

## Investigating the Use of Ancient Fertility Themes in Malcolm Bradbury's *Eating People Is Wrong*

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### ABSTRACT

Employing James George Frazer's anthropological book *The Golden Bough* (1890) as a theoretical background, this paper examines the ways in which Malcolm Bradbury's academic novel *Eating People Is Wrong* (1959) builds on ancient fertility rituals to delineate the divide between past and present moods and modes of thought and to illuminate the emotional and intellectual sterility afflicting the modern academy and its population. It will be clear that although their names and conduct resonate with echoes of the celebrations and rites of savage tribes and subsequent societies, Bradbury's characters fail to enact the roles of ancient fertility divinities and to maintain the essential flavour of remote antiquity's culture. This is best illustrated by the vain attempts of a number of ardent suitors to marry the leading but misleading character Emma Fielding, a latter-day fertility goddess who heartlessly hurts their hearts. While ancient fertility goddesses' suitors or consorts were concerned about the welfare of the community on the whole, alongside their own welfare, their modern counterparts merely seek to enhance their narrow interests. Predictably, all the characters in the novel finish up helpless and hopeless. Finally, grounded on the premise that scholarly disciplines tend to crisscross in a mutually enriching manner, this investigation aims to prove how helpful it is for Bradbury to explore the academic soul and soil through the employment of studies from other fields and how interesting it is for the researcher to spot out this cultural trend and to bring it to the attention of the reader.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background and Literature Review

Reading Malcolm Bradbury's academic novel *Eating People Is Wrong*, a significant allusion to ancient fertility rituals arrested my attention. When he learns that a South African student called Eboebelosa wants to marry an English graduate student named Emma Fielding, Stuart Treece, an English teacher, tells the latter, "I wonder if it was your holding his teacup for him at the reception? Isn't there something about that in [James George Frazer's] *The Golden Bough*?" (61).

Although Frazer's book abounds with accounts of the use of the cup in fertility rituals and in other associated practices (92, 231, 242, 254, 288, 315, 336, 399, 694, 781, etc.), Treece's thought-provoking question seems to refer to one of the following three cups. The first one is the cup of brandy which old Prussians habitually got the tallest girl to carry in her hand as she stood on a seat preparatory to praying to the god Waizganthos for the growth of flax (335). The second one is the cup of wine passed around the crowd during the celebration of the midsummer festival bearing the name of St. John in Sardinia (399). The last one is the cup which the

man presiding over the bear-feast organized by a primitive tribe called the Aino or Ainu passed around the attendees (587), ascertaining that everyone tasted a little of the boiled bear's meat therein. Having just been offered to the dead bear, this cup is called "the cup of offering" (588).

Examining these anthropological facts in the light of Treece's query, I decided that it would be interesting to investigate the ways in which Bradbury, delving into the dark recesses of the past, yokes ostensibly irrelevant and irreverent themes to modern life.<sup>1</sup> I seek to draw analogies and contrasts between Frazer's hypotheses and Bradbury's fictional adaptation of these hypotheses to portray his characters' character and conduct. In the light of this, I aim to demonstrate that literary texts are not closed entities and that they rather have fluid boundaries, hence their tendency to converge and converse with works from other disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, and history. This is particularly interesting with regard to academic novels like the one under consideration, as they are not only penned by scholars who boast a first-hand familiarity with the margins and crevices of the university and with scholarly work but are also populated by knowledgeable and verbose academic

characters who tend to engage in intellectual debates and to make judgements (and, at times, misjudgements) about a vast array of issues that are vital to education, research, tenure, promotion, conferences, hiring, and firing.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding the richness of Bradbury's novel, critics have only cast a sideways glance at it. The reviews penned by Tucker, Price, Snow, and Gransden merely place the novel within its historical and literary context and encapsulate its major topics. Admittedly, however, Linda L. Elphick's doctoral dissertation, "*A World without Real Deliverances*": *Liberal Humanism in the Novels of Malcolm Bradbury* (1988), allots some space and attention to the work in question. But then again, it only examines the theme of liberalism here as well as in Bradbury's other academic novels, namely *Stepping Westward* (1965), *The History Man* (1975), and *Rates of Exchange* (1983). Considering the dearth of critical interest in *Eating People Is Wrong* and the nonexistence, to my knowledge, of any research on the way it covertly burrows into and borrows from Frazer's lengthy exploration of ancient fertility rituals, I seek to stir interest in this novel and to gauge the extent to which it succeeds in covering some appealing and appalling aspects of modern academic life at the professional and personal levels.

### Methodology

While Bradbury's novel seems to scratch only the surface of Frazer's themes and hypotheses, it proves, on closer inspection, to lend itself to a Frazer-based interpretation, as it were. The Scotch anthropologist attends to ancient people's tendency to worship certain vegetation deities with an eye to guaranteeing fertility for the land and for women. Although rituals and festivals differed from one country or one region to another, they were actually variations on the same tune. Several names were assigned to the same "great Mother Goddess," who embodied "all the reproductive energies of nature" (385). Obviously, in order for this goddess to fertilize the natural and human landscapes, so to speak, she had to secure fertility for herself (163) by annually having a sexual intercourse with a mortal divine lover (385). To take only one example, the Roman goddess Diana was served by Virbius (8). The annual celebration of these "sacred nuptials" included the custom of getting real people or divinities' images to play the roles of the bride and the bridegroom (164).

According to Turner's portrait of the Golden Bough, Frazer maintains, the "sacred grove and sanctuary" of Diana of the Woods was located under the cliffs on which the modern village of Nemi perches, right on the northern shore of "the still and solitary woodland lake of Nemi," also known as "Diana's Mirror" (1). This sanctuary hosted a tree whose branches must not be broken. However, a runaway slave was allowed to pluck one of its boughs and was, therefore, granted a chance to combat with the priest. If he triumphed, he succeeded him as King of the Wood (3). Sometimes, the king was obliged to fight against whoever craved his position (183). In other cases, a mock execution of the king took place on an annual basis, paving the way for a worthy successor. At the heart of these practices lay the savages' belief that as old kings represented the "enfeeblement of the spirit

of vegetation," they had to cede their positions to younger ones, through whom vigour and fruitfulness were restored to the tree-spirit and to the natural world in general (349).

Diana was alleged to be a huntress and to be capable of blessing men and women with spring and of granting women an easy delivery. No wonder that votive offerings were later found at her site (Frazer 3). Wine and cakes were central to the celebrations of the goddess's annual festival (4). No less important in her ritual was the fire that burnt in her grove (3), hence the subsequent custom of lighting candles and lamps. Fire's fertilising power was not limited to crops and animals. It was believed that unmarried girls who walked around the fire would marry within the year (728) and that lovers who jumped hand in hand over the fire would be fertile after marriage (749).

By whatever name she went, Diana was not alone in exercising a fascination on peasants' imagination. For instance, Isis, Osiris's sister-cum-wife, was thought to have so miraculous a fertilizing power that Roman and Greek paintings featured ears of corn in her hand or on her head and that people designated her "Lady of Abundance," "Lady of Bread"; "Green goddess, whose green colour is like unto the greenness of the earth," and "Creatress of green things" (Frazer 444).

Equally appealing were the celebrations involving male divinities. People in Egypt and Western Asia celebrated the death and resurrection of the spirit of vegetation through Tammuz, Adonis, Attis, and Osiris, who were actually one and the same (Frazer 378). Adonis was so handsome that both Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and Persephone, queen of the nether world, were enamoured with him (380). Similarly, people in Phrygia worshipped Attis, a deity of vegetation (403) and a tree-spirit who was alleged to have turned into a pine-tree after he died. Generally, trees were worshipped (126-27) and offered sacrifices in the belief that they had souls or hosted the souls of the dead (128) and that, being both males and females, they could get married in a real or figurative sense (131).

As part of the vegetable world, flowers, like trees, played a pivotal role in fertility rituals. In a Danish parish, for example, a little girl was customarily selected as the Whitsuntide-bride and was made to wear rich clothes and "a crown of the freshest flowers and of spring on her head." Her bridegroom, too, was decked in ribbons and flowers, among other things (Frazer 153). The other agrarian products which assumed paramount significance in daily life and in fertility rituals were wheat, barley, maize, and rice (486-87).

Additionally, Frazer underlines the huge importance of animals (26, 163, 247, 275, 599, 608, 609, 622, 636, 642, 796, etc.) and of fish (21, 76, 100, 103, 216, 167, 233, 241, 253, 287, 573, 612, 692, 784, 796, etc.) as sustenance since time immemorial. To take only one example, when the Indians of British Columbia started worrying subsequent to the uncharacteristic shortage of fish in their rivers and sea, the wizard Nootka placed an image of a swimming fish into the water while people around him engaged in a ritual dance. Soon later, fish appeared in abundance and joyful celebrations erupted (20).

In view of the value attributed to vegetation and farming, savages tended to propitiate wood-spirits by offering them a number of things and animals, including goats, because the latter were believed to haunt trees (Frazer 134). This is consonant with the savage's belief that at harvest time, the corn-spirit assumed the form of an animal such as a gander, a hare, a cat, a fox, a goat, a dog, or a wolf (518).

Like other fertilizing factors, pregnant women were credited with the ability to bestow fertility on fields. Some peasants believed that if the first fruit of a tree was eaten by a pregnant woman, that tree would bring forth plenty of fruits while others recommended divorcing barren wives lest their sterility should spread to their husbands' gardens. Greek and Roman farmers, on the other hand, went so far as to sacrifice pregnant women to their corn goddesses (Frazer 32).

Curiously enough, the intimate connection between the human and the vegetable worlds survived well into nineteenth-century Northern Europe. At times, the corn spirit figured as both male and female or as bridegroom and bride (Frazer 476). In Java, for instance, it was common practice to form a Rice-bridegroom and a Rice-bride out of ears of rice before starting the cutting of rice (484) and to place them in a furnished bridal chamber (485). People, however, believed that in order for the marriage of plants and trees to be fruitful, it had to be accompanied by the real marriage of human couples, who, afterwards, made love in the fields while seeds were deposited in the earth or when the crops were in bloom (157).

Ancient people's overriding obsession with the fertility of women and the land prompted them to court the favour not only of gods and goddesses but also of other venerated figures such as kings and emperors, who were thought to manipulate the weather and secure a good harvest for their people (Frazer 100-03). When a sacred king's power waned, however, elders consulted about his fate. If his disease was thought to be incurable, he was stabbed to death lest his lethargy should spread to vegetation. Before long, his soul was caught and transferred to his younger and stronger successor (308-10). His body was then burned, his ashes were preserved for years, and his teeth and bones were kept as amulets (125).

It is worth noting that the chief ingredient underlying peasants' practices and rituals is magic, which splits into two categories. Sympathetic magic, which consists of charms observing "the Law of Similarity," is called "Homoeopathic Magic" (Frazer 12) or "Imitative Magic" (13). Based on the principle that "like produces like," it stipulates, among other things, that you can hurt an enemy by simply drawing their image on clay, ashes, or sand and then pricking it with a sharp stick (14) or by burning their effigy (15).

"Contagious Magic," on the other hand, consists of charms founded on "the Law of Contact or Contagion" (Frazer 13). It simply "proceeds upon the notion that things which have once been conjoined must remain ever afterwards, even when quite dissevered from each other, in a sympathetic relation that whatever is done to the one must similarly affect the other." It follows from this that evil can be worked on someone through severed parts of their body

like hair, nails (43), and the naval string (45), and through other things like their clothes and footprints (50). Savages also treated the head as a sacred part of the body in the belief that it hosted a spirit which was especially sensitive to disrespect and injury (268), and they ascertained that the heads of certain ordinary people or chiefs were not stepped over or touched by others (269).

What is more, savages thought that magic could be wrought on them even through their names (Frazer 284). Accordingly, ancient Egyptians made sure that everyone had two names, a concealed one known as "the good name, or the great name," and a known one known as "the little name" (285). In like manner, the Gippsland blacks preferred to be called by surnames or nicknames instead of their real names so that enemies would not use these names as "vehicles of incantation" (288). Obviously, savages' fear of the salient presence of goblins, demons, ghosts, and other sources of evil explains why they accorded a great privilege to magic (633).

To ward off these threats, they also had recourse to scapegoats (Frazer 634) such as "degraded and useless beings" (670). Confusing mental and material things, they thought that as we could shift a load of wood or stones from our back to another person's back, so we could get the dying god or person to bear away the sins and misfortunes of the tribe, to suffer on their behalf (624), and to help them obviate calamities like famines, plagues, and droughts (670). Having selected and inspected a range of topics from Frazer's voluminous book, let's now see the extent to which they apply to Bradbury's *Eating People Is Wrong*.

## ANALYSIS

### Emma as a Latter-day Goddess

When Stuart Treece proposes to her, Emma Fielding answers negatively, apologizes for her cruelty to him, and admits that she is "a hideous creature to fall in with" and that she sometimes feels "so remote from other people that I find it hard to believe that they really do exist in the way that I do, as subjects rather than objects." She also hopes that she will one day "reach" the "perfect human condition" she is looking forward to "by finding someone I wholly and fully love" (Bradbury 283). This invites the assumption that Emma's remoteness from people, while mainly social, emotional, and psychological, has a parallel in the geographical remoteness of Diana, the ancient fertility goddess who lived in a distant grove in Nemi and who also impatiently awaited the arrival of the right companion. It should also be no coincidence that the Bishops' house, where Emma lives, is "bubbling with flowers" (124) and that it is described as a "Georgian, civilised, spacious and dense" "collectors' piece" (121) and as a "frondy" and "ornate" "citadel of the old guard" whose beauty is enhanced by the "faded tiles" decorating the stairs and by a collection of "Edwardian hats, with great brims, and ostrich plumes" (124). This house is also significant in another aspect. Its owners' surname, Bishop, denoting "a senior priest in charge of the work of the Church in a city or district" ("Bishop"), lends it enough sacredness to host a goddess like Emma, as it were.

Emma's surname, Fielding, bears witness to her association with verdure in that it contains a frequently occurring term in Frazer's accounts of ancient fertility rituals, viz. field (10, 53, 81, 85, 86, 137, 145, 157, 159, 297, 322, 331, 361, etc.). This hypothesis finds legitimacy in W. Mannhardt's claim that "the first part of Demeter's name is derived from an alleged Cretan word *deai*, 'barley,' and that accordingly Demeter means neither more nor less than 'Barley-mother' or 'Corn-mother'" (Frazer 463). There is further evidence of the significance of the term *field* in Bradbury's novel. Indeed, it is part of two other characters' surnames, namely Butterfield and Masefield. The attachment of *field* to *butter* is not insignificant; the latter word features prominently in Frazer's book whether as a source of sustenance or as a vital element in certain vegetation rites (27, 40, 154, 253, 559, 622, 728, 758, etc.). The same amount of significance attaches to the surname Masefield, the first name being Viola. *Mase* obviously brings to mind the agrarian product maize, which is, once again, a sustenance plant of substance in primitive society (38, 159, 367, 479, 487, 501, 514, 561, 566, 683, 684, etc.). The name Viola, too, conjures up the word *violet*, a flower plant that played an active role in ancient fertility rituals, especially as far as the divinities Hippolytus (8) and Attis (407) are concerned.

Bearing in mind the narrator's claim that "there was quite a lot of fish in Shakespeare, and there was more to it, now it was being at last exposed, than you would have thought, or even Sigmund Freud would have thought" (Bradbury 35), it is plausible to presume that Emma's investigation of fish imagery in Shakespeare (35, 84) testifies to her being a life guarantor. This possibly explains why she saves Louis Bates's life after he falls into the river towards the end of the novel (269). It is revealing that when Bates is at a loss as to where he can find her, a novelist called Walter Oliver advises him to "try the river" (171).

Equally intriguing is the frequent association between Emma and the garden. For instance, Bates confides to her that he is looking forward to marrying a woman who would, amongst other things, "enjoy making love in the garden" (Bradbury 130). Soon, however, he is disappointed to find her in the garden in the company of Oliver on the occasion of a party thrown by Mirabelle (158). The German student Herr Schumann, too, has already pleaded with her to accompany him to the garden, but to no avail (157).

It is also reasonable to argue that the gas fire burning in Emma's room is reminiscent of the perpetual Vestal fire that burned in Diana's grove. The fact that Bates, fearful of going down with pneumonia, dries his clothes on this fire while waiting for Emma (Bradbury 127) is symbolic not only of her role as a life guarantor but also of Bates's hope that his hostess will put an end to his misery by returning his love, marrying him, and granting him the fertility that fire is associated with. Obviously, this brings us back to unmarried girls' tendency to walk around the fire in the hope that they would marry soon and to lovers' tendency to jump over the fire in quest of marital fertility.

Taking into account the abovementioned clues, I suggest that Emma is a latter-day goddess of fertility and that each

of her suitors is looking forward to being assigned the role of the goddess's consort so as to fertilise her and make it possible for her to do her duty for mankind. Unlike ancient goddesses of fertility, however, Emma is not supposed to fertilize the vegetal world but rather to fertilize the other characters' lives by lending meaning to them through love and marriage. Basically, she is supposed to treat all her suitors on an equal footing, given her "good nature" (Bradbury 66) and given that she is a "liberal-minded" woman who is "careful of the feelings of others" (67).

### Rivalry for Emma's Favour

Like Diana's suitors, Louis Bates, Eborebelosa, and Stuart Treece engage in intense competition for Emma's favour. Unlike their progenitors, however, Bradbury's heroes depend on words rather than swords, be it through tête-à-têtes or through letters, rather than on jousting, to achieve their goals, although vestiges of the violent ancient combat are detectable. For example, Eborebeosa sticks pins into Treece's image and threatens to kill him (62), and Bates threatens to pull the same character's ear off (146).

Bates's desire to get married attests to his thirst for fertility and stability. Having plumbed the depths of despair as a result of his unrequited love for Emma, he sends her two letters in which he "confessed his mad passion and sought to drag her some way towards the altar" (Bradbury 94). His idealization of her borders on worship in that he is enchanted with her "white, straight teeth," "white arms" (85), "pretty face," "dark eyes," and the "wispy hair falling over her brow" (87). Aren't we here reminded of Demeter's symbolic "long yellow hair" (Pater 87), of the "abundant tresses of her hair" as represented by Greek art (224), and of Frazer's claim that Isis was portrayed by Greek and Roman artists with ears of corn in her hand or on her head?

Emma's amazing beauty accounts for Bates's jealousy and ensuing confrontation with the other suitors, as per the pattern set by the suitors of the ancient goddess of fertility. He feels sick with jealousy when he finds Treece in Emma's room. After threatening to pull his rival's ear off, he tries in vain to talk Emma into joining him to Mirabelle's party (Bradbury 146). Finding her in the company of the German student, Herr Schumann, at the aforementioned party, he wonders if he lacks the things and attributes other people have and expresses his frustration at being "everybody's whipping-boy" and at being treated as an "invisible" man (157). Soon after, dismayed to find Oliver kissing Emma in the garden, he snaps, "Is it just everybody except me?" and warns her that her companion is merely playing with her (158).

As for Emma's other suitor, the African student Eborebelosa, taking the other characters' disdain for his ethnic origins into consideration, he may be said to represent the runaway slave who picks the branch of the golden bough in Diana's grove and gets a chance to win the fertility deity's favour. It is little wonder he threatens to kill Treece after believing Emma's lie that she is engaged to him and keeps asking her if his rival has died (Bradbury 62). At the English department reception for foreign students, Emma does her

best to appease him. Invoking the “cup of offering” used in ancient fertility rituals (Frazer 588), she holds his cup for him to keep the tea from splashing out of it; tries to restore his self-confidence by offering him “a generous smile” (Bradbury 41); gives him sips from his cup (42-43);<sup>3</sup> and, being “a thoroughly amiable personality,” she keeps offering him smiles in answer to his request (43).

While the above suitors have only a slim chance of winning Emma’s heart, Treece seems to be the most likely candidate for the highly esteemed marriage. Indeed, his very name, calling to mind the term *trees*, invites comparison between him and ancient tree gods like Attis, Osiris, and Dionysus. Interestingly, after Mirabelle’s party, he kisses Emma under a tree (Bradbury 186), and she later tells him that she existed as a person for him only once, when he kissed her in the Town Hall gardens (255). Treece’s association with fertility is also evidenced through the value he attaches to fire. On the occasion of the tea party he organizes, he ascertains that his guests observe “the norm” he has planned for the evening and that “everyone took his place in a half-circle about the fire, and talked communally.” (81).

Granted Treece’s connection with fertility, Emma is bursting to have a sexual relationship with him. As he starts fiddling with his clothes at the English Department, she hopes that he is planning to make love to her there and then (Bradbury 66). Soon later, attending a tea party in his house, she wonders if he “was going to haul her off upstairs” and make love to her (79). She will later be pleased to have a relationship with him because “the rewards seemed greater than was lost, for there was at least a sense of identity.” Feeling happier and prettier than ever before, she can now confidently confide to her worrying mother that she has at last found someone to marry and settle down with. Her mother, for her part, decides to see Treece and see to it that he and Emma get married as “one is never a virgin twice” (189).

We are here left in no doubt as to the significance of matrimony in the novel, which corresponds to Frazer’s insistence on the high esteem placed on marriage with regard to the relationship between the goddess Diana and her consort, the performance of conjugal sexual intercourses in the fields, and the depiction of allegedly married plants in anthropomorphic terms. It must not be forgotten that Bradbury’s novel is set in the 1950s, a decade known for its moral and religious conservatism, as against the succeeding decade, which witnessed a deluge of cultural and social changes.<sup>4</sup>

In the same vein, a lady in a “flower-pot hat” considers Treece’s bachelorhood “disgusting” (48), ascribes it to his loathing for children, and hopes that he will change his mind about them when he himself has children (51). This lady’s faith in marriage and in the necessity of having children comes as no surprise, one may surmise, as the flower-pot hat she is wearing brings to mind not only the “crown of the freshest flowers and of spring” on the head of the Whitsuntide-bride in the Danish parish mentioned by Frazer but also the crowns of corn featured by painters on the head of the corn goddess Isis.

As peasants in the past offered gifts to their fertility deities to please and appease them, so Emma’s suitors try to

win her heart by offering her gifts and by rendering certain services to her. These gifts, however, create rifts. Inviting Emma to join him to Mirabelle’s Party, Bates, whose very name calls to mind Bacchus, an ancient god of the vine (Frazer 162), boasts that he has bought and brought a bottle of wine. When Emma angrily tells him he has to drink it himself (Bradbury 146), he waves it in the air and insists that she go with him (147). He also sneers at the dress offered to her by Treece and asks her to take it off, adding, “I think it’s terrible, and it amazes me that you accept gifts like that. You’re a cruel woman” (148).

Similarly, at the English department reception for foreign students, Herr Schumann offers to bring Emma a cup of tea, and she agrees (Bradbury 38). Soon later, echoing the value of wine in ancient fertility rituals (Frazer 383, 409, 529, etc.) and hinting at the resemblance between these rituals and academic parties with respect to joyful celebration, he asks, “But when do we have the intoxicating liquors?” Emma, however, tells him to leave her alone because she is “busy with my friend” Eborebelosa. The German student complains that she has “no taste” and claims that he would have given her “cakes, chocolates, food of all natures” and that he can introduce her to friends of his who are “in positions of great responsibility” (Bradbury 42).

As for Eborebelosa, he promises to make the modern fertility goddess present of a number of goats (Bradbury 42, 62). A surprised and jealous Herr Schumann warns the African student that Emma is a white woman and that Europeans do not ride goats or drink their milk, for they “have gone past the goat” and their culture “has trod on” (42). He may here be hinting at the ancient fertility rituals in which the goat, like certain other animals, played a leading role as a corn spirit. Significantly, the novel is sprinkled with references to this symbolic animal. One of the girls attending Treece’s tea-party dismisses men as “such prancing, leering goats” (80); one of the articles commonly recommended in the magazine *Vogue* is entitled “Have a goat’s milk bath this week” (99); and Oliver, alluding to the plausibility of identifying Bates with a corn spirit, complains that he smells like a goat (164).

Being dismissed as a member of an inferior race, Eborebelosa is supposed to preserve and observe certain practices that are alien to Western civilization. Chief among these is magic. Interestingly, his very name is steeped in ambiguity. Having no clear clues as to whether it is a name or a last name, and building on Frazer’s claim that some blacks chose to be called by surnames or nicknames lest their enemies used the real names as “vehicles of incantation,” we may presume that it is either a nickname or a surname but not a first name. On the practical side, he offers Emma his grandfather’s skull, which he has preserved in a box (Bradbury 61, 63),<sup>5</sup> evoking savages’ habit of keeping the sacred king’s bones and teeth as amulets and proving, at the same time, that Emma is so dear to him that he can offer her such a highly treasured and tabooed object which strangers should not touch. Emma captures the retrograde nature of these practices when she tells Treece that “it is very flattering, to be admired by someone out of a different culture” and adds, in the same breath, that white suitors “don’t try to give you

their grandfather's skull" (63). Finally, Eborebelosa sticks pins into Treece's image as a punishment for his attempt to take Emma from him (62), enacting not only the practice of imitative magic which Frazer traces to savage society but also the old habit of the use of swords to decide who was worthy of the fertility goddess's company.

## DISCUSSION

### The Characters' Emotional Fiasco

The failure of Emma's suitors to lead her to the altar is attributable to their selfishness, hence their objectionable view of marriage as the door to narrow goals rather than as a social institution that ensures the continuity of the human race or as a guarantor of the fertility of the land and of subsequent plenty, as was the case with primitive societies. Treece's hatred of children is eloquent testimony to this. He intimates to a female children's novelist, "Was it Chesterton who said he didn't like children because they smelled of bread and butter? I dislike them because they aren't grown up." When another woman asks him if he is charmed by children's innocence (Bradbury 50), he replies that "innocence is in the eye of the beholder," that children are as "culturally disconnected" as old people, and that they are rather "cruel and savage." If he had children, therefore, he would "lock them up in a cage until they could prove that they were moral creatures because the only interesting thing about man, to me, is that he's a moral animal; and children aren't" (51).

Echoing Frazer's account of the primordial significance of pregnancy and of the veneration with which pregnant women were treated, Treece, his loathing for children notwithstanding, hopes that Emma is pregnant for the selfish purpose of forcing her to marry him (Bradbury 256). Indeed, he looks forward to sparing himself the pain of having to cook his own meals (253) and to enjoying the things associated with marriage, such as shopping (93) and a wife's sustenance of "a level of polite conversation" with guests during parties (69-70).

Unsurprisingly, his purported commitment to liberalism (Bradbury 12, 15, 55, 260) turns out to be a chimera. Although he initially plays the role of a match-maker by trying to talk Emma into marrying Eborebelosa or Bates (64) and takes offence when she rejects them (67, 289), he later sheds his liberal skin and decides to have a relationship with Emma, regardless of his protégés' feelings. Once again, it expires that he lacks the sense of commitment which relationships of this kind hinge on. For instance, he is unwilling to meet Emma in private for fear he should "be possessed" (190), choosing to "hurry away" or rather to "escape." (192). Emma protests that their relationship should see the light of day instead of being restricted to her room (192) and that Treece does not want to marry her in particular but rather to marry in absolute terms (254). Her unapologetic interlocutor admits that he does not "feel a wild sort of love" for her and that he is "simply parasitic on other people" (256).

The logical conclusion to draw from the above pieces of evidence is that whoever lacks commitment and responsibility should be disqualified from the competition for a

latter-day goddess's favour. As a matter of fact, no matter how often he tries and cries, Treece finally fails to achieve his heart's desire by winning Emma's heart. This may be considered a well-deserved punishment for his selfishness and for having chosen to have a sexual relationship with Emma instead of proposing to her from the outset and of postponing lovemaking until marriage, as per the pattern set by the ancient fertility goddess and her consorts.

Be this as it may, he is not alone in being rejected and dejected. Bates, too, is not deemed an appropriate consort for this goddess although he is young and should, accordingly, be more virile than a forty-year-old Treece. Again, his expulsion from the circle of likely candidates is ascribed to his selfishness. Adopting a thoroughly utilitarian attitude to marriage, he not only sees Emma "in these simple images—cooking at his stove, darning his socks, making their bed, dandling their children, nursing his influenza, knitting his sweaters" (Bradbury 134) but also he hopes that marrying an "intelligent and sophisticated" (170) woman will help him "flourish as an individual" (130), shed his "lack of normality" (134), and mix with "finer society" (170). Unfortunately for him, a "perfectionist" (254) like Emma will not be duped into marrying on these terms even though Bates, unlike Treece, is thinking of having children.

Nor will Emma accept the equally selfish proposal made by Eborebelosa. Priding himself on being the son of a chief (Bradbury 32), the African student keeps following Emma everywhere at the university (58); announces publicly that he wants to make her his fifth wife; and is ready to sacrifice his intimate relationships with his four black wives for Emma's sake (61). Obviously, this suitor's belonging to a culture where polygamy is standard practice, together with his indifference to his other wives' emotions, should put Emma off.

As for Oliver, he is unequal to the task of being a goddess's spouse, although his name, conjuring up olives and olive trees, suggests his potential connection with the land and with verdure. He does not even propose to Emma but only kisses her in the garden, yet again a symbolic place, and reminds her that "[s]ex rules the world" (Bradbury 158). Being an unrepentant philanderer, he lacks the sense of commitment a goddess's partner should show. When he meets Bates in a bar, he invites him to "watch me do a seduction." Pointing at the girl in his company, he adds, "This girl has put herself in severe moral danger, and I'm it. Tell her what a fine fellow I am." When Bates confirms that his interlocutor is indeed a nice fellow, the latter urges him to be more helpful: "Try some of that old moonlight on the water stuff, or a bit of crap about Ceres and the essential fertility of the earth. Come on, man, boost me" (171). By mentioning Ceres, the goddess of the corn (Frazer 162), and the theme of fertility, Oliver is possibly, but vainly, trying to prove the fruitfulness of clandestine sex.

The failure of Emma's suitors to live up to her expectations is ascribed not only to shortcomings on their part but also to Emma's egotism, faulty reasoning, carelessness, and callousness. It is little wonder that she takes a perverse pleasure in treating them cruelly, observing, so to speak, the

role of the huntress played by her literary progenitor, Diana, instead of behaving like a fertility goddess who cares for the wellbeing of humanity. Bates, in particular, assumes the role of the huntress's easy prey most obviously, given his name's connotations. As a matter of fact, Viola, who has taken every opportunity to degrade him, seems to draw an analogy between him and the beast when she asks contemptuously, "Mr. Bates, Mr. Bates, what does that word remind me of?" (Bradbury 179). Emma, on the other hand, speaking to Treece about the same character, says, "You know the poem: 'See the scapegoat, happy *beast*, From every personal sin released'" (289; emphasis added).

She also suggests that the yawning social gap between Bates and her militates against their potential marriage. Being "upstart middle class" (Bradbury 125) and belonging to a deep-rooted "tradition of snobbery" (126) and to "another status and another class" (131), she baulks at the idea of marrying beneath herself (131). In addition, she decides that she cannot treat her young suitor fairly because of his "grotesqueness," his "lack of charm" (131), "his face," and "his lack of normality" (134). In short, he does not fulfil the criterion of handsomeness associated with ancient divinities like Adonis, with whom Aphrodite and Persephone were besotted. Having lost hope of getting Emma to return his love, Bates takes a big dose of aspirin to put an end to his life (286) and is soon taken to a mental asylum (288).

Emma's disregard for Bates's feelings lies heavy on her conscience ever after. Evoking Frazer's examination of the mistreatment of scapegoats in primitive societies, she admits to Treece that Bates "was other people's scapegoat ...a whipping boy, the one they spanked when the prince was naughty so that wrong shouldn't go unpunished... He simply suffered for other people's. You know the poem: 'See the scapegoat, happy beast, From every personal sin released'" (Bradbury 289).

As Bates's face and social background stand between him and Emma's reciprocation, so Eborebelosa's colour revolts Emma, who refers to him as "that Negro student" and complains that he has "gone too far" (Bradbury 61). Being a "liberal-minded person," she regrets having lied to him about being engaged to Treece but she admits, all the same, that she cannot tell him to his face that there is "no common *ground* between" them (62; emphasis added). Treece captures Eborebelosa's plight in equally symbolic terms by claiming that "[w]hen one ceases to *cultivate* one's own *garden*, then one ceases to be influential" and simply becomes "a buffoon" like Eborebelosa, who is "not funny on his *native heath*—but here!" (65-66; emphasis added). In other words, the African student has to enact his fertility rites in his own country and to court the favour of a compatriot fertility deity. This accords with Frazer's contention that cults vary according to cultures. Finally, taking into account Eborebelosa's emotional disappointment, one may venture the conjecture that the cup Emma holds for him during the foreign students' reception party is neither the "cup of offering" nor any other cup, at that, but rather another version of the poisonous cup which the wife of the sick king offers to him to end his life.

In the light of her hunting habits and haunting presence, Emma rightly deserves the title *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, a

name given to John Keats's titular character in an oft-quoted ballad. Predictably, Emma denies having any kinship with the aforesaid character (Bradbury 95, 195). Her demeanour, however, pulls strongly in the opposite direction, hence her own admission that she is "a hideous creature to fall in with" (283) and hence Bates's angry rejoinder that she has to stop behaving "like some young virgin who can ignore all men until at last her prince comes," that she has "to live in a different world" because she is "a menace to the rest of us," and that she has to shed the "terrible feminine hauteur" she is adopting to keep people from getting near her (169). The logical conclusion to draw from this is that Emma is not the right person to trust and to entrust one's heart and life to and that she is not the altruistic ancient fertility goddess who sets a high premium on the community's welfare.

### Sexual Impotence

Treece's failure to fertilize Emma, or rather to impregnate her, despite making love to her on several occasions, may be considered irrefutable evidence of his impotence and of his not being entitled to the title of a fertility god who can benefit humanity. Little wonder that he feels "essentially *passé*" (Bradbury 12). Looking at himself in the mirror, he is shocked by the amount of "white hair" (252) marking the onset of old age and the decline of the vigour and potency connected with youth. After seeing Willoughby to the station, he "felt terribly, terribly old, and quaintly set in his ways. He was of the old guard now. His visions, which he had cherished so sturdily, believing them absolutes, were going out now. Somehow his time had slipped by and they had gone beyond him now, the new men" (260).

This is a curtain-raiser to further deterioration of his health and to his hospitalization subsequent to being diagnosed with an intensive haemorrhage. As the blood-drip continues for two days and nights, he "found himself increasingly listless and depressive" (Bradbury 279) and feels defeated by illness, "a cruel and unfair chance that attacked randomly its victims. a cruel, defeating thing, a betrayal of the human possibility, a canker in the self ...a savage test..." and a death knell for the happiness of people who have "lived late in the world" (281). When Emma warns him that his sickness is "a cruel warning" to everyone, he assures her that she has no reason to worry because she is young and that the young "have enthusiasms, vigour, power, new eyes; they're never ill and nothing can tie them down for a while" (284). The fact that three doctors meet together to discuss his condition (272) brings to mind how elders in savage societies met and consulted each time a sacred king was sick and how he was, at times, killed, after which his body was burned and his ashes were preserved for years (Frazer 125). By claiming, "I'm ashes" (Bradbury 284), Treece seems to admit that he has suffered the same fate as the sacred king of yore, if only figuratively.

As a clear sign of the paleness of the tree spirit and of the vegetation world he represents, Treece's sickness seems to have been foreshadowed early in the novel by the "last leaves falling damply from the trees" (Bradbury 11) and by the three "weakly marigolds" that "stood in a jar" on his desk

(13). This finds eloquent corroboration in Frazer's claim that "the tree-spirit or the spirit of vegetation in general is represented either in vegetable form alone, as by a tree, bough, or flower; or in vegetable and human form simultaneously, as by a tree, bough, or flower in combination with a puppet or a living person" (147).

Treece's despair reaches a climax towards the end of the novel on the occasion of the poetry conference. When Emma comes to his room to talk to him about a serious thing, she finds him in bed, fully dressed, smoking, and "eaten by his ungovernable depression." Having intimated that he has decided to marry, he adds that he feels "painfully lonely" and that he is badly in need of love (Bradbury 253). As his health deteriorates, he stresses the importance of marriage and regrets having led an aimless life (284).

In a similar vein, by considering his wounded foot "a castration symbol" (Bradbury 248), Carey Willoughby, a leading poet and a representative of scholars in general, may be hinting to his sexual impotence and to the futility of clandestine love relationships. Accordingly, his alleged sexual adventures (223, 229, 232) are possibly meant to dissipate doubts about this affliction and to ward off potential humiliation because, as David Kepesh, a professor in another academic novel, says, "Impotence is no joke – it's a plague! People kill themselves!" (Roth 150).

### Intellectual Sterility

Since Willoughby considers the poet's role in improving the world crucial and since poets in general are "the antennae of the race" (Bradbury 226) and the "the trumpets which sing to battle; the influence which is moved not, but moves; the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley 54), I argue, in the light of Frazer's emphasis on the association between the virility of the king and the fertility of his land, that poets' physical weakness, as illustrated by Willoughby's bad leg, is likely to affect their artistic performance and thwart the services they render to humanity.

This has a significant parallel in Jessie Weston's examination of the inextricable link between the wasteland in Grail romances and the incapacitating wound of the Fisher King, the custodian of the Holy Grail, who is referred to as "Roi Mehaigné, or Maimed King" (119), and in Roger Sherman Loomis's claim that this wound is a symbol of the "loss of reproductive power" as it is usually in the groin or between the thighs (262). Interestingly, both scholars are indebted to Frazer for having familiarized them with the close correspondences between pagan fertility rituals and the Christian account of the Holy Grail (Weston v; Loomis 39, 43, 78, 79, 80, etc.).

Having proposed that there is precedent for Treece's and Willoughby's assumed sexual impotence in that of Frazer's, Weston's, and Loomis's kings, it may be considered a well-deserved punishment for their lack of emotional commitment. It may also be deemed a vivid reflection of the intellectual barrenness plaguing the academic scene on the whole. In effect, Treece is not proud of the only book he has published despite Mrs Bishop's assurance that fecundity is a pleasant thing (Bradbury 190). Emma fails to make any progress on her PhD during the whole vacation (60) and

fears that she may need "at least a hundred years to finish writing it" (84). Oliver, on the other hand, can only write "seventh chapters" in novels despite his distinction in the world of letters (153). Worse, he gets "stuck" later and is at a loss as to what to write (213).

It is worth adding that the leading academics in the book may rightly be accused of perpetuating the intellectual sterility afflicting the academy by withdrawing into an ivory tower instead of working for the improvement of society and of thrusting pressing and consequential topics into the spotlight of debate. This is best illustrated by their use of meandering language to ward off the lay public. The Vice-Chancellor, feeling intimidated by the jargon used by Willoughby and by the "ambiguities" filling his poetry (Bradbury 227), protests, "You people are slippery fishes. You have a faculty for defining the simple in terms of the grandiose, so that a poor devil like me can't understand it. You're all the same. Well, a plague on your abstractions. Facts, my friends, facts." Equally unwelcome to him is the novelists' tendency to choose unclear endings for their novels (230). Treece, too, wonders why the famous poet does not call his lecture "Modern Verse" rather than "Contemporary Poetics: Adumbration and Exegesis" (200). Ironically, however, Treece himself has "a fondness for using oddly exaggerated words to define things, as if the ordinary commerce of language was just not quite enough for him" (78).

### A Demythologized Deity

Emma is not only proven to be egoistic, selfish, and callous but is also demythologized with respect to appearance, turning out to be a mere mortal human being who has limitations and flaws or rather a corrupt latter-day version of the impeccably beautiful fertility goddess of yore. Before going on the river with Emma, Bates becomes aware of numerous "fragrant freckles" on her cheek. While "fragrant" highlights her resemblance to flowers and fields, the freckles, together with "the myopic eyes," reveal that she is not "exactly beautiful, but sweetly formed, and with faint defects" and bring her "nearer to him, so that contact seemed less impossible as one realised that one's own dental problems, one's own impurities of the bloodstream were shared by her too" (Bradbury 265).

Bates is not alone in waking up to Emma's blemished beauty. Having haunted Emma's haunts during the vacation, a nostalgic Treece is disappointed as soon as he meets her after classes resume, "for she was simply a person, with freckles on her face, a few hairs on her top lip." No less revolting is "the running flush of water that preceded her return" to the bedroom, where Treece is waiting for her (Bradbury 190). This shatters the aura of perfection accorded to her by Mrs Bishop, who, replying to Bates's question if Emma is in the bathroom (138), says, "'Certainly not'...as if nothing like that ever happened in her house" (139).

This situation has parallels in David Lodge's *The Picturegoers* (1960). Lying in bed, Mark Underwood, the leading character and an aspiring writer who is obsessed with the cloacal in writers such as Rabelais, Swift, Joyce, Smollett, and Swift, becomes aware that someone is using the lavatory in the adjoining room and deduces that it is Clare Mallory,



the Catholic girl he is dating. The narrator reports, "It was a good job girls like Clare had to relieve themselves: it made them face the facts of human nature. Otherwise they were prone to think themselves bloody little angels. But perhaps even the angels had to pass their nectar." Hearing the musical sound emitted by the water in the flush, Underwood recalls Joyce's description of the chamber pot in his novel *Ulysses* and considers writing an ode entitled "*On Hearing His Beloved's Urination*" that reads as follows:

*O gushing stream*

*You bring sweet music to my troubled ear;*

*And as I lie upon my restless couch,*

*I fit a picture to each sound I hear.*

He is also reminded of Yeats's "great-bladdered Emer" (Note the acoustic similarity between *Emer* and *Emma*), who takes part in a competition between the Celtic goddesses to determine who can make "the deepest hole in the snow with urine. You could imagine them squatting in a row, with the steam rising all around." The narrator makes a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that this contest should be called Winter Sports and that it should be included in the Olympic Games (94).

## CONCLUSION

Building on the hypotheses formulated in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and on the purportedly provable historical facts and findings recorded therein, Bradbury's *Eating People Is Wrong*, adopting a cautionary rather than an accusatory attitude, illuminates the emotional and academic sterility afflicting the British university and demonstrates the extent to which primitive fertility rituals and lifestyles continue to attract attention and generate contention. While its characters ostensibly observe the rules and roles ancient society assigned to certain fertility divinities and to closely connected individuals, they actually fail to fulfil them not only because they are oriented towards personal goals but also because they are basically disoriented in a post-war world where fast and vast changes are beginning to take shape. Bringing intimate mores to bear on the academic scene, Bradbury suggests that intellectual fertility hinges on emotional and marital stability as much as the fertility of the landscape in ancient times hinged on the well-being of fertility divinities and of their consorts.

As we have already had occasion to note, while even a slave had a chance of winning the fertility goddess's heart in savage society, Emma Fielding, the snobbish descendant of the aforesaid goddess, chooses not to treat her suitors on an equal footing. Instead of allowing them to settle their quarrel through swords, as per the old pattern, in a manner of speaking, or through words, she defends her suitable suitor and offends his rivals. No matter how she chooses and whom she chooses, however, she ends up desperate and disappointed.

No less disappointed and disappointing are the other characters. A selfish Treece, having suffered the fate of his rivals as far as his belated marriage proposal is concerned, is left alone and lonely. Bates runs mad due to unreciprocated love and is relegated to the margins of society; Eborebelosa loses hope of integrating with Western civilization; and

Oliver and Willoughby continue playing the roles of lecherous but emotionally and intellectually sterile scholars whose licentiousness is a curtain raiser to the onset of the 1960s' sexual revolution and the attendant relaxation of sexual mores. Even the fertility suggested by the names of most of the characters turns out to be a mere illusion. I would propose, therefore, that the celibate philanderer Butterfield, who refuses to marry the woman by whom he is rumoured to have fathered two children (Bradbury 50), had better be called *Bitterfield* and that Viola Masefield, the "eccentric old spinster" (173) who admires Bates's intellectual distinctiveness (194) while disdaining his appearance (174, 181, 193) and social background (193) and who behaves violently (25, 26, 73, 116) despite her name's positive connotations, should be called *Mazefield*.

Lastly, by applying an anthropological approach to Bradbury's aforementioned novel, I hope I have shed more light on the importance of interdisciplinary research. I also hope that my present study will make a valuable contribution towards achieving a higher visibility for and a deeper understanding and appreciation of the campus novel, a subgenre which deserves more consideration from literary critics, given its informed reflection on purely academic issues and its first-hand reflection of the professional and personal life of a number of fictional but immediately recognizable teachers, scholars, students, librarians, and administrators.

## END NOTES

1. Similarly, in his *Small World: An Academic Romance*, David Lodge, drawing heavily on chivalric romance, classical Alexandrian romance, and Renaissance epic romance, follows a number of professors as they travel around the world, have adventures, attend conferences, and so on. The use of these romance subgenres licenses him to "contrive all kinds of coincidences and twists in the story that might otherwise be too hard to swallow" (Lodge, "Interview").
2. For an enlightening account of the academic novel subgenre, see Lyons, Proctor, and Showalter.
3. In view of Eborebelosa's passion for Emma, I feel inclined to argue that the latter is here observing the time-honoured view of the Cup (or Vase) as a symbol of the female sexual organ (Weston 77). Meanwhile, while denying her devotee the physical pleasure he is eager for, she makes up to him by giving him tea and offering him smiles.
4. For an informative study of the transition from the conservatism marking the 1950s to the seismic changes which the 1960s' sexual revolution wrought, see Eberstadt; and for a fictional account of the same phenomenon, see Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*
5. The Templars, warrior monks who leapt to fame in the twelfth century and were called the Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon (Baigent et al. 76), were also known to worship heads, which, to them, shared with the Grail various properties such as guaranteeing the fertility of the land and providing sustenance for those who needed it (300).

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