From *Blurred Borders: Creative Writers and Globalization, by Mike Pemberton*

# CRITICAL PREFACE

## Introduction

My thesis seeks to explore the influence of institutions, economic globalization, and the blurring of borders – both physical and intellectual – upon individuals, families and communities impacted by these forces. Economic globalization is a major factor in the homogenization of cultures, creating politically divergent market based bedfellows like the United States and China. Similarly global literature is blurring the borders regarding the influence of nationality, ethnicity, and cultural background on the creative process. Which is the chicken and which is the egg is not necessarily the point for creative writers. But recognition of the impact of economic and literary globalization is something which needs to be part of the conversation.

Keeping in mind the interweaving of economic and literary globalization we will note the connection of themes in my fiction portion of this thesis with two novels written by others and nonfiction works touting the pros and cons of multinational corporations and globalization. We will examine how institutions, particularly the modern corporation, came to be and how the corporation has impacted life across the world including the writing of fiction. From there we will trace how the term "globalization" became connected to literary studies and look at the aforementioned novels. These works, *The Nubian Prince* by Juan Bonilla and *The Fountain at the Center of the World* by Robert Newman, focus on shared concerns like the gap between the economic have and have

nots, the isolation of the individual within a decaying society, and the homogenization of culture that appear to be results of globalization. They also raise the question of writing across national/ethnic/religious/pick the demographic and whether this is even an issue under the umbrella of a globalized narrative. Thus, in its very structure, this thesis serves as an example of the mingling of economic and literary globalization and the recognition that the twain not only have met, but will not be broken.

To begin, then, my fiction portion of this thesis, written prior to my having any knowledge of the other authors' novels, strikes the previously mentioned thematic chords and serves as an example of the influence of globalization and the crossing of intellectual borders. While I cannot speak for other writers, it is my hope my work will continue the use of the narrative form to, as Jonathan Culler writes in *Literary Theory,* "expose the hollowness of worldly success, the world's corruption, its failure to meet our noblest aspirations" (92). That said, however, I trust it demonstrates the resilience of the individual within the parameters of a society that allows for freedom of expression. As historian Tibor Machan states in *Individual Rights Reconsidered* what makes us unique and separates humans from other species is the ability to "take the initiative and create something on our own" with the understanding that "much that is given to us by others. The bulk of the language we use, for example, we did not create ourselves" (xvi). For those of us who choose to express ourselves by writing fiction these statements ring particularly true.

If each individual is unique yet influenced by the society within which he lives then how our institutions and communities are structured is crucial. One aspect of that

structure that can be an indication of a vital society is its economy. A dynamic economy usually is associated with the most vibrant civilizations. If people are struggling to survive there leaves little time for contemplation and the setting in motion of creative ideas – whether they be in the field of art, science, business or any other endeavor. Thus the fate of the individual and society are linked to some degree. As David Korten says in *When Corporations Rule the World*, "Healthy societies seek balance in all things" (273). For those of us involved in the arts and who seek to explore the human condition awareness of what is transpiring in the greater world is crucial. That does not mean we all have to study economics, write protest literature or march on city hall, but it does mean we should be cognizant of the forces shaping society, how they impact the people who may encounter our work and, conversely, how our work is affected by the world in which we live. Creative writers have been handed the gift of language from previous generations. Our use of language helps shape the world we live in just as that same world influences the language. To use a phrase that is relatively new and thus serves as an example of the dynamism of language, creative writers should "pay it forward" by being aware of the forces that impact the individual and the society in which we live. Russian writer Viktor Shklovsky in *Energy of Delusion* put it as well as anyone when he said "the great writer, is working with words created long before him…yet he is free – because he is reinventing everything" (26).

I attempt to employ my own creative ability and the use of narrative to focus on the issues cited above and "reinvent everything" through a series of vignettes connected by the trail of a shipment of cocaine from Columbia to Mexico to the United States. For

me the drug trade is an example of capitalism in its most brutal form in terms of meeting supply and demand and survival of the fittest. Thus it is a useful allegory for some aspects of economic globalization. Tied together by the shipment, the stories can also stand alone just as individuals are so often forced to do in our increasingly segmented society. These are tales of people affected by the creeping tentacles of the societal influences cited above which are represented by the cocaine shipment and the misery it leaves in its wake. My characters' reaction at a personal and visceral level to the machinations of entities like drug cartels, governments, and corporations serves as a reflection of what life is like for many in the twenty first century. I could say as Nina Felshin does in *But is it Art?* that I hope to use the narrative form in a "public space to address issues of sociopolitical and cultural significance and to encourage community or public participation as means of effecting social change" (9). But such language is off-putting to me and makes this son of the modest Midwest feel too full of himself. So I will settle for folks contemplating the idea that there might be better ways to live and structure our economy and society, while they enjoy a good read.

**Institutions, Corporations and Capitalism**

Part of what my novel seeks to analyze is whether the institutions we have created with the best of intentions to foster society and develop the individual are benefitting us in the manner we had hoped. Or, have they turned against the individual and spawned a less nurturing and less free world within which too many people survive but do not thrive? In their own way, institutions are borders. Humans have recognized and been limited by

institutional control from day one. Just ask Adam and Eve. In his study of the Aborigines in *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud uses exogamy, the prohibition "against persons of the same totem having sexual relations with one another" as an example of an early "institution" (6). Over time others emerged like individual rights regarding parameters on personal space, property, and self defense along with rules on treatment of animals, trade, work and numerous other activities. Money became of primary importance in most cultures as a means of providing food, shelter and clothing and created another border, the separation between rich and poor. The use of currency is deemed progress by many and the tipping point of our demise by others, but it is how we have evolved. Regardless, it appears a basic part of us, even at our most primitive, yearns for structure and limits, borders if you will, and with that desire came the creation of the "institution" defined by Webster's as "the principle custom that forms part of a society or civilization" (139).

One such institution which has come to embody our current state of affairs is the modern corporation, an entity that has spurred globalization. Like most institutions the corporation's original form was designed to protect and promote the individual and benefit society as a whole. In the sixteenth century, the government of England, desiring the economic gain and political influence the opening of markets to the East Indies could bring, wanted to encourage the traders to venture forth. So, as Korten relates, they came up with the idea of the corporate charter which "limited an investor's liability for losses of the corporation to the amount of his or her investment in it – a right not extended to individual citizens" (55).

This transference of individual responsibility to a nonhuman entity that, unlike humans, cannot die creates a conflict. At the same time the corporation protects investors it may lead those same people to mistreat others. In the name of what best serves the corporate interest, individuals, communities and natural environs may be harmed. The modern mantra of "it's not personal, only business" mouthed in untold multiples over the years in response to those who do suffer personal harm – loss of work, pollution of air and water, depletion of food supply, and general uncertainty about a future that allows for the basic necessities of a sustainable life style – is based upon a business decision. Works like Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* explore this conflict in excruciating realism by bringing to life the inequities that can be the by-product of unfettered capitalism. In some cases they produced substantive change in business practices. Sinclair's brutal images of slaughterhouses, for example, led to the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. But even when such literature does not lead to an act of Congress, the fact that it brings issues to the public's attention may create a dialogue which holds business accountable.

Now it is only fair to pause and make clear that this writer, like many people in our society, deals daily with this same conflict. I have been associated with a Fortune 500 property/casualty insurance company for twenty four years, ten as an employee and fourteen as a self-employed agent. I have seen the benefits of a well-run corporation to its customers, employees, and community at large. While I certainly recognize the deserved criticism of the capitalistic system, particularly at the time Marx and Engel wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, I do not have an issue with the ownership of private

property or amassing a fortune by dint of hard work and innovation. I bear no grudge toward such people and am wary of a government that believes it has the right to confiscate their wealth and redistribute it based on its notion of fairness. It makes one wonder what next such a government might feel it has a right to: my religious beliefs, my freedom of expression, of movement, of choice? That said, it is obvious that our current mix of crony capitalism, wealth built through the "playing" of markets, and corporate takeovers designed to eliminate competition at the expense of actual creation of a product is not working for the vast majority of people either. So I am betwixt and between and do not attempt through this thesis to offer solutions. Or as Patricia Netzley, in the encyclopedic book *Social Protest Literature*, quotes Dreiser in responding to a critic who mistakenly concluded Dreiser was advocating communism by attacking capitalism, there is no plan "that can be more than a theory…dealing with man is a practical thing – not a theoretical one" (76).

But when millions of people work in sweat shops, factories, fields and mines for far less than a living wage, when three billion people live on less than two dollars a day and untold numbers go to bed every night hungry and suffer from poverty related diseases, one can hardly make the argument that with the demise of twentieth century communism we have somehow emerged into an economic nirvana. While benefitting some, our current path toward an economically borderless world may actually hinder individual growth and destroy local, sustainable economies and communities. For Korten this is a given since "business has no nationality and knows no borders" (121). Similarly, Alan Tonelson in *Race to the Bottom*, claims technological advances and globalization

"far from enriching most U.S. citizens and citizens of other countries…is now exerting downward pressure on living standards" (14). Yet others like Kenichi Ohmae take an opposing view. In his book *The Borderless World*, Ohmae proposes a "Declaration of Interdependence Toward the World" and argues that economic globalization and an "interlinked economy" allows for "this borderless world that will give participating economies the capacity for boundless prosperity" (216).

**Literary Studies and Globalization**

There are thousands of books, articles and speeches espousing a variety of opinions regarding economic globalization, institutional control and the blurring of borders penned by academics, economists, environmentalists, business people, politicians and others. Dr. Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Associate Professor in Dakar, who explores the area of boundaries and globalization in his creative writing, recognizes the work of researchers and scientists serves an important purpose. Yet, in an interview in *The Frontier Telegraph* Nyamnjoh states it is the fiction writer who is "able to interpret and relay material drawn from research in a creative way that does not alienate ordinary people" (1). Of globalization and "arbitrary boundaries" such as have been imposed on Africa, he states that with "so much being said of globalization you would think territorial gates are being open but…the gates are being closed" (2). Creative writing, Nyamnjoh believes, is important in expressing these viewpoints and serving as a means to "document the events of a given community or society" (2).

As for the creation of a new global literature, Shameen Black, Assistant Professor of English at Yale University, speaking in the *European Business Review* points out that

"to even think about literature and globalization is to push against deeply held traditions" (1). Those traditions are that literature has always been thought of in local and national terms. Black asserts that technology has increased the availability of literature through sites like Amazon and blogs, as has the rise in incomes in countries like China. Economic growth has increased purchasing power as countries develop a middle class and thus "simple economics has played a great role in the globalization of literature" (2). But Black, citing as an example Turkish author Orhan Pamuk whose novels are well-regarded in the West and as a result have some within his own county disowning him, wonders "if the novel will ever be able to successfully decouple itself from questions of national identity" (2).

But in what context is the term globalization tied to literary studies and how did it come to be? In his book *Globalization and Literature*, Suman Gupta, Professor of Literature and Cultural History at the Open University, notes it first appeared in Webster dictionary in 1961 and emerged within academia in the 1970's but did not enjoy common usage until the 1980's. Almost from the beginning the term globalization created uneasiness within literary studies with its "geographical and disciplinary border crossings and the transgression of different linguistic registers and area of application and usage" (4). One of the reasons, according to Gupta, is the term was coined outside the field by sociologists and many literary scholars feel as if it spins in a space "out of their control" (6). Since the concept of globalization overlaps so many other fields some feel like a piece of the puzzle is always missing and thus the term creates an anxiety among literary scholars who feel it cannot be "tamed" (5). Unlike other literary movements or theory,

Gupta states, globalization has been imposed upon literature from the "outside and will not be denied, and is a larger and more dynamic than its past and present masters" like "postmodernism" or "post colonialism" (6).

But those of us involved in literary studies and creative writing should not feel sheepish about our anxiety. This inability to define globalization makes other people in other endeavors – economists, businesses, farmers, factory workers – nervous as well. Globalization seems to be a word which we implicitly understand but cannot define to everyone's satisfaction because it means different things to different people. Like excessive contemplation of an ever-expanding universe might drive one mad, the defining of globalization should not become an obsession. Certainly we should not ignore it, but for creative writers and those in literary studies it is more important to recognize its influence, if any, upon our work and come to terms with it in that context.

This recognition is necessary for while Gupta points out the elusiveness of defining globalization and the anxiety it produces, Michael Valdes Moses argues it is not a new dilemma. In his book *The Novel and the Globalization of Culture* Moses writes that the idea of globalization began with German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's declaration of the "end of history" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* and the notion that "history does indeed have a direction and an end" (3). The idea being, Moses explains, that after the French Revolution of 1806, which Hegel believes marked the end of the master-slave dialectic, the principle of "mutual recognition of all human beings by all other human beings" was recognized and with it the "universal establishment of human freedom, and the dawning of a post historical society" (8). With the foundation of

a “universal” belief in human freedom laid (not a universal practice, mind you, but a recognition that as of the French Revolution it is the inevitable direction of history) the movement toward a “homogenizing worldwide process of modernization has become inexorable” (6). Thus, Moses asserts, “all human communities…are inexorably coming to resemble one another, exhibiting the same salient characteristics of a modern society” (6). While terms have changed over the years from “modernization” to “developing nations” to “world system” to “cultural imperialism” to a “global village,” the direction is clear. The movement toward a homogenous modern society is proceeding and while there may be major impediments along the way – dictatorships, repressive regimes, bloody wars and revolutions – there is nothing to “presage the return to a premodern form of existence” (196). So call it what we might, Moses argues, the movement of globalization has been with us, remains with us, and will continue, the blurring of borders an historical inevitability.

**Unique Voices, Common Themes**

Just as Moses studies novels by Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, Chinau Achebe, and Mario Vargas-Losos in relation to the “prospect of a post-historical society” (23), we will review *The Nubian Prince* by Juan Bonilla and Robert Newman’s *The Fountain at the Center of the World* as twenty-first century examples of novels dealing with globalization. While Bonilla’s work is farcical and humorous with a more indirect take at the darker side of globalization, Newman’s work is dramatic and direct in its objections, particularly to economic globalization. Just as nonfiction writers Korten and Ohmae’s

differences provide room for discussion, the contrast in styles (if not conclusions drawn) of these two novels serves us well in addressing the question of how writers from diverse backgrounds and orientations, address the common themes of globalization and cross cultural borders.

In *The Nubian Prince*, Bonilla, who was born, raised and lives in Spain, creates a character, narrator Moises Froissard, whose job it is to "save" people. We discover quickly that Froissard is no minister or social worker, however, but a scout for Club Olympus, a high priced, worldwide escort service catering to the sexual desires of the super wealthy. It is Froissard's job as a "scout" to discover the "models" to fill this need, economic supply and demand working in its most basic form. Froissard meets this demand of the rich by scouring the poorest, catastrophe ridden pockets of the globe for beautiful "pieces" i.e. gorgeous men, women and children, the classic diamonds in the rough. Whether it is the parents of a child, or grown men and women, Froissard uses his persuasive skills to convince these prospects, and himself, that a few years of high-priced prostitution is worth exchanging for liberation from desperate circumstances. Along the way Froissard deals with his own guilt in regard to his work, while simultaneously hoping to land a job in management so he can supervise scouts instead of working as one.

Like many people enmeshed in a corporation, including the "models" of Club Olympus, Froissard dreams of a day in which he will have enough money to walk away and live life on his own terms, free of company demands. Thus the notion is raised of whether all of us involved in corporations or similar institutions in which we do work that is not wholly satisfying are not all prostitutes in some form or fashion. The "models" just

confront it without pretense. In the meantime, like so many, Froissard deals with the stress of being a company man. He suffers from insomnia, a rash placed in the best tradition of poetic justice, isolation from his troubled family (both his parents commit suicide), and the knowledge that despite his best efforts to convince himself and the "pieces" he "saves," the service they provide cannot be rationalized into acceptability. They are all being exploited to serve the needs of the corporation and its customers. The Nubian Prince of the title is the ultimate "piece" which Froissard is sent to recruit for Club Olympus, an African man who a client spied in a news photo taken in a strife filled part of the globe. Froissard's successful recruitment of the Nubian and the events that unfold afterward provide the culmination and convince our narrator to find another line of work.

Because it is told in a comical, first person narration, *The Nubian Prince* is not a depressing, in your face lecture about the moral hazards of corporate life or globalization. Moises Froissard carries on in the tradition of Huck Finn, his entertaining travels around the world in search of "pieces" and his ultimate recognition of the problems with his corporate career, similar to Huck's adventures and moral awakening. While there are laugh out loud moments in *The Nubian Prince*, there is an underlying uneasiness as to where it will all lead, a foreboding which is confirmed in the conclusion. For all its humor and snappy take on the human condition in our twenty first century world, *The Nubian Prince* is very much about the downside of globalization.

This downside is evidenced in the locales to which Froissard travels. They are economic wastelands like a garbage dump in La Paz, Bolivia where thousands of people,

mostly children, exist. They sift through the trash looking for anything they might eat, sell or trade and numb their senses by draping glue soaked rags over their heads and drifting off to dreams of a better life. Or they are destinations for those escaping such hellholes, like Africans landing on a beach in Gibraltar. Or Buenos Aries after a financial crisis and professionals, like secretaries and middle management folks, who have lost their jobs turn to prostitution to make a buck. The best pickings, we learn, are where the people are the most desperate. It is a buy low, sell high market of human beings who Club Olympus have reduced to a commodity and the corporate lexicon has labeled "pieces" like an economist discusses "widgets."

Froissard's alienation from his family, the glue induced mental escape of the poor and the economically induced prostitution of a growing number of people serve as examples of how isolated individuals become as institutions and societies deteriorate. Far from any blissful notion of a global village, Froissard paints a picture of a world that is becoming a survival of the fittest nightmare and not just in "developing" countries. When he returns from La Paz, Froissard publishes an article in a weekly Spanish magazine with pictures of the children in the garbage dump and a brief article about their plight. Not yet committed to being a scout for Club Olympus he decides to do another such piece about a war torn corner of the world, but without leaving his home town of Seville. So he walks the city taking pictures of weatherworn women, derelicts, decaying buildings that look as if they had been bombed and empty lots filled with rubble and trash. Upon developing the photos he discovered to his horror that he was indeed in the midst of a war as "these people's eyes spoke of it…all you had to do was write Grozny

where…you should put Seville" (43). Froissard submits the article to several magazines but is called a fraud by one whose editors recognize some of the local places. Another magazine editor, however, makes no such connection but tells Froissard he had just done a piece on Grozny.

While presented in a satirical, slacker-scamming-a-buck motif, Bonilla depicts in this scene and throughout the book a world in which the homogenization of culture across borders is an economically bi-level affair separating the rich from the poor. The rich in Country X live like the rich in Country Y and, conversely, so do the poor. While Froissard flies first class to beautiful cities, stays at swank hotels, and eats at five star restaurants – luxuries that are the result of Club Olympus financial success – he does his business in the slums. The number of resort destinations, office buildings, and exclusive condominiums and gated communities no doubt has increased over the last half century across the globe. But so have the equivalents of the La Paz garbage dump, perhaps more so, and usually within a short drive of the enclaves in which the wealthy are cloistered. Thus Froissard, if he so chooses, is able to search for "pieces" in any city in the world in the morning and return to his luxury suite in the afternoon. Even within the confines of his hometown in a developed country, Froissard finds evidence of a "war going on" (43). The divide between the have and have nots and the separation of individuals from the institutions of a well functioning society – strong families and social networks, private and public sector employment, government aid, churches and welfare organizations, schools for children – are not problems relegated to unfortunate corners of the world. Nor are they a result of that particular corner's unwillingness to modernize or welcome

economic globalization. The "war" between the haves and have nots is going on everywhere and it is not clear as economic globalization marches forward which group is multiplying faster.

Touching upon similar themes, Robert Newman's *The Fountain at the Center of the World* is more earnest and angry in its take on economic globalization. Newman, who describes himself as Greek-Cypriot, English, French and American, tells the tale of three people related by blood but separated by circumstances beyond their control. Evan Hatch is an Englishman of Mexican descent, adopted at twelve weeks of age, who is a well-educated public relations expert. He gives a positive spin to what he and others know to be the problems of economic globalization. Evan is ill with what he believes is leukemia and goes off in search of his brother, Chano Salgado, for a bone marrow transplant. But when he meets Chano in Mexico, Evan learns his true condition. He has chagas, an incurable tropical disease he contracted from his biological Mexican mother while in her womb. The European doctors had not considered a "disease of the poor" striking an individual raised in England (317). It is up to Chano to tell Evan the hard truth.

Chano is used to brutal reality. An activist against capitalism he is in hiding after blowing up the pipes of a corporation which is poisoning the groundwater of his village. But this is not the biggest blow Chano has absorbed. His wife Marissa was shot and killed while working as an activist years before. Later Chano, unbeknownst to his friends and family, was imprisoned. Thinking he suffered the same fate as Marissa, Chano's friends put their son Daniel up for adoption. When Chano returns to the village a few

years later, Daniel is gone. Fast forward a few years and as luck would have it, Daniel sets out to search for Chano at the same time as Evan. Thus the narrative is put into motion with the three arriving in Seattle and the World Trade Organization's meeting in 1999. The "Battle of Seattle" provides the setting for the culmination of the novel as the two brothers and lost son connect with and miss each other in the haze of tear gas, protests and meetings of the WTO.

While the style, background and approach of Newman is different from Bonilla, *The Fountain at the Center of the World* touches upon similar themes. The isolation of the individual along with separation from family and the bi-level homogenization of cultures created by economic globalization embodied in each of the three main characters. The Englishman Evan Hatch was born as the Mexican Jose-Marie Salgado and sent away by his underprivileged family to a wealthier place in hopes he might find treatment for his "disease of the poor" (317). Despite his monetary success as an "issues management man" and credentials within the business community, Evan has no close friends or family, never knew his biological parents nor his brother, and associates only at a superficial level with people from work (182). While running a never ending "political campaign" to control the debate regarding "contentious and legislative issues" in favor of global corporations, Evan has sacrificed his humanity (182). Chano, on the other hand, has been assaulted directly by the global corporations with the loss of his wife and son. Although Chano has more human interaction in his village than Evan does in London, he too is a loner. While Chano's setbacks and his life of poverty reinforce his belief in the evils of capitalism, Evan's career and financial success has him singing its praises.

When the brothers meet up in Seattle, Chano argues that they, along with humanity at large, have been cheated by what he sees at the destructive force of capitalism. Imagine, Chano speculates, what human beings could accomplish "if everything…was not in the service of a profit…that we might create…other ways of organizing our lives" (195). Evan is not impressed, scoffing at the idea of any kind of people's revolution or other system of societal organization. As he sees it folks across the world appear to be happy "buying Air Nikes, queuing for the multiplex" (192). They like that capitalism brings "investment and CD's that rock…a satellite dish, the air conditioned hatchback and a funny program on TV" (192). For Evan, capitalism is not the problem, it is the solution. When the conversation ends the brothers go their separate ways, Evan alone to his swank hotel room, Chano to his cot, surrounded by many others at the local mission, yet isolated in his own way. The symbolism is reminiscent of the images created by Bonilla between the economic have and have not's who nevertheless share a sense of empathetic separation from other human beings.

As for Daniel, he becomes the symbol of the "international poor" a teenager who's "face had a look which crossed all borders" (212). Homogenization of poverty is depicted throughout Daniel's journey to Seattle as he bounces from Costa Rica to Chano's village in Mexico to England to the streets of Seattle. The underprivileged people who he comes in contact with all deal with the same lack of food, clothing, housing and sense of insecurity regardless of the country, the poverty creating a community of have nots who cling to and exploit one another. Along the way Daniel is abused by private citizens, a Mexican thug who thinks he can use the boy as a means of

drawing Chano from hiding and collecting the reward for his capture, fishermen who toss him overboard from a boat he smuggled himself upon, and public officials as police in Mexico, England and the United States either harass, arrest, tear gas or beat him.

Yet he also manages to find people who care for him to some degree: Chano's friends in the village, two English fishermen who rescue him from sea and a couple of activist English women who take him in and eventually to Seattle. But as far as any societal safety net, the legal and welfare institutions established by the state largely fail Daniel. He is always saved by individuals, all of whom are struggling economically themselves, but nevertheless take in the boy and share what little they have with him. The poverty within which he lives does not defeat Daniel, however. Perhaps because of his youth it does not yield hopelessness but rather a fearless, "how much worse could it get" attitude which he carries away from the protests in Seattle. We last see Daniel on a packed and steamy dance floor in Bolivia surrounded by other kids cast out from society. The next day they march in protest toward a group of soldiers protecting an international corporation's property. The soldiers fire upon the crowd and, rather than run away, Daniel and hundreds of other kids race toward the "crack-crack of bullets" knowing "they can't touch him" (331). Meaning, one might conjecture, not so much Daniel's physical body, but his soul. For Daniel and billions of others, a bullet to the chest from a soldier or the grinding down of a life lived in poverty are capital punishments of a different sort, but death penalties nevertheless. A sentence meted out by a global system which not only does not seem to care but actually accepts economic winners and losers as part of societal organization. A harsh and unfair accusation those of us who are the haves might

argue. But the billions of have nots who feel hunger and hopelessness every day might deem it a just and righteous statement.

**Borders, Writers and Art's Role in a Globalized Society**

It does seem that even as the economic divide widens in many places of the world, borders of all types are blurring. To be sure, some are natural and more defined. The Appalachian and Rocky Mountains cut across the United States, the Rio Grande River divides two countries, oceans separate continents and the Earth spins in space, staying its orbital course as the other planets do the same, none infringing upon the other in respect of an immutable cosmic line, each only reachable through physical effort and a desire to do so. These are not human delineated divisions. They pre-exist our species and, most likely, will survive our demise. Yet they too will, at some point, no longer exist.

National borders, and others, are not as hardened. As Reed Way Dasenbrok said when speaking of the divide separating the U.S. and Mexico in the introduction to historian Cecil Robinson's *No Short Journeys*: "Borders…are contingent facts, not absolute ones, and we cannot allow the abstract concept of a border to blind us to what crosses…and to similarities between the cultures on the two sides of it" (xix.) Yet the same border, and the political and social hot wires it trips, reminds us that North Americans are still defined by its existence, the crossing of it, and the differences between the cultures on either side. Similar situations abound throughout the world – India and Pakistan, China and Taiwan, Israelis and Palestinians – which indicate that the nation-state and its very real borders will not be disappearing any time soon. Nor will the

invisible yet substantial divide between developed and less developed countries, the educated and uneducated, and the well-fed and malnourished. These "contingent" borders are as well-manned and defended by the haves against the have nots as any geographic or political one. Hegel may be correct about the inexorable movement toward universal freedom, but he did not offer a timeline.

In the twenty first century, billions of people arise early, work within the isolation of their jobs – a telemarketing cube in the U.S., the assembly line in Mexico, backbreaking migratory farm work on both sides – come home late, eat, sleep and do it all over again. Often they work twelve hour shifts, six days a week with meager annual raises and little hope of advancement to a higher paying job. These are not nurturing environments for the development of the individual and creating any sense of community. There is little time for just being. For engaging in things that make life worthwhile like spending time with family and friends, getting educated, playing music, dancing, tending to your own garden of fruits and vegetables, caring for the elderly and infirmed neighbors, or doing nothing at all except staring at the clouds: In short, the full flowering of the individual within the interdependence of a mutually engaged community.

To be sure, this balance between the providing of the necessities of existence – food, clothing, and shelter – and the living of a life to the full expression of each individual has been the crux of the matter for humanity from day one, the pragmatists and the dreamers always somewhat at odds. Some point to the ancient Greeks as having gotten it right, but let us not forget such references are made towards a small population of elites served by slaves. Hardly the way, I hope, most people desire to attain individual

and/or artistic fulfillment. For us today in a relatively slave-free world, at least in the historical sense of the term, the issue is whether globalization is a positive evolutionary turn that will lead to a one world economic society in which more people than ever prosper, in every sense, and where the greater good of humanity in all aspects is served. Or is globalization a continuation of the problems associated with mass production capitalism (on steroids) toward a survival of the fittest, every man for himself world that widens the gap between the have and have nots as we further distance ourselves from our agrarian-hunter-gatherer roots and the sense of interdependence within the community those activities fostered.

As for art and literature's place in this ever mechanized/digitalized/shrinking world which conversely marginalizes and isolates people, destroying basic human interaction and appreciation of beauty for beauty's sake, one must wonder what role the artist can take. What difference can art make? Keeping in mind Moses assertion that globalization is not new but just renamed, we can take this suggestion from John Ruskin, the 19th century English critic of art and society who wrote in *The Relation of Art to Use*:

> To get your country clean, and your people lovely; -- I assure you that is a necessary work of art to begin with (284)… that, though England is deafened with spinning wheels, her people have not clothes – though she is black with digging of fuel, they die of cold – and though she has sold her soul for gain, they die of hunger. Stay in that triumph, if you choose; but be assured of this, it is not one which the fine arts will ever share with you (289).

Whether we have made progress from Ruskin's time, even in a Hegelian sense, is debatable. Pragmatists from various fields are addressing the issues associated with economic globalization along with institutions ranging from religions, environmental

groups, governments, and corporations. It is important, therefore, that the dreamers, the artists of whom Ruskin speaks, pull up a chair to the globalization debate table as well. A segment of literary study and creative writers are doing just that, even if some are not happy about it being imposed from outside forces. Some creative writers like Newman approach it directly and unsympathetically, while others like Bonilla ironically. But writers of all backgrounds like the multinational Newman, the Spanish Bonilla, the African Francis Nyamnjoh, the American Shameen Black, the Turkish Orham Pamuk explore the impact of globalization fearlessly and unapologetically.

Such work across borders makes the debate regarding William Styron's writing over racial demographics in *The Confessions of Nat Turner* or the occasional protest against Mark Twain's depiction of slaves in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* seem anachronistic. "Guess what," authors from all backgrounds writing about all sorts of people from various places, seem to be saying, "we are doing it anyway, because we are united in our humanity." While economic globalization may increasingly divide us between rich and poor, technological globalization brings us together with its ability to allow us to see more clearly that very disparity. If anyone disputes this please reference the revolution in Egypt in January, 2011, and the role Facebook, Twitter and the internet played. Tie in the increased cost of food and the fact that a high percentage of Egyptians live on less than two dollars a day and the type of globalized themed novels we are discussing jump to life. Thus, regardless of where they are born, creative writers share a universal sense of the effects of globalization because it is brought to them courtesy of worldwide communication systems. Just as Bonilla's Froissard recognized the "war" in

"developed" and "peaceful" Spain and the three disparate main characters in Newman's work identified with the bi-level economic homogenization of culture, creative writers from all backgrounds are exposed to the common effects of globalization on people. Their characters may not share their nationality, but they share the sense of economic uneasiness and isolation and fear. The fact is, as Mitali Perkins, a much published young adult author from Bengal says in an article in WordPress.com, "All fiction crosses borders…otherwise you're writing memoir" (1). As long as writers do their research, Perkins argues, create fully formed characters that ring true as human beings, then the race, religion or ethnicity of the author will not be an issue. Proof of this resides in the works of authors like Bonilla and Newman (and Styron and Twain, for that matter.)

Regardless of what position one might take on writers frame of reference, a globalization of the narrative is occurring which are blurring the borders of literature and its study. If one believes Robert Moses and Hegel, this has been going on for some time in literature and the greater world. For good or ill and regardless of who, what, when, where and why of the progression, it seems, as Chris Ernst said in his review of Ohmae's *The Next Global Stage*, that "globalization in and of itself is neutral. It is up to us to help shape it, interpret it, and give it meaning" (242). It is my hope that those of us in the field of literary studies and creative writing will continue to play our role in examining the impact of globalization on the individual and use our ability of "reinventing everything" to bring people from all walks of life into the discussion.