

Eve's Apple

A review of a novel

Jonathan Rosen takes some audacious risks in his debut novel. His chosen topics—anorexia nervosa and teenage suicide—court pop-psychology and disease-of-the-week cliché, while his central characters, a young Manhattan couple immersed in their own woes and ailments, offer little in the way of immediate appeal.

Fortunately, as *Eve's Apple* explores “how seductive illness can be,” it incorporates some unsettling cultural commentary into its tale of deliberate self-starvation. Mr. Rosen (who is the cultural editor of *The Forward*) links his book's specific case history with a more general “self-destructive urge of humanity,” and while this feels strained or specious at times, it can also be provocative.

The novel's narrator, Joseph Zimmerman, has constructed his emotional life entirely around his girlfriend Ruth Simon, but his devotion involves a fair amount of subterfuge. He sneaks looks at her diary, interrogates her when she says she has a stomach bug and even talks her into letting him inspect her teeth. The reason? He suspects she has returned to the bulimic and anorexic eating habits of her teenage years.

At first, Mr. Rosen lets the reader wonder whether Joseph's concern is really warranted. Obviously, Ruth needs careful handling (“The wrong word, the wrong phrase, could trigger her considerable anger”), but she has suffered no radical weight loss, and it's possible that Joseph is projecting his own troubles onto her. Since the suicide of his only sibling, Evelyn, at the age of 16, he has been afflicted with severe migraine headaches; and since moving in with Ruth, he has cut himself off from his family. Indeed, his interest in Ruth, to the exclusion of all else, is as morbid as any eating disorder.

Here are the makings of an arresting psychological detective story, one that

might eventually unveil a “real” Ruth behind the illusory one perceived and pursued by Joseph. But Joseph's Ruth is all we get—a poor little rich girl with troubling food neuroses—and Joseph himself comes across as equally cipher-like and unformed.

These shortcomings, arguably, may accurately reflect the couple's youth—they're in their early 20's—but the reader yearns for more sense of what the adults Joseph and Ruth will become. As it is, neither seems sufficiently resourceful to escape the trap they've created for themselves.

Mr. Rosen strikes a more engagingly perverse note when exploring Ruth and Joseph's uncomfortable sexual relations. Joseph has reason to feel frustrated (“The closer we grew, the less we made love”), and his attempts to dismantle the barrier between them—he is too gentle a man to break it down forcibly—are as poignant as they are kinky.

The book's prose, like its tone, is variable and not entirely under control. When Joseph describes Ruth eating a muffin crumb “with eucharistic care,” he hits the mark, but when he sets off excitedly to do library research on anorexia—“My heart was racing, my palms sweating”—you wish he had found a less hackneyed way of putting it.

In the book's final stretch, Mr. Rosen does better. Separated, the lovers reach a crisis point, and their situation offers absorbing complications that have hitherto been missing from Mr. Rosen's depiction of their characters. *Eve's Apple* ultimately is more admirable in concept than execution, but it hints at talents that, in future books, could become impressive.

Michael Upchurch, The New York Times Book Review, April 27, 1997

- 1 The reviewer states that Jonathan Rosen takes certain risks in his novel. In what way?**
- A He writes about topics of which he has little personal experience
 - B His choice of subject seems trendy rather than original
 - C The central characters seem out of place in the story
 - D The theme of the book will not attract many young readers
- 2 What are we told about Joseph's relationship to Ruth?**
- A He seems like a father to her
 - B He fails to pay enough attention to her
 - C He is almost obsessed with her
 - D He fears she is not faithful to him
- 3 What is the reviewer's opinion about Mr. Rosen's description of Joseph and Ruth?**
- A The reader never gets to know their true inner selves
 - B They seem ordinary enough for the reader to identify with
 - C Their personalities change remarkably throughout the novel
 - D They are convincing representatives of a troubled generation
- 4 What comment does the reviewer make about Mr. Rosen's way of writing?**
- A It is relaxed although too complicated at times
 - B It is precise but does not compensate for the flaws in the story
 - C It is immature but on the whole well suited to a novel of this kind
 - D It is uneven and some expressions seem worn out
- 5 What is the reviewer's conclusion?**
- A *Eve's Apple* will definitely find its way to readers' hearts
 - B In spite of certain shortcomings, *Eve's Apple* is a promising debut
 - C The chief value of Mr. Rosen's novel lies in its stylistic complexity
 - D Mr. Rosen should not have made his literary debut quite so early

Please turn over

The Power of Symbols

From an article by Jo Carlowe

Throughout history, inanimate objects such as voodoo dolls have been invested with supposed powers, and rituals such as prayer or sacrifice have then emerged in association with the object—the motive usually being to show the idol appropriate reverence, or to persuade it to grant a particular desire.

Anthropomorphism and the use of symbols are prevalent across cultures and time. Cave paintings and symbols first emerged 30,000 years ago, but evidence of symbolic cannibalism 100,000 years ago was recently found in France.

However, it is only in recent years that we have come to understand why symbols play such a major role in human behaviour. Whether the chosen object is a pig's head on a stick, a statue of the Madonna, or a poster of Elvis, the process appears to be similar and universal. But why do we invest inanimate objects with human or godlike qualities, and why do we use symbols or gestures—be it a Valentine's heart or a Black Power salute—to convey meanings or feelings?

Symbols can be seen as a kind of shorthand for conveying ideas or messages. You see an image and you make a link. Conveniently, the whole process happens subconsciously and instantaneously. This ability to manipulate and interpret symbols is a basic mechanism of the human brain, amply demonstrated by our possession and command of the ultimate symbol-based system, language.

The psychologist Dr Roddy Cowie, of Queen's University, Belfast, suggests that in keeping with the natural world, the significance of many of our symbols and icons stems from their practical value in our early history. He believes it is no coincidence that rivers, mountains, trees and forests frequently crop up as revered objects in many different cultures. For example, the Sioux of North America believed the Black Hills had special significance and considered their desecration by white miners an appalling tragedy. The Masai tribes of East Africa believe the olive tree symbolises peace. Elders in Masai villages will even sit

under the olive tree to resolve disputes, in the belief that the tree is sacred and will predispose negotiations towards peace.

Dr Cowie believes these natural phenomena are invested with wonder because they play an overwhelmingly important role in human survival. For example, the top of a mountain is of strategic benefit during battle. And rivers and wells, also frequently revered, are vital as watering holes. It is logical, therefore, not to be dispassionate about them.

Icons and symbols also have a bonding effect—they help to bind communities together. The symbol of the Cross links Christians across nations. It is interesting, too, how icons and symbols represent many things to many people. The cross is among the oldest known symbols. A cross dating back to the 15th century BC was discovered in Crete. In China the cross represents the unbroken umbilical cord of the cosmos. In Christianity it is a reminder of Christ's crucifixion. In Eastern legend it represents the bridge by which human souls climb towards God.

In secular societies there still seems to be a need to fill a void by creating not divine but cultural icons of our desires and fears, and Dr Cowie hypothesises that there may be a convergence between the role of traditional icons and modern celebrity. Icons in the modern sense are people who have been invested with symbolic qualities by simplifying and de-personalising them—whether Marilyn Monroe as the personification of glamour, James Dean as the archetypal teen rebel, Elvis Presley as a snake-hipped symbol of sexuality, or Princess Diana as faultless fairy-tale princess.

And although in the West we may think we are immune to powerful symbolism, too sophisticated to serve false gods and too smart to be fooled by clever imagery, just take a look at the annual turnover of any major advertising company and think again.

Focus, August 2000

- 6 What are we told in the first two paragraphs?**
- A All human communities seem to have used basically the same symbols
 - B Human sacrifice was part of the original use of symbols
 - C Using symbols is believed to be a universal human characteristic
 - D The use of symbols emerged as a result of cannibalism
- 7 What is said about the processes involved in the use of symbols?**
- A Language is necessary for understanding symbols
 - B The use of symbols has been shown to require great mental effort
 - C Some symbols appear to be genetically transmitted to the human brain
 - D Being able to use symbols is necessary for the use of all languages
- 8 What is Dr Cowie's view of the origin of many symbols?**
- A They were chosen because of their religious significance
 - B Their basic function was to promote fertility and prosperity
 - C They were ordinary things of importance to everyday life
 - D Their extraordinary appearance made them easy to notice
- 9 What is implied about the meanings of symbols?**
- A Most symbols have only a social function
 - B The meaning of a symbol may be far from obvious
 - C All symbols have a mainly religious function
 - D The meaning of a symbol is usually easy to guess
- 10 What does Dr Cowie think about today's icons?**
- A He points to their similarity to icons of earlier times
 - B He is critical of their superficial celebrity status
 - C He believes they have little in common with historical icons
 - D He is doubtful about their long-term symbolic value
- 11 What is the writer's general conclusion?**
- A Symbols have lost much of their power in recent years
 - B Even secular Western societies need spiritual symbols
 - C Symbols in advertising are taking on a religious importance
 - D The use of symbols today is as widespread as ever

Please turn over

And here are some shorter texts:

Taxes

Generally, people whose tax affairs are straightforward do not have to complete a self-assessment form, because there is no more tax to pay. However, the thousands of taxpayers who have not been given a form may be missing out on substantial refunds because they have paid too much tax. Those most at risk of losing out include people who have stopped working in the middle of a tax year and whose annual allowances have been apportioned for only part of the year, and casual or “portfolio” workers who might have several jobs simultaneously.

12 What is implied here?

- A Taxpayers with only a small income do not need to fill in a form to be fairly taxed
- B The present system is unfair to all part-time workers
- C People with more than one job at the same time will have part of their taxes repaid
- D The present system will have to be revised to be fair to all taxpayers

Martin Luther King

Americans don't have much patience with complicated heroes. A hero should be simple and unthreatening, preferably reducible to a single idea or expression. There are few historical figures who illustrate this tendency better than Martin Luther King, a man whose entire career is often summarized in the phrase “I have a dream”. But what exactly was that dream? It's sometimes hard to remember. Ever since his assassination, King's patrimony has been claimed by every ideological group imaginable. That's why a new biography of King provokingly proposes a 10-year moratorium on reading the “I Have a Dream” speech so that the rest of his ideas might come to the fore.

13 What are we told here?

- A King's greatness has been questioned on a variety of political and other grounds
- B A more thorough analysis of King's “I Have a Dream” speech should be carried out
- C The wide scope of King's thinking deserves more attention than it has usually received
- D King's “I Have a Dream” speech has given rise to a number of misunderstandings

Educating People

The world of education, at the top, is a very small one, resembling nothing so much as an American high school where rival cliques vie for power and prestige. Everyone knows everyone else, having served on the same blue-ribbon panels, attended the same academic conferences or even taught in the same schools.

14 What is the main point here?

- A High schools hardly provide a healthy educational environment
- B Educators in leading positions seem to form a kind of establishment
- C Teachers should be more aware of the social dimension of education
- D Educational experts tend to have similar views on educational issues

Happily Divorced?

Statistics show that women usually get the short end of the stick when their marriages break up. But it's men who feel more dissatisfied with their divorce settlements—and not for the reasons you might think. When Indiana State University psychologist Virgil Sheets, Ph.D., asked 372 ex-couples how they felt about the terms of their divorce, including custody arrangements, child support, and division of property, he found that women were far more pleased than their former mates—despite the fact that the average woman's standard of living plummets 27 percent the year after her marriage dissolves, while a man's increases 10 percent.

15 What does the writer suggest?

- A Divorced wives feel they have few things to be happy about
- B Divorced men and women differ considerably in their attitudes towards their former partners
- C A divorce changes men's standard of living more radically than women's
- D Financial outcome may not be what determines people's feelings about their divorce

Students and Exams

Under exam rules, students can apply for "special consideration" if they can show that factors such as recent family bereavement or illness seriously affected their performance. However, the exam boards are worried at a surge in appeals, many offering outlandish excuses, and warn that some schools are being too lax.

16 What are we told in this news item?

- A Too many students seem to be granted individual favours at exams
- B Some schools do not show enough consideration for students in trouble
- C The rules should be revised for students who are ill during exams
- D Foreign students should undergo the same exam tests as others

Please turn over

In the following text there are gaps which indicate that something has been left out. Study the four alternatives that correspond to each gap and decide which one best fits the gap. Then mark your choice on the answer sheet.

Darwinian Medicine

The enterprise of studying medical problems in an evolutionary context has been termed Darwinian medicine. Most medical research tries to explain the causes of an individual's disease and seeks therapies to cure or **17** deleterious conditions. These efforts are traditionally based on consideration of proximate issues, the straightforward study of the body's anatomic and physiological mechanisms as they currently exist. **18**, Darwinian medicine asks why the body is designed in a way that makes us all vulnerable to problems like cancer, atherosclerosis, depression and choking, thus offering a broader context in which to conduct research.

The evolutionary explanations for the body's flaws fall into surprisingly few categories. First, some discomfiting conditions, such as pain, fever, cough, vomiting and anxiety, are actually neither diseases nor design **19** but rather are evolved defenses. Second, conflicts with other organisms—*Escherichia coli* or crocodiles, for instance—are a fact of life. Third, some circumstances, such as the ready availability of dietary fats, are so recent that natural selection has not yet had a chance to deal with them. Fourth, the body may fall victim to trade-offs between a trait's benefits and its **20**; a textbook example is the sickle cell gene, which also protects against malaria. Finally, the process of natural selection is constrained in ways that leave us with suboptimal design features, as in the case of the mammalian eye.

- 17** A abandon
B replace
C relieve
D aggravate
- 18** A Consequently
B In contrast
C Likewise
D In fact
- 19** A responses
B benefits
C causes
D defects
- 20** A costs
B design
C structure
D advantages

Randolph M. Nesse and George C. Williams, Scientific American, November 1998

That is the end of the English test. If you have time left, go back and check your answers.