

Run Away Train

by

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This paper and accompanying painting were written and created as an assignment for Prof. Alain-Philippe Durand's course LASC 195A Freshman Colloquium: Digital Humanities, University of Arizona, Spring 2011.

I developed a visual representation of the partly literal and most figurative depiction of the search for self as expressed by Jean-Philippe Toussaint in his novel *Running Away*. In his book, Toussaint develops a character whose is in want of self-identity yet fails to grasps it throughout his aimless adventures he goes on. In the story various cultural and language barriers cause the main character to isolate himself despite the rich culture that he is surrounded with. His lack of purpose throughout the novel builds on the notion of chaos and lack of direction. I drew namely from one scene in particular where our main character escapades with Qi Lee, an acquaintance introduced to him by his business partner Zhang who our character considers to be a watcher to keep tabs on him. The escapade takes place during the evening on a train where all are thought to be asleep. Toussaint goes into great detail of the ambience that the train gives off and creates a sensuous encounter soon to be ended by the knocking on the door of Zhang who has somehow managed to stay awake. His suspicion is called for. The abrupt interruption epitomizes the struggle for our character to find the autonomy he searches for throughout the story.

The train itself is representative of the journey in search of identity. The sky in the painting gives off an ominous ambience that can be attributed to the story that is going on within the confines of the train. The sky is dark and confusing. The moon gives off a dim light; however, the brightest light comes from within the train compartment windows. I compared the train scene to a Buddhist metaphor that goes, "when staring out the window of a speeding train and gazing on the nearby mountains it is difficult to gauge the speed at which the train is going until you look at the present moment or more specifically the ground beneath the window." Similarly, I felt this quote related to our main character and would be the advice I would have given to him. Toussaint tells a story that much of his audience goes through at some point or another in their time. Many seem to lose themselves by looking too far into the future and forgetting to acknowledge the here and now. In the practice of staying in the present moment, our minds open to new possibilities and perhaps even the understanding of self.

April 2011