonance of Hanson, and also cultural diversity, from American composers like Copland to the Japanese Toru Takemitsu.

Why does the layman assume that all classical music is similar? One reason might be the appearance of a symphony orchestra. In almost every concert at Severance Hall, the same players sit at their appropriate seats in almost the same order, perform on the same instruments, and dress in formal black-and-white clothing. After studying the correlation between visual and aural perception in music, Alexander Mayyasi from Stanford University wrote in *Pricenomics Inc.* that much of what is visually observed affects the perception of the music played by an orchestra (Mayyasi). In his study, Mayyasi demonstrated that most people, if not all, are more inclined to judge a performance by visual observation, instead of carefully assessing that which is heard (Mayyasi).

Hence, a keener observation, based on knowledge and musical sensitivity, would suggest that the music of the

Cleveland Orchestra reflects a wider range of historical and cultural diversity. The musical diversity of the Cleveland Orchestra is not only evident in history, but also in the unique styles that characterize each musical period. The musical style during the Baroque Era (c. 1600-1750) is primarily characterized by dramatic effects and rich phrasing (Huizenga). The origins of orchestration began in this era, giving rise to the music of Johann Pachelbach, Antonio Vivaldi, Johann Sebastian Bach, and George Frederic Handel (Cook). After the Baroque Era came the Classical Era (1750-1820), which is primarily characterized by shorter melodies and lighter textures, focusing on the intellectual aspects of composition (Brians). These stylistic trends characterize the pieces written by composers like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Franz Joseph Haydn, and Ludwig van Beethoven. This style strikingly contrasts with that of the subsequent Romantic Era (1820-1900), which “cherishes freedom, movement, passion, and endless pursuit of the unattainable” (Shotwell). Many of the composers from this time period have become household names, such as Franz Schubert, Fryderyk Chopin, Franz Liszt, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Pyotr Tchaikovsky, Antonin Dvorak, Richard Strauss, and Claude Debussy, and also lesser-known composers, such as Louis-Hector Berlioz, Georges Bizet, and Gustav Mahler. Finally, after the Romantic Era begins the Modern Era (1900-Present), characterized by the novel understanding of rhythm and harmony, commonly known to depart from the traditional sense of musical language. Each musical period has its own personality and characterization: the Baroque with its elegance, Classical with its humor and liveliness, Romantic with its emotional zeal and fervor, and Modern with its sense of revolutionary dissonance.

At the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Performing Arts Series is indeed quite diverse. On the museum’s website, the performing arts season contains music from cultures ranging from Spanish flamenco to Indian classical music (ClevelandArt.org). Not only that, the performing series season is also featuring “Western classical music –

including Baroque” (ClevelandArt.org). At first blush, the unique natures of the music that the CMA presents, such as those from Spanish and Indian cultures, may mislead many to believe that they are what should characterize CMA to be “more” diverse than the Cleveland Orchestra. However, most of the cultures represented by the CMA actually produce music that, whether because of the differing instruments or techniques, cannot be played by an orchestra. For example, the “6 string single-coursed guitar” used in Spanish flamenco music is not typically played in a symphony, but rather played as a solo instrument in a much more cultural context (TimeNet.org). The same situation applies to the instruments used in Sufi qawwali music, an Islamic-based style, which, by its religion, is limited to “instruments that are culturally from the Middle East,” such as the “harmonium, tabla, and dholak” (Gleason). Because of this, although both Severance Hall and the Cleveland Museum of Art include a similar multitude of cultures in their showcased music, a definite affirmation of which is “better” or “more diverse” cannot be answered, but can be answered only subjectively through the lens of the individual.

As a classical musician myself (a proud violinist), I consider myself to have a decent knowledge of classical music. When I had discovered that the Cleveland Orchestra was playing Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and Shostakovich’s Tenth Symphony, my own excitement gave me a headache. I had played the Shostakovich Tenth almost three times in my life and essentially knew the piece by heart. But, underlying the excitement was my genuine appreciation not just of the beauty of the pieces, but their origins and context as well. Shostakovich, a citizen of the USSR, had written the symphony during the mid-twentieth century, after his exile from his homeland. He expressed uncertainty in his own identity and anger towards Stalin through the breakdown of formal structures and a highly dissonant musical style. And Beethoven, who lived during the late Classical Era, was suffering from increasing deafness during the time of the composition of his Fifth

Symphony in the early 1800s. Although both pieces express frustration and longing, the style, geographical origin, and time period of each is vastly different. With this in mind, I prepared myself not only to experience the musical transcendence of these two pieces, but also to understand the context in which they were written.

Many of the upcoming pieces on the calendar of the Cleveland Orchestra have no correlation to what the public generally considers as “classical” music. Now, pieces by John Williams, the composer of the music for *Star Wars* theme, are not at all considered taboo. At Blossom, the Orchestra’s summer home to the south of Cleveland, the repertoire is even more centered on a popular repertoire. And finally, the Cleveland Orchestra offers “pop” concerts at Severance Hall on a regular basis.

With the immense technological growth in this modern age, every aspect of culture and society is becoming just one part of a global network. What was known as strictly western is now enveloping the entire globe, and classical music is no exception. Such globalization is evident in the cultural diversity of classical music composers, orchestras, and performers. Although less known than their European counterparts, composers from the East include Japanese composers Toru Takemitsu and Toshio Hosokawa, both of whose pieces were played by the Cleveland Orchestra itself at Severance Hall in 2007 (Hicken). Not only this, but some orchestras, most notably the famed Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra in China, have begun to blend “ancient Chinese instruments with a full Western symphony orchestra” to draw “upon the profound culture of China’s 5,000-year history” (Shenyun.com). Critics are calling such a development a “breakthrough in classical music” (Shenyun.com). The integration of diverse cultures into the traditional orchestral setting is beginning to bring the “disparate world of Western and Eastern classical music together” (ShenYunPerformingArt.org). Lastly, Asian performers, whether as famed soloists or orchestral performers, have once again proven that classical music no longer exists in the canonic clutches of Western society, but

is shared globally. Critically acclaimed performers include violinists Sarah Chang, and pianists Yundi Li, Lang Lang, and Yuja Wang, all of whom have achieved success on the global scale (ClevelandOrchestra.com). Furthermore, the Cleveland Orchestra itself has non-white performers, namely Yoko Moore, Jung-Min Amy Lee, Takako Masame, Wei-Fang Gu, Ghul-In Park, Yu Yuan, Sae Shiragami, Yun-Ting Lee, and more (ClevelandOrchestra.com). Therefore, the classical music that the Cleveland Orchestra performs must not be seen as exclusively western, but rather appreciated throughout the world, spanning a multitude of cultures as evident in many of the Eastern-based composers, orchestras, and performers.

In conclusion, the historical chronology, stylistic trends, cultural aspects, and global appeal of the classical orchestral repertoire all argue for a reevaluation of its value and relevance in the twenty-first century. As the appreciation for classical music grows, the audiences of today can realize that musical diversity comes not only in the performers or the instruments played, but also through the influence of the sound that the music embodies and the historical, stylistic, and cultural implications attached to that sound. Maybe then we can hope that the collective moniker of “classical music” or the “symphonic repertoire” may stand for something that is not stagnant and passive in today’s society, but rather as the active, foundational force of much of the music we enjoy today.

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