

SHANTARAM

The Architecture of the Novel

This essay is a guide to my novel, *Shantaram*, and a short summary of the elements that constitute the architecture of the novel. It is designed to help general readers, and those who have chosen to study the novel academically. After the general introduction, which gives the reader some background into the development of my literary method, the essay provides a breakdown of the twenty two layers that make up the architecture of the novel. For those who like to cut to the chase, there is a bullet point summary of the layers provided on the final page of the essay.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

My long apprenticeship as a writer took me through many forms of the art. I wrote plays, poetry, journalistic pieces, comedy routines for comedians, commercial presentations for businessmen, television treatments, speeches, advertising copy, song lyrics, and dozens of short stories. I wrote a novel and a novella while I was on the run, after escaping from prison, and had to sacrifice them when I was required to leap out of a second-story window to evade capture by a *Sonderkommando* special armed police squad, in Germany. The works were lost, and I've never been able to recover them. Almost at once, on the night after I lost those manuscripts, I began to write a new short story as I hid in a tiny, concealed room beneath a stairwell at a German friend's house. I was always writing. Even as I was being tortured in a prison in India – chained to a wall and beaten until no part of my skin was free of wounds and blood – I was writing the experience of being tortured in my mind. The writer's voice inside my head was saying: *This is damn good material! If you live through this, you've got to write all this down, and use it in a book some day!* When I was locked in solitary confinement, without a pen and paper, I wrote a short story in my mind; composing the sentences one by one, hour after hour, day after day, and memorizing them as if they were part of a long, chanted mantra – until I was released, and was able to write all of the sentences down.

So, I'm a writer. But for a large part of my writer's life I spent ten years on the run from prison, and ten years in prisons on three continents, and I couldn't publish anything, except very rarely under an assumed name. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, makes much of the so-called *10,000 hour rule*. According to that rule, anyone who's any good at anything at all, from playing golf to playing the guitar, and from writing books to writing computer codes, has to spend 10,000 hours in a pragmatic, hard-working apprenticeship in the chosen field. If that's true, then my unpublished work in those fugitive years constituted the required apprenticeship. Writing for an average of ninety minutes every day (some days not more than a few lines, and other days several hours without a break) through twenty years, I clocked up my 10,000 hours. A lot of the work done and lost in those years wasn't very good, but all of it contributed in some way to the development of a way of writing – and a way of *thinking about writing art* – that ultimately became my literary theory. The novel, *Shantaram*, and the trilogy from which it forms the central part, proceeds from that literary theory.

When, after thirty years of writing, developing a coherent literary theory, and *not* publishing, I was finally free to publish under my own name, I turned my full attention to a theme that had occupied my creative inspiration for some years. That theme was nothing less than the 20th Century itself. As a writer born almost exactly at the mid-point of that century – a century when human beings gained their greatest understanding of themselves and of the world around them, and achieved their first glimpse of an ostensible purpose for the existence of their consciousness; a century that begins with Einstein, ends with the sequencing of the Human Genome, and has the black hole of the Holocaust in its heart – I felt that it was my duty as an artist to describe that century in a major literary work.

My studies through those thirty years in fields as varied as psychology, particle physics, anthropology, sociology, game theory, philosophy, comparative religion, literature, politics, and history led me to conclude that the defining characteristic of the 20th Century was *alienation*. The exegesis, processes, and consequence trails involved in even small, relatively simple examples of alienation are confoundingly complex. The kind of global, existential alienation that I felt characterized the entire 20th Century is so vast that there's probably no conclusive end to the number of books that might be written on the subject. Nevertheless, there seemed to me some

broad strokes, some basic elements of the alienation phenomenon that might allow me to explore the theme in a major new literary work.

THE THEME OF THE TRILOGY: ALIENATION

For a start, in this short examination of the theme of the trilogy – of which *Shantaram* forms the central part – it can be reasonable and rationally maintained that alienation wasn't always a bad thing: in the long march of the 20th Century, we humans were alienated from some of the myths and falsehoods that had constrained our thinking for millennia, such as the manifest destiny of empires, and the honour and propriety of waging “just” wars, to name two from perhaps hundreds. The sunset of the imperial age in the 20th Century allowed a new dawn of understanding of the iniquities of colonialism to illuminate the shadows that had been thrown over the great numbers of humanity by flags of empire. And the carnage of two world wars, involving the deaths of millions and culminating in attempted genocide, and the firebombing and nuclear bombardment of civilian centres far removed from the armies that were purportedly waging the wars, revealed the cynical horrors that are the truth behind what Wilfred Owen called “that old lie”: *Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori* – *Sweet and fitting it is, to die for the Fatherland*.

But without doubt, and again speaking in broad strokes, we who were born in the 20th Century – and those born after, who are and will be influenced by the outward ripples of the 20th Century's temporal impact crater – were also alienated from some of the comforting and reassuringly solipsistic certainties of the past. Just two of those certainties, by way of example, are what was believed for millennia to be the static and endlessly unchanging universe, banished forever by Edwin Hubble's definitive proof of an ever-changing, rapidly expanding universe; and the myth of religious omnipotence, driven from the centre of the page to the margins by discoveries that explained everything from atoms to inherited characteristics without the need for a Creator's hand. Freud revealed the submerged subconscious beneath the iceberg tip of the conscious mind, and alienated us from our previously certain sense of Self. The Holocaust revealed our capacity for realizing what until then had been an unimaginable horror, and alienated us from the benign visions of Rousseau, Thoreau and Gandhi. Nuclear and bio-chemical weapons revealed our frailty in the face of

genuinely existential threats, forcing us to face the end of days. Communism, fascism, existentialism, post-modernism and capitalism's millenarian hedonism combined with the Uncertainty Principle and Quantum weirdness to alienate us from the universe we thought we knew. Hundreds of millions uprooted themselves from villages and townships in migratory drifts toward the great cities, alienating themselves from the pastoral certainties they had known for the whole modern history of mankind. Within those cities, extended families shriveled to "nuclear family" units, alienated from the support and solace of the wider group. The list goes on, but the conclusion is rational and reasonably found: alienation is inarguably a defining characteristic of the 20th Century.

For the purposes of my large work, I decided to focus on three components of the general theme of alienation: *conflict*, *exile*, and the *search for meaning*. I arrived at this selection of just three from all the many aspects of alienation under the influence of the work of Joseph Campbell, most notably in his book *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*. It seemed to me that the nature of myth is intimately and profoundly connected to one of the central components of writing art, which is the narrative, or story telling. Campbell's examination of myth in many cultures and societies concentrated on the aspects that linked all of the world's myths in what might be called mankind's meta-narrative. The components I chose – conflict, exile, and the search for meaning – correspond to an abbreviated form of Campbell's analysis of global myth structures, which describes the journey of a young man or woman who leaves the tribe or village or family home, experiences great adventure and hardship in exile, and then returns to share what he or she has learned, as part of the tribe or family's search for meaning.

Just as this meta-narrative is common to all cultures, in all places, my intention was to discover a range of attributes or components of my novel's theme that might remain true to the central subject – the 20th Century and its defining characteristic of alienation – and also have a universalism pitched to the human ear in every place where it responds to the written word. By focusing on those three components of alienation – conflict, exile, and the search for meaning – I would tell the story of the 20th Century in the manner of an artist, and still be linked to the meta-theme that has been the mythic voice of my species: the species that I love with an artist's rapture, and that rewards my love with the fuel of a writer's inspiration, endless fascination.

In this way, the structure of my major work unwound itself from my meditations, and the Shantaram Trilogy was born. Clearly, there would be three novels. The first

would have *conflict* as its theme: it would take the protagonist (a fictitious character sharing one of my many names, and many of my experiences) through the experience of rebellion and revolutionary conflict, familial breakdown, drug addiction and crime, being imprisoned, escape, and the early years of life as a fugitive in Australia and New Zealand. The second novel would explore the *exile* experience: the fictitious protagonist would arrive in India, and involve himself in crime and punishment, the lives of the poor and disenfranchised, life as a member of a unit of the Bombay mafia, the dread and dreadfulness of war, and the hope for peace. And the third novel of the trilogy would focus on the *search for meaning* that leads us home, with the protagonist and all of the other characters involved in different aspects of the existential search for meaning and purpose.

Working within the architectural structure that I had developed through many years of writing – a structure that proceeds from my own literary theory, and will be discussed presently in this essay – I laid out the foundations for the three novels. Each foundational map contained the originating theme, and the basic elements of the narrative – the “story” told in each book – and plot derived from that theme, and the essential sub-structural elements for each novel. The rough shape and interior space of each novel was created, and it remained only to research them definitively, and to write them.

The question then, was which novel to write first. As an unknown writer, attempting to sell the concept of a complex, major new trilogy to publishers and readers, it seemed to me important to select the one novel from the trilogy that might establish the project with the most passionate interest. For that reason alone, I selected the second of the three novels – the one dealing with the aspect of *exile* – as the first to be written and published.

So, the theme I chose for my trilogy of novels was *the 20th Century*. The defining characteristic of the 20th Century, from the point of view of my major work, was *alienation*. The three components of the alienation phenomenon that I chose to explore were *conflict*, *exile*, and *the search for meaning*. Each of those components provided the originating theme for each of the novels in the trilogy. And the first novel to appear, chronologically speaking, was the second in the order: the novel, *Shantaram*, which explored the *exile experience*.

At this point, it might be useful to examine what I consider to be the defining characteristics of a novel, because the word will be used many times in this essay, and

there are no doubt many readers whose definitions differ from my own. I think it fair to say that basic, traditional definitions of the word “novel” work along these lines: *A novel is a fictitious prose story of book length.* While this definition is useful in a lexicographic sense, its limitation is that it doesn’t actually tell us what the essential characteristics of “book length fictitious prose stories” might be. From a literary point of view, a definition of the word “novel” should elaborate the essential, defining characteristics of a novel, in such a way as to provide a platform for analysis and substantive criticism.

In my definition, *a novel is a society of characters, undergoing transformations, in the course of a sustained prose narrative, which is impelled by a plot, unified by clearly discernible central themes, and universalized by a complex architecture of allegorical and symbolical sub-strata.*

Let’s take a closer look at those elements:

a) *a society of characters* – a novel must have a dynamic interaction between a cast of characters, a society; if the written work involves only one character it is a monologue, not a novel.

b) *undergoing transformations* – if the characters don’t transform, the work is a portrait, not a novel.

c) *in the course of a sustained prose narrative* – the narrative must be prose; in my literary theory, a “novel in poem form” is not a novel: it’s a big poem. A car isn’t a motorcycle in automobile form: it’s a car.

d) *which is impelled by a plot* – the plot is an essential element, because a narrative without a plot is an essay or journalism, not a novel.

e) *unified by clearly discernible central themes* – a work that isn’t unified by a clearly discernible central theme isn’t a novel, it’s a discourse.

and

f) *universalized by a complex architecture of allegorical and symbolical sub-strata* – these allegorical, symbolic and imaginal elements are the tools and devices of writing art that lift the work from the prosaic sense of the word *prose* and give the novel its unconscious reach into the emotional heart and aesthetic sensibility of the reader.

ART, SURPASSING EXCELLENCE & ARTISTRY

Before dealing directly with the structural elements of *Shantaram* – before examining the architecture of the novel – it's necessary to make some general remarks about the nature of art, as defined by my literary theory. The *raison d'être* of the architecture and the logic of its structure depend upon an aesthetic appreciation of writing art that's fundamental to my work. However, that aesthetic appreciation, while once part of an agreed language of literary criticism, isn't as widely taught or accepted today. A reader of this essay who hasn't been taught in a literary aesthetic tradition, or who simply doesn't accept such literary criteria, or refuses to couch discussions within such aesthetic parameters might question the validity of using a coherent, structural architecture for the writing of a novel. Such a reader might ask the persistent question: Why bother to create such a structure (the architecture that will be discussed below) at all? To anticipate that question, and to provide a cogent response, based on my literary theory, it's necessary to discuss the nature of art, excellence and artistry themselves.

I contend that there is a set of characteristics that give a novel its tendency toward surpassing excellence and artistry. An enumeration and assessment of the complete list of that set of characteristics is beyond the scope of this essay, and must remain in another, much longer examination of my general literary theory. For the purposes of this essay on the trilogy – and more specifically on the novel, *Shantaram* – it is sufficient to state that among that larger set of characteristics are the following:

a) a theme of importance, such that its exploration attempts to provide humanity with a contribution of profound and enduring value;

b) the aspect of beauty, where literary beauty is considered to be a combination of the qualities of rhythm, rhyme, tone, mood, metaphor, simile, cadence and coherence, that may lead a reader toward an enhanced experience of harmony and aesthetic delight;

and

c) the aspect of *truth*.

The absence of that full set of characteristics (and particularly of the three characteristics mentioned above) may have a high order of probability of moving the work *away from* the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry. The presence of the set of characteristics may have a high order of probability of moving the work *toward*

the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry. Neither tendency is absolutely certain: a work may have none of the characteristics in the set, and yet still be a work of surpassing excellence and artistry, and a given work may have all of the characteristics in the set, and yet still fail to reach the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry. Nevertheless, while such outcomes are possible, they're improbable; and my literary theory, just like my cosmological theory, is based on what's probable, not on what's possible. Works written without the presence of the full set of characteristics are very unlikely to tend toward the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry: they may be great fun to read, but they're generally not works of surpassing excellence and artistry. Those works written with the presence of the full set of characteristics are much more likely to tend toward the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry. Furthermore, the probability of a written work actually achieving surpassing excellence and artistry *without* the set of characteristics is so small as to be negligible. The bottom line, at least in terms of my literary theory, is that if you want to write a work of surpassing excellence and artistry, you must work with the presence of the full set of characteristics, three of which are enumerated above.

Some questions are posed by this contention, of course, one of which is: How do we measure the qualities of *surpassing excellence* and *artistry*? For the purposes of this discussion, I will confine the very long answer to this profound question to the nature of art itself. In my view, art can be defined as: *any creative human expression involving work, skill, coherence, and love*. Proceeding from that definition, a work (that is, a creative human expression) of *surpassing excellence and artistry* is one that exhibits profound manifestations of *work, skill, coherence, and love*.

A second question posed by the contention that there is a set of characteristics that give a novel a tendency toward surpassing excellence and artistry is this: What, then, is the difference between works that tend toward surpassing excellence and artistry, and those that don't? I like Graham Greene's friendly dichotomy, where he divided his written work into "entertainments" and "literature". Using this formulation, it seems to me that those works that are constructed with the presence of the set of characteristics will have a tendency toward literature. And those works that are constructed without the presence of the set of characteristics will have a tendency toward entertainments. I'm not passing a judgement on the importance of either category: both meet the obligations of their readers, and both are valid contributions to writing art. However, the presence of the set of characteristics that give a written

work its tendency toward surpassing excellence and artistry is not *essential* for the work to be a valid entertainment and to meet the obligations of readers. Yet, for a written work to be valid literature and to meet the obligations of readers who seek literary satisfactions, the work *must* be written in the presence of the full set of characteristics, amongst which are: a theme of importance, the aspect of beauty, and the aspect of truth.

So, to the sub-set of three characteristics, as enumerated above, that give a written work its tendency toward surpassing excellence and artistry – or more specifically, in the context of this essay, to the three characteristics from that full set that are relevant to this guide to the novel, *Shantaram*.

The first characteristic on that list is *a theme of importance, such that its exploration attempts to provide humanity with a contribution of profound and enduring value*. There are, of course, many intellectual traditions that dispute the very idea that *any* written work can make a profound and valuable contribution to humanity. Such traditions argue that collective generalizations, such as the use of the word “humanity” proceed from flawed understandings of human consciousness; and further, that in a morally and philosophically relativistic universe, such as they consider ours to be, any contribution a writer might make is equally as valid, profound, and valuable as any other. I don’t accept that. The complete explanation of this aspect of my literary theory is, once again, beyond the scope of this essay, but in an extremely condensed version here and now I can state that my examination of all of the available data about our species and its relationship to the universe leads me to conclude that there is a purpose for human conscious: that our lives have meaning and purpose. I contend that the meaning and purpose of human consciousness is to *enhance, promote, and accelerate the movement toward complexity throughout our part of the universe*. Proceeding from that conclusion, any written work that directly enhances, promotes, or accelerates the movement toward complexity – or provides us with insights, understandings and experiences that contribute to the tendency toward complexity – can be considered to have made a profound contribution of enduring value to humanity. Thus, works that satisfy this criterion have *ipso facto* taken a step toward the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry.

The second of the sub-set of characteristics chosen to explain my literary theory in relation to the novel, *Shantaram*, is *the aspect of beauty, where beauty is considered to be a combination of the qualities of rhythm, rhyme, tone, mood, metaphor, simile,*

cadence and coherence, that may lead a reader toward an enhanced experience of harmony and aesthetic delight. The question posed by the use of words such as *beauty, harmony, and aesthetic delight* is this: By whose measure can such qualities be judged? Certainly, there are many who would argue that one person's ugliness is another person's beauty; one person's discordant jumble of sounds is another person's harmony. What's more, such arguments run, perceptions of beauty change with time: what was beautiful in one age might be considered strange or even grotesque in another age. I don't agree. Perceptions of beauty change very slowly: cave paintings in Lascaux are as beautiful today as they were when they were painted, 16,000 years ago; Michaelangelo's *David* is as aesthetically pleasing and beautiful today as it was when it was created. It seems to me that just as there are profound similarities and common elements to all of the mythic stories in every culture, in every place, throughout our human history, there are also similarities and common elements to all of the conceptions of beauty and harmony – and that these common elements transcend time, and arrive in our age intact. Amongst others, some of the common elements fundamental to this shared understanding of such aesthetic qualities are proportionality, symmetry, complementary colour combination, rhythmic pulsation, smoothness or uniformity or texture, and tonal harmony rather than discord. Written works that display these common elements are more likely to meet the characteristic of *beauty*, from the sub-set of three, and are thus more likely to tend toward surpassing excellence and artistry.

The third from the sub-set of characteristics is *the aspect of truth*. This does not refer to the kind of “truth” expected from autobiography, or any other “truth” about the author, or about persons or events existing in the real (that is, not fictitious) world. The deliberations expressed in this essay, are concerned only with the elements of a *novel*, which is a *fictitious* work. In fact, I'm using the word *truth* in a very specific, literary sense, and if the poor soul who has read thus far in this essay keeps in mind the concepts of “good faith” and “authenticity” as synonyms for this word *truth*, it will help to explain my special use of the word. In my literary sense, the word *truth* refers to *the qualities connected to the authenticity of the author of the work*.

The defining characteristic of an author's style is the *authorial voice*, and the defining characteristic of the authorial voice is *authenticity*. If ten single pages that we have never read from the books of ten authors whose work we know are laid out on a table, with no visible way to identify which page came from which book, it should

still be possible to identify each page based on the authorial voice of each author. It should be possible, for example, to say that one page is clearly taken from the work of Salman Rushdie, and that another page is taken from a book by Ernest Hemingway, and another by Virginia Woolf, and so on. What allows us to do such a thing is that we have come to know the authorial voice of the writers in question. And writers gain authorial voices by achieving a high degree of authenticity: by being connected to those qualities that express their authenticity. There are many ways in which authors reach a point of connection with the qualities that express their authentic nature, but within the scope of this essay I will mention only four:

a) a profound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the writer's own character;

b) a profound understanding of the nature of loss;

c) intimate acquaintance with artistic failure;

and

d) the development of a personal music, and a discriminating ear for any discordance with that music.

The value of this element – and my own theory as to why the authenticity of the authorial voice is so highly prized by readers – is that Truth (in a philosophical, rather than a literary sense, and hence the capitalization of the “T”) is a critical component of complexity. Remember that according to my literary theory, the meaning and purpose of human consciousness is to enhance, promote, and accelerate the movement toward complexity. In my view, complexity is *the measure of the relationship between the positive characteristics expressed in a given event or phenomenon*. Among those positive characteristics are *life, love, consciousness, freedom, truth, co-operation, constructiveness, and creativity*. If truth, then, is a component of complexity, by virtue of being one of the positive characteristics, then any work that tends toward truth will tend to enhance, promote, or accelerate the movement toward complexity. In doing that, such works meet one of the sub-set of characteristics that tend toward surpassing excellence and artistry. So, works written in a profoundly authentic authorial voice – works that express the truth of the author, in this special literary sense – are more likely to tend toward surpassing beauty and artistry.

To sum up so far, in point form for the sake of clarity:

a) the theme I chose for my trilogy of novels was the 20th Century;

b) the defining characteristic of the 20th Century was alienation;

c) the three components of alienation were conflict, exile, and the search for meaning;

d) I chose to write the second of the three novels first in order;

e) that novel, which had the theme of the exile experience, was *Shantaram*;

f) a novel is a society of characters, undergoing transformations, in the course of a sustained prose narrative, which is impelled by a plot, unified by clearly discernible central themes, and universalized by a complex architecture of allegorical and symbolical sub-strata;

g) a work of art is any creative human expression involving work, skill, coherence, and love;

and

h) the set of characteristics that give a novel its tendency toward surpassing excellence and artistry include: a theme of importance, the aspect of beauty, and the aspect of truth.

SHANTARAM

It's possible now to discuss the architecture of the novel, *Shantaram*, using all of the foregoing as foundational material. It remains, however, to make one final examination of the what I chose to call the *vocal devices* that proceed from my literary theory. While it's beyond the scope of this essay to fully explore the theory (the literary theory runs to some 200 pages, and I'm straining the patience of even the most dedicated and curious readers as it is), some brief analysis is essential, if the essay is to make sense at all. The *vocal devices* describe the range and reach of the *voice that speaks inside the head of the reader*, and as such are critical to the authorial voice and the "sound" of the book.

In accordance with the component of "truth" (in the special literary sense of the word, as described above), when working on a literary work that seeks to enter the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry, such as was the case with *Shantaram*, I never write from the point of view of an omniscient authorial perspective, or from outside my own gender, spatio-temporal matrix, and experiential background. If I were to write in the third person, for example, and assert that I, as the author, know everything that's happening inside the heads of all of my characters, I'd be breaking

the “truth law”, because life simply doesn’t work like that. We never know everything that’s happening inside the heads of others, and authorial omniscience (where writers know everything in the minds of all the characters simultaneously) is a trick – a lie, if you will – that bears no relation to the truth of the author. If I were to write from within a spatio-temporal matrix remote from my own, such as the city of Rome in the year 100 BCE, I’d be breaking the “truth law”. If I were to write from the point of view of a different sex to my own, I’d be breaking the “truth law”. The works that I write as an omniscient author, from a place and time I don’t know from experience, and from a sex not my own might still be wonderfully entertaining novels. But from within my own literary theory, when planning to write *Shantaram*, and attempting to create a work of surpassing excellence and artistry, I had to write within my own conception of truth and authenticity: I had to write in the first person, without an omniscient authorial perspective, and from my own spatio-temporal, experiential and gender matrices.

THE THEME: THE EXILE EXPERIENCE

The theme of the novel determined many of the structural aspects of its architecture. The theme of the novel, *Shantaram*, is *the exile experience*. It’s the theme that determines the contours of the narrative, the devices and mechanisms of the plot, the number and qualities of the characters, and the emblematic symbol of the novel. Moreover, the theme of the novel determines the contours and characteristics for all of the other twenty layers of allegorical, symbolic and imaginal depth. Proceeding from that theme of the exile experience, for example, I chose the *island* as the emblematic image of exile. A desert island is the ultimate symbol of exile: to be shipwrecked on a desert island, with no hope of escape, is to be in the ultimate exile. Furthermore, the city of Bombay, the setting for most of the action of the novel, is itself an island, and is known as the Island City. Structurally, I chose to use the image of the island throughout the novel, and to represent the island in the form of many buildings that became figurative “islands” within the context of the novel. Some of these figurative islands (islands within The Island) are: the saint’s tomb on the island shrine at Haji Ali, Leopold’s Beer Bar (read how many times the bar is referred to as “an island”), the village huts, the construction towers in the centre of Prabaker’s slum,

Khaderbhai's house, the Nabila Mosque, Madame Zhou's Palace, Gupta-ji's den, Arthur Road Prison, the Chinese-gothic Mandarin Hotel in Mauritius, the counting room building in the Fort Area, Abdul Ghani's mansion, and many others.

Because the island became the central, emblematic image of the novel's exile theme, many other aspects of the novel followed from the imagery of the island itself. The colours of the novel, for example, are green and gold: green for the trees of the island image, and gold for the sand of the island image. The cardinal elements used in the novel are air and water: the air above the island, and the water that surrounds it. So, there is a direct line from the theme, through the emblematic symbol of the novel, to components such as the cardinal elements and the colours used throughout the novel.

THE NARRATIVE

The sine wave undulations of the narrative in *Shantaram* are designed to take the reader into, through, and beyond the exile experience. At the beginning of the novel, the Bombay neophyte Lin receives information about the Island City from his guide, Prabaker. Lin is passive, because he is new to the exile experience: when confronted with the mob that attacks the taxi driver after the first taxi accident, he does nothing. As his understanding of the city (and the exile experience) becomes more profound, Lin changes: in the second taxi accident he becomes involved, helping to save Hassan Obikwa.

The arc of Lin's experiences follows this journey into and through the exile experience. First contact with the Island City and the village in Maharashtra take Lin (and the reader) into the strange, bewildering exile world – an experience that is vivified by Lin's exposure to the villagers, with their profound sense of belonging. Life in the slum is a concentration of the exile experience, and although being embedded in the slum community gradually consolidates Lin's understanding of the city and its ways, that faltering step towards a sense of belonging, and rescue from the isolation of exile, is followed by a steep fall into an even more intense exile experience in prison. The prison stands for all of the senses of exile that are connected to our intimate senses of ourselves. Lin is reduced to half of his body weight, covered in parasites, scarred and beaten, tortured and forced to wear leg-irons: he is gradually

exiled from everything that had given him a sense of personal, physical identity. Lin was already exiled from his family, friends, nation, and name. In the prison, he becomes exiled from his own skin and flesh.

Rising from the flames that burned away so much of what he'd been – or what he'd thought himself to be – Lin is absorbed into the Bombay mafia. The mafia represents another form of exile: banishment from moral certainty. Through the loss of loved ones, drug addiction and the agonies of recovery, love and its loss, and the path to war, Lin travels all of the long broken highways of exile – bringing the readers with him. By the novel's end, the reader should sense that there is at least a glimpse of escape from the exile experience for Lin. The symbol of that escape is the half-submerged boat, buried in the sand, in the penultimate scene of the novel. In that scene, Lin sits on the half-submerged boat to talk with Karla. It is in that final conversation with Karla that Lin takes his final steps toward freedom from the exile that has come to define his life. The half-submerged boat is a symbol of hope – the chance of escape and rescue – as if drawn from Lin's own unconscious mind. In the final paragraphs of the novel, Lin finds a point of connection with Prabaker's baby that links him through space and time to the kind of *belonging* that had defined the villagers in Maharashtra. It is that sense of belonging that provides Lin with his real hope of rescue or escape from exile.

Running parallel to the narrative undulations through the exile experience is a sine wave of narrative explorations of love. The contention is that love is the only real hope for the exile: it is only through love that one can escape from exile or be rescued. Every character explores and expresses a different aspect of love. Khader Khan, Prabaker's father in the village, and the headman in the slum, Qasim Ali Hussein, are representations of fatherly love, for example, and Prabaker and Abdullah are representations of brotherly love. Every kind of love and loving is explored in the novel, and every character represents a portion of the whole.

THE PLOT:

The plot of a novel, within the definition composed by my literary theory, is the engine of the narrative. The fuel of that engine is always interrogative by nature, and proceeds from the dramatic tension generated by the *action-intention dialectic*. Most

often, this dialectic takes the form of a question and its answer. The question posed by a plot is: why does this or that happen, and why do these characters behave as they do? The answer that should be provided by the plot – in the form of revelations and insights about the motives and actions of key characters – is the means by which the plot resolves itself within the narrative’s conclusion. A *plot*, then, is the most intensely *human* of all the elements that constitute the theoretical framework, or architecture, of a novel. For example, dramatic events, such as an earthquake or a flood, might form a crucial part or even the greater part of a narrative, but can never be an element of plot. The reason is that we can’t ask a flood or an earthquake for a motive: we can’t ask them *why*? The *plot* of a novel, by contrast, is always derived from and connected to the actions and intentions of key characters. In my literary theory, the action-intention dialectic – the engine of the plot – must, for the sake of the coherence, beauty and symmetry that will allow the novel to enter the arena of surpassing excellence and artistry – proceed from actions and motives *derived from and emblematic of the central theme*.

In the case of *Shantaram*, with its theme of the exile experience, the plot revolves around *betrayal*, as an action emblematic of the exile experience, and from *engagement*, which is an action emblematic of the *escape from* the exile experience. Lin’s betrayal of his true nature, through drug addiction and crime in Australia, is what leads to his exile in Bombay. That first cause betrayal, so to speak, is echoed throughout the book by other betrayals: Karla’s betrayal of Lin, Abdel Khader’s betrayal of Lin, Khaled’s betrayal of Habib, Madame Zhou’s betrayal of Karla, Ulla’s betrayal of Modena, Maurizio’s betrayal of Modena, Abdul Ghani’s betrayal of Khader Khan, and so on. The link between all of these betrayals, from Lin’s first cause betrayal of his true nature to Karla’s final betrayal of Lin (by marrying Jeet) at the novel’s end, is the action-intention dialectic of the novel: the plot works in and through the chain of betrayals, and the unfolding revelations of motive for those betrayals.

The engagement Lin makes with the people in the village, with those in the slum, with the freedom fighters in Afghanistan, with Karla and Lisa Carter, and even with the Bombay mafia expresses the other half of the feedback loop of the plot. When Johnny Cigar and Prabaker *engage with* the women they love, when Vikram *engages with* Lettie, when Lisa Carter *engages with* the people in the Bollywood film world, and when Kano the bear (representing our animal nature) *engages with* the god

Ganesh (representing our spiritual nature), the plot of the novel is returning the reader to a path of resolution of the conflicts thrown up by the succession of betrayals. Through those betrayals, the plot drives the novel deeper into the exile experience: Khaled betrays Habib, for example, and then leaves the camp of the freedom fighters, wandering through the world as an ultimate exile. Through the successive engagements of the novel, the plot brings the reader home to a place of understanding, and perhaps to forgiveness and hope. When Lin returns to the slum on the novel's final page to engage with the slum dwellers, he closes the feedback loop of the plot's dialectic, and brings the reader back home.

THE CHARACTERS

All of the characters in the novel, *Shantaram*, are created. None of the characters bears even a remote resemblance to any real person I've ever known. Proceeding from the theme of exile, all of the characters represent one or another aspect of the exile experience. None of the characters – with the exception of Johnny Cigar, who is born to a vanished (exiled) father from somewhere beyond the city – is born in Bombay. All of the characters are exiles, in one way or another. Prabaker is an exile from his village, Karla is an exile from the United States of America, Abdel Khader is an exile from Afghanistan, Abdullah is an exile from Iran, Khaled is an exile from Palestine, Didier is an exile from France, the slum dwellers are exiles from many other parts of India, and on it goes. Every character is an expression of a different characteristic of exile, and each is living a different expression of the exile's life. Taken as a whole, as a society of characters, they represent the most complete exploration of the exile experience that I can express.

To enhance the sense of exile, I created a village full of characters that are so completely at home – so completely *not* exiled – that they understand exactly where the rivers run when they're in flood. The moment when Lin receives his name, *Shantaram*, is also the moment when he is most acutely defined as an exile. The villagers – who represent the *opposite* of the exile experience – know precisely where they come from, and where they belong. Lin is the outsider, afraid of the flooding river, which represents the tide of the unknown. The village is emblematic of home

and belonging, and stands in constant contrast to the vivid exile experienced in the Island City of Bombay.

THE LAYERS OF ALLEGORICAL DEPTH: DANTE & THE BIBLE

Following from my literary theory, each major work that I write has two layers of allegorical depth. The purpose of these allegorical layers is to provide the novel with an artistic echo of its theme, symbols and imagery that might reinforce the central theme, and enhance the intensity of the reading experience. Works chosen as allegorical texts must meet three main criteria:

- a) they must be relevant to the theme of the novel in question;
- b) they must endure;
- c) they must have a body of scholarly interpretations available to general readers.

If the allegorical texts are not relevant, they defeat the purpose of their inclusion in the architecture of the novel. Relevance to the theme of the novel is what allows the allegorical text to provide constant background echoes of that theme, and to reinforce the intensity of the readers' engagement with that theme. If the texts don't endure, they simply become obscure. If, to use an extreme example, a writer chose to use a certain menu card from a fast food restaurant as an allegorical subtext, it would prove difficult for readers to examine, because the menu card might well disappear without a trace when its usefulness to its owner expired. If, however, the text chosen by the writer has a high order of probability of enduring well into the future, then the writer can be assured that readers will always be able to locate and examine the chosen subtext. Similarly, the chosen allegorical subtext must have a body of scholarly interpretations, because if it is too obscure a text, and it exists without the appropriate scholarly guides to its language, readers might not be able to engage with it.

For the novel, *Shantaram*, I chose *The Bible* as my first layer of referencing, and Dante's *Inferno*, particularly Cantos 11, 21, 22, 23, and 26 as the second layer of referencing. All of the exile references in both texts have been included in *Shantaram*. For example, in the old testament of *The Bible*, Moses leads his people out of exile in Egypt, but he dies an exile himself, within sight of the Promised Land. In *Shantaram*, Abdel Khader Khan leads his men out of Pakistan into Afghanistan, but he dies an exile still, within sight of the "promised land" of his native village. Similarly, Noah

and the flood is represented in *Shantaram* by the flood in Bombay that surrounds the slum: all of the people with animals in the surrounding area bring their animals into the high ground of the slum, which becomes a kind of “sprawling Arc” filled with animals of every kind. All of the exile references in Dante’s *Inferno* are included and transformed in the same way.

The allegorical references from both texts appear throughout the novel, selected and employed on the basis of their relevance to the narrative of the novel.

THE HOUSE OF MIRRORS: MIRRORED EVENTS & CHARACTERS

The third layer of referencing in the structure of the novel (proceeding from my literary theory, and the same in all my literary work) is a House of Mirrors. Every major event in *Shantaram* happens twice. The taxi accident with Prabaker in the beginning of the novel is the mirror of the taxi accident later in the novel, with Hassan Obikwa. In the first accident, Lin is a newcomer, a stranger in a strange land, and can’t become involved in what happens, but in the second accident he is at home in the Island City, and does get involved. The flood in the village, where Lin receives his name, Shantaram, is mirrored by the flood at The Taj Mahal Hotel, where Lin rescues Karla in Vinod’s boat. In the first flood, we see the beginning of the spiritual transformation of Lin; in the second, we see the beginning of the emotional transformation.

Everything happens twice: the secret stairs of Madame Zhou are the secret stairs used by Abdul Ghani’s killers; the death of Habib Abdur Rahman is the death of Abdul Ghani; Prabaker has his face “amputated” in the taxi accident, and Modena has his face “amputated” by Maurizio; the wedding party in the slum is mirrored by the wedding party in Afghanistan; Lin is cradled by Karla when he is dragged from Gupta’s den, and Ulla cradles Modena in the same way; the journey to the village is mirrored by the journey to Afghanistan; Lin’s ordeal in prison is mirrored by his ordeal in cold turkey; Qasim Ali Hussein raises his green scarf during the fire in the slum, and Abdel Khader raises his green banner in Afghanistan – the list goes on for the whole length of the novel. Everything happens twice.

Moreover, every character has a mirror character. The mirror character for Prabaker, the brother of light, is Abdullah, the brother of violence. Both characters

refer to Lin as “brother”, which is the clue for readers. Abdel Khader Khan, who rules his mafia empire through violence and force, is the mirror character for Qasim Ali Hussein, who as headman in the slum “rules” through nothing more than his integrity. Ulla is the mirror character of Khaled, the Palestinian, because both have sold themselves, body and soul, to survive in a broken world: Khaled has a scar from cheek to jaw, and Maurizio cuts Ulla with a knife, from cheek to jaw, which is the clue for readers. Maurizio is the mirror character for Abdul Ghani, Karla is the mirror character for Lisa Carter, Modena is the mirror character for Nazeer, Didier is the mirror character for Vikram, and so on, through all of the characters.

The reason for this technique of mirroring events and characters is to bring the reader into a powerful feedback loop of similarities and concurrencies that might:

a) enrich the world of the novel through self-referential reinforcements, which should act in a not-conscious manner to make that world seem familiar (despite its potentially “exotic” otherness), and known, and real, as the reader travels further into it;

b) to soften and reduce the “mythic” status of some of the characters and events in *Shantaram*, even though they *are* mythic and heroic in the literary sense, by deliberately and carefully reflecting them through other characters, so that they may be felt, rather than merely observed, and loved or loathed, rather than merely admired or scorned;

c) to assist the first two layers of allegorical depth, in that the mirrored reflections of characters and events provide the allegorical references with new opportunities to nuance the resonances;

d) to provide an artistic elaboration of one critically important aspect of the cosmological model that provides the philosophical underpinning of my work as an artist: that aspect is the “self-reinforcing feedback loop”, known as an *autopoietic system*, which is the universal engine of complex systems in nature, and is manifested in every complex aggregation of matter throughout the universe;

and

e) to provide the reader who chooses to return to the novel for a second, third, or fourth reading with a small treasury of new “house of mirrors” discoveries.

THE MOSAIC IMAGE: MAN, WOMAN, ISLAND SEA & SKY

The fourth layer in the architecture of *Shantaram* (and every other literary work that I write) is the Mosaic Image. The technique employed is to create or select an emblematic image, or “mind-picture” that might express all of the main components of the central theme. In the case of the novel, *Shantaram*, I chose the following as an emblematic image: *a man and a woman, standing on a beach, surrounded by overhanging trees, with a half-submerged boat buried in the sand, and a view of the ocean and the sky.*

After creating this image, I divided it into 42 (because the novel was constructed to have 42 chapters) mosaic sections, or *tesserae*, each one of which represented a different chapter of the novel. The number of each tile, or tessera, coincided with the number of a chapter in the novel. The tessera were assigned to each chapter on the basis of two criteria: its relevance to the chapter, and the frequency with which the type of tessera had already appeared in previous chapters.

For example, within that image of a man and a woman standing on a beach, with overhanging trees and a half-submerged boat, some of the 42 tiles or tesserae of the mosaic version of that image might show pieces of the sky, while others might show pieces of the sea, and others might show a hand of the man or woman, an eye, a leg, a foot, or the leaves of the trees, or the sand, and so on. As each tessera of the mosaic picture was assigned to a chapter, taking care not to put all the “sky” tesserae or “sand” tesserae or “tree” tesserae in bunched or consecutive order, then the view contained in the tessera (sky, sand, tree, a hand, an eye, and so on) would be incorporated in the chapter itself. If the tessera for a given chapter were a “hand” tessera, then the imagery of the “hand” would appear throughout the chapter, and have a profound influence on the expression of metaphors and similes in the chapter. If the tessera for a given chapter were the “sea” tessera, then the imagery of the sea would appear throughout the chapter, and so on.

Moreover, the emblematic mosaic image or “mind-picture” – a man and a woman on a beach, half-buried boat, and so on – actually appears toward the end of the novel: Lin and Karla sit on a half-submerged boat, buried in the sand, on the beach, beneath overhanging trees, with a view of the sea and the sky. In every chapter leading up to the “exposure” of that image, fragments of the whole image have been embedded within the text of the novel’s chapters, one tessera at a time.

The tesserae fragments of the mosaic image, the Eden-picture, are so deeply and subtly embedded within the text, I hope, that the readers' perceptions of them are subliminal. They should resonate unconsciously – or even post-consciously, if such a term is not too strange – and combine with one another at the deepest level of symbolic referencing.

If successfully achieved, the tesserae should accompany the readers toward an overwhelming conclusion. When the scene of the mosaic image — the beach scene, with the man and the woman — is finally described, in the last pages of the book, the readers should *recognize* it at such a profound level that an ineluctable sense of *rightness* surrounds the encounter. At the deepest level, the readers should both *know* and *agree* that they have reached the end of the novel's journey.

My hope and intention through the work of the third allegorical sub-stratum is that, in a heartfelt, non-verbal, and not-conscious sense, readers will respond to the scene and its resolutions of love and forgiveness with the feeling: *Yes, of course, it had to be this.*

Most importantly for this third layer in the architecture of the novel, this emblematic mosaic image has the purpose of *unifying the imagery and symbolism* of the novel. When we write novels, we use symbols, images, similes and metaphors, among other tools, to enhance the descriptive power our language. The range of sources for that imagery and those symbols is virtually limitless: from the world of computers to the depths of the ocean; from ancient history to imagined worlds on other planets. My literary theory insists that the range of choices for such symbols and imagery should proceed from four sources:

- a) the natural world of the planet that is *our own source*;
 - b) the emblematic symbol of each novel (in *Shantaram*, the “island”);
 - c) the two allegorical texts chosen as the first layers of referencing for each novel (in *Shantaram*, Dante's *Inferno*, and *The Bible*;
- and
- d) the emblematic mosaic image chosen for each novel (in *Shantaram*, the man, woman, beach, half-submerged boat buried in the sand, and so on).

The fourth of those sources, which in the case of *Shantaram* is the emblematic mosaic image of *a man and a woman, standing on a beach, surrounded by overhanging trees, with a half-submerged boat buried in the sand, and a view of the ocean and the sky*, provides much of the imagery and symbolism used in the novel.

Consequently, in every chapter, and in most of the metaphors and similes, the well-spring of that emblematic image is referenced again and again. The images and symbolism drawn from sand, the island, trees, surrounding waters, the boat, the female and male forms recur throughout the novel with consistency and unity, because they're drawn from the same source: the emblematic mosaic image.

Because *all of the imagery and symbolism* in the novel is drawn from the four sources listed above, and *from no others*, there is a precise and structured coherence in the imaginal range and reach of the novel's language. The images don't just tumble and spill into the novel from any source, in any time and place: the images are coherently assembled from a unified source of inspiration unique to each novel. In short, they *belong*.

THE OTHER LAYERS

There are 14 other layers of symbolic and imaginal depth, which constitute the remaining architectural elements of my literary method.

THE EMBLEMATIC SYMBOL: THE ISLAND

The first of the remaining layers is the *emblematic symbol* of the novel. In the case of the novel, *Shantaram*, with its theme of the exile experience, the emblematic symbol of exile is *the island*, as stated above. Throughout the novel, the "island" symbol recurs, and is always present at or close to all the main moments of peak transition, transformation or emotional intensity in the novel.

THE VIRTUE: HUMILITY

Every novel has a defining virtue, which operates throughout the novel as the vibrating chord of moral significance, and gives shape to the set of positive characteristics explored in the novel. In the case of *Shantaram*, a novel dealing with the exile experience – the experience of a stranger in a strange land, who must learn the ways of that new, strange world – the virtue is *humility*. Every character in the

novel that is uplifted in some way is raised up through their innate humility, or through an act of humility. Prabaker asks if he is man enough to love the girl who has captured his heart. The Blue Sisters, who forgive the man who betrayed them, are saved by their humility, and raised up to a position of wealth and respect. This is true for every character that rises above.

THE VICE: PRIDE

Every novel has a vice, which works throughout the book to shape the set of negative characteristics explored in the novel. In *Shantaram*, the vice is the sin of *pride*. Every character that experiences a fall is cast down through their own pride. Abdel Khader dies in Afghanistan because his pride made him bring fine horses to the war, instead of camels or donkeys. Lin loses his chance to be with Karla because his pride won't let him accept an ultimatum from her. This is true of every character that experiences a fall.

THE TWO COLOURS: GOLD & GREEN

Every novel has two colours, which are derived from the emblematic mosaic image (the Fourth Layer, above), and which serve to reinforce the undulations of the narrative. At every point of peak transition, transformation, or emotional intensity, the colours green or gold, or both colours, appear in some way. The green of Karla's eyes, the green of her scarf, the green of the plants during the flood when Lin receives his name, the gold of Abdel Khader's eyes, the golden sand on the beach at Goa – these colours always appear at peak times throughout the novel.

THE TWO CARDINAL ELEMENTS: AIR & WATER

Every novel has two elements (from the four cardinal elements: earth, fire, water, and air), which are derived from the emblematic mosaic image (the Fourth Layer, above), and which reinforce the coherence and unity of the imagery and symbolism in the novel. In the case of *Shantaram*, the two elements are *air* and *water*. At every

moment of peak transition, transformation or emotional intensity, the elements of air and/or water appear. When Lin receives his name, *Shantaram*, in the village, there is a flood; when Lin makes love to Karla, there is flooding rain in the city; when Lin falls to his knees to pray for the death of his wounded, suffering friend, Prabaker, there is a cleaner's bucket of water in the room, and when Lin hears from Abdel Khader the full extent of his betrayal, he is surrounded by a howling wind. These elements of *air* and *water* are always present at peak times throughout the novel.

THE TEXTURES: LEAF & COCONUT FIBRE

Every novel has two textures, which reinforce the coherence and unity of the imagery and symbolism, and help to emphasize the peak moments in the novel. In the case of *Shantaram*, the textures are those of the leaf, or grasses, and of coconut fibres made into ropes and other materials. Lin makes his first real spiritual transition – and the beginnings of his spiritual transformation as a character – while lying on the coconut fibre bed of Prabaker's father, Kishan, in the village; Lin's house in the slum is made from tatami mats, called *chettai*, which are made from leaves. These elements of leaf (or reed, or grasses) and coconut fibres are always present in the background at peak moments throughout the novel.

THE TASTES: SAFFRON & LIME

Every novel has two tastes that recur throughout the text, serving to reinforce the subconscious connection to moments of peak transition, transformation and emotional intensity. In *Shantaram*, the tastes are *saffron* and *lime*. Scented saffron rice is served at the wedding feast of Joseph and Maria in the slum; water flavoured with the juice of limes, called *nimbu pani*, is served during Lin's first visit to Madame Zhou's palace. These tastes are often present in the background of peak moments in the text.

THE EMBLEMATIC ANIMALS: HORSE & BEAR

Every novel has two emblematic animals, whose appearances in the text are consistent with moments of peak transition, transformation, and emotional intensity. In *Shantaram*, the emblematic animals are the *horse* and the *bear*. The horse appears in the slum and in the mountains of Afghanistan, among other places. The bear appears in the slum and in a prison cell, among other places. Both animals exist as shadows moving behind the peak moments of the text. At the end of *Shantaram*, the bear is transformed into the god, *Ganesh*, in order to escape from the authorities. As mentioned above, this is a symbolic reference to the spiritual transformation that is just beginning for the character, Lin.

THE PERFUMES: CINNAMON & *Coco* by CHANEL

Every novel has two perfumes or scents that serve to reinforce the reader's connection with moments of peak *romantic* transition, transformation, or emotional intensity. In *Shantaram*, the scents are *Coco*, by Chanel, and *cinnamon*. These two scents are most closely identified with Karla, and they serve to heighten Lin's sense of connection, through Karla, to the peak moments of the novel.

THE NUMBER: EIGHT

Every novel has a significant number, used throughout the text to subconsciously reinforce the moments of peak transition, transformation and emotional intensity. In *Shantaram*, the number is *eight*. There are eight key members of the Leopold's society of friends; there are eight members of the Khader Khan Council when Lin visits for the first time; there are eight survivors (after Khaled murders Habib, and leaves the camp) of the original thirty men who went to in Afghanistan, and so on. This number recurs through out the text, working in the background of the peak moments.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

While an examination of my general literary theory is beyond the cope of this basic guide for readers of *Shantaram*, it's possible to summarize those elements that proceed from the literary theory, and in that way give a guide to the architecture of the novel. Listed in point form, as a ready reference for readers, those elements are:

- 1) The narrative
- 2) the plot
- 3) the characters
- 4) the first layer of allegorical referencing: Dante's *Inferno*
- 5) the second layer of allegorical referencing: *The Bible*
- 6) the house of mirrors, where every important action happens twice, and every character has a mirror character
- 7) The emblematic mosaic image of the novel: man, woman, island sea & sky
- 8) the emblematic symbol of the novel: the island
- 9) the virtue: humility
- 10) the vice: pride
- 11) the colours: green and gold
- 12) the elements: air and water
- 13) the textures: leaf and coconut fibre
- 14) the perfumes: cinnamon and *Coco* by Chanel
- 15) the symbolic number: eight

Taken as a whole, these elements combine to form an aesthetic and coherent architecture for the novel. The elements are inter-dependant, and form a structural *gestalt* that is both edifice and interiority, frame and flesh. The architecture proceeds from a literary theory, but in one of those strange, self-referential circularities that have come to define the loop of alienation so characteristic of the 20th Century, if the literary theory has any validity the architecture should stand on its own merit – exiled, as it were, from the theory that spawned it. Whether or not that's so, the novel, *Shantaram*, can't be wholly understood or articulated discussed without this journey around and within its architecture. And if your interest is sufficient to have read this far, I do sincerely hope that the journey into that architecture, which is, like the novel, a journey into and through my love, has given you the happiness of understanding.