

The Lines that Bind

Emitting dim, yellow light, the phonebooth stands deserted on its corner with Market and Cass. In the early morning stillness, the car door shuts with a thud, and then the only sounds are a buzzing street lamp and the scuffing of her shoes. She enters the booth, leans against the glass and picks up the handpiece. Dropping a dime into the slot, she hears the tone and dials 411.

“Directory assistance—city and state, please?”

“Binghamton, New York.”

“What listing?”

“The YWCA.”

“Just a moment, please.”

She steadies her pencil, the handpiece hard against her ear.

“The number is six zero seven, then nine zero eight, zero nine six seven. Do you want me to connect?”

“No, that’s not necessary. Thank you.”

She places the notepad in her purse, shoves the folding door away, and strides back to her car. Tomorrow she’ll get breakfast with her last few dollars, call the Y about a room, then hit the bank at nine. She’s not sure how long the drive will take, but it really doesn’t matter. Somewhere close by a robin starts singing, and she realizes it’s Easter Sunday. “Happy Easter to you too, Mister

Robin.” She enters the little Dart, pats the dash, then flips through her road atlas in disbelief. She’s going home.

In the above scene, from my novel-in-progress, *The Angel of Pleiku*, protagonist Arlene Stephens is about to depart on a profound journey. Her destination is fraught with risk, as it encompasses not only overwhelming joy, but cutting, emotional pain. There she will attempt to find the man she once had an unconditional, sacred, and magical bond with—her father.

At the beginning of the story, watching falling snow obliterate the boundaries of her neighbor’s yards, Arlene wonders if invisible things are real. Her seemingly idle musing introduces one of the central themes of the novel, as it deals with situations we all face regarding the bonds that connect us to special places, to each other, and to our relationship with reality. Are invisible things real? Is the past real? Things that cannot be measured, put into words, or reconciled? As a science teacher, Arlene has a decent grasp of how the physical world works, yet struggles to cope with forces she doesn’t understand, forces that put her life in danger. By the end of act one, the act that culminates at the phonebooth, her existence has reached a breaking point. Severely out of balance, it has become untenable.

Here it’s useful to mention that I structure this story on the Hero’s

Journey, a classic pattern of story-telling that has risen from a well of thought patterns and characters called archetypes. As first postulated by Carl Jung, the archetypes originate from our collective unconscious. Said to lie in the deepest, most primitive level of the mind, it is universally shared by individuals across many cultures. These patterns are thought to originate from a more instinctual time in mankind's development, and are not under the control of our conscious mind. The Hero's Archetype/Journey is revealed in countless stories, myths, dreams, plays and movies. Far from being formulaic, it allows much freedom in presenting a story. There are other ways to structure a story, but I've found it a very useful and intuitive model.

As heroine, Arlene has decided to act, to leave her life in Indiana and return to the city of her birth, all in the hopes of finding and reuniting with her father. This city—her first home—along with the special relationship she had with her father, have become mythic, especially since she has not returned, nor seen him, since he deserted her 28 years ago. This decision marks the crossing of a threshold (another type of invisible line and potential barrier) into the next stage of her journey. Though this is considered the first major turning point of the novel, there is an entire history of events that fate weaves into the creation of any one individual. These threads, lines and borders are what writers and artists work with to explore or model the fundamental mysteries of life.

In these blogs I expound on various aspects of *The Angel of Pleiku* to stir curiosity. Much like the novel description or pitch found on a book cover, I reveal some things—found mostly in the first act—as a lead into the story. Although my discussions here are analytical, and may verge toward mysticism, the writing itself, as shown by the excerpt above and in Post 17, is grounded in a very familiar, everyday reality. Though I reveal some of the inner thoughts of my main characters, it is their actions that propel the story forward. In Post 12, I mention the explicit and implicit nature of reality using the metaphor of a river. What lies hidden below the surface, the invisible things, can be just as real as those we perceive with our senses. Found there are the motivating factors that drive one's behavior and actions.

There is a parallel analogy to this, however rough, in the world of quantum physics. This science explores the world of atomic and subatomic particles—the most fundamental building blocks of matter and energy. As such, it delves into the very nature of reality, into the limits of what we can measure and grasp with our mind. The question of reality will always be debated, but some scientists have found their studies have circled back, ironically, into the realms of religion and philosophy, into questions concerning our own conscious perception of the world.

But back to my analogy. There is in physics entities known as

fields, such as the electromagnetic field, or the gravitational field. Forces propagate through them, and they accord with Einstein's theories of relativity and his concept of space-time. Another field I've read about is the zero point field. Said to exist uniformly through the universe like the other fields (are they all the same?) it is thought to possess the lowest energy state found in nature—and yet, as some theories propose, it could be the source of all matter, which is composed of particles of pure energy. These are seen to spontaneously erupt from the field, then disappear back into it. It has also been described as a vast sea of hidden energy, and “vibrations in the space between things.”* The use of the word *particle* implies separation, but they are all interconnected and interdependent in one endless web. There is also something known as entanglement, whereby particles, once paired but now separated, can exhibit the same change of state. For instance, if the spin of one is reversed, this same thing happens to its other, now distant, twin. At the same time. These and other strange outcomes perplexed Einstein, which he termed “spooky action at a distance.”

Being a high school science teacher in the 1960s, Arlene never had to deal with such sophisticated topics, but she was acutely aware of the mysterious ties that affect us—the lines that bind. Powerful, beyond logic, they are the essence of our humanity.

**The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*, by L. McTaggart, pg. XXVII