

Encountering the Other:

The Challenge for the 21st Century

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BACKGROUND

Globalization is the interaction and integration of people, companies, and governments of different countries. It is one of the most visible trends in modern culture. With increasingly common and efficient intercontinental travel, communication, and trade, regional life has become tied to cultures around the world. The globe is, metaphorically, getting smaller.

SCAN FOR
MULTIMEDIA



- 1 **T**he encounter with the Other, with other people, has always been a universal and fundamental experience for our species.
- 2 Archaeologists tell us that the very earliest human groups were small family-tribes numbering 30 to 50 individuals. Had such a community been larger, it would have had trouble moving around quickly and efficiently. Had it been smaller, it would have found it harder to defend itself effectively and to fight for survival.
- 3 So here is our little family-tribe going along searching for nourishment, when it suddenly comes across another family-tribe. What a significant movement in the history of the world, what a momentous discovery! The discovery that there are other people in the world! Until then, the members of these primal groups could live in the conviction, as they moved around in the company of 30 to 50 of their kinfolk, that they knew all the people in the world. Then it turned out that they didn't—that other similar beings, other people, also inhabited the world! But how to behave in the face of such a revelation? What to do? What decision to make?
- 4 Should they throw themselves in fury on those other people? Or walk past dismissively and keep going? Or rather try to get to know and understand them?

NOTES

- 5 That same choice that our ancestors faced thousands of years ago faces us today as well, with undiminished intensity—a choice as fundamental and categorical as it was back then. How should we act toward Others? What kind of attitude should we have toward them? It might end up in a duel, a conflict, or a war. Every archive contains evidence of such events, which are also marked by countless battlefields and ruins scattered around the world.
- 6 All this is proof of man’s failure—that he did not know how, or did not want, to reach an understanding with Others. The literature of all countries in all epochs¹ has taken up this situation, this tragedy and weakness, as subject matter of infinite variety and moods.
- 7 But it might also be the case that, instead of attacking and fighting, this family-tribe that we are watching decides to fence itself off from others, to isolate and separate itself. This attitude leads, over time, to objects like the Great Wall of China, the towers and gates of Babylon, the Roman limes² and or the stone walls of the Inca.
- 8 Fortunately, there is evidence of a different human experience scattered abundantly across our planet. These are the proofs of cooperation—the remains of marketplaces, of ports, of places where there were agoras³ and sanctuaries, of where the seats of old universities and academies are still visible, and of where there remain vestiges of such trade routes as the Silk Road, the Amber Route, and the Trans-Saharan caravan route.
- 9 All of these were places where people met to exchange thoughts, ideas, and merchandise, and where they traded and did business, concluded covenants and alliances, and discovered shared goals and values. “The Other” stopped being a synonym of foreignness and hostility, danger and mortal evil. People discovered within themselves a fragment of the Other, and they believed in this and lived confidently.
- 10 People thus had three choices when they encountered the Other: They could choose war, they could build a wall around themselves, or they could enter into dialogue.
- 11 Over the expanse of history, mankind has never stopped wavering among these options, and, depending on changing times and cultures, has chosen one or the other; we can see that mankind is fickle here and does not always feel certain, does not always stand on firm ground. War is hard to justify. I think that everyone always loses because war is a disaster for human beings. It exposes their incapacity for understanding, for putting themselves in the shoes of others, for goodness and sense. The encounter with the Other usually ends tragically in such cases, in a catastrophe of blood and death.
- 12 The idea that led people to build great walls and gaping moats, to surround themselves with them and fence themselves off from

1. **epochs** (EHP uks) *n.* periods of historical time.
 2. **limes** *n.* walls mortared with quicklime plaster.
 3. **agoras** (uh GAWR uhz) *n.* open gathering places.

others, has been given the contemporary name of apartheid.⁴ This concept has been erroneously confined to the policies of the now-defunct white regime in South Africa. However, apartheid was already being practiced in the earliest mists of time. In simple terms, proponents of this view proclaim that everyone is free to live as he chooses, as long as it's as far away from me as possible, if he isn't part of my race, religion, or culture. If that were all!

- 13 In reality, we are looking at a **doctrine** of the structural inequality of the human race. The myths of many tribes and peoples include the conviction that only we are human—the members of our clan, our community—while others, all others, are subhuman or aren't human at all. An ancient Chinese belief expressed it best: A non-Chinese was regarded as the devil's spawn, or at best as a victim of fate who did not manage to be born Chinese. The Other, according to this belief, was presented as a dog, as a rat, as a creeping reptile. Apartheid was and still is a doctrine of hatred, contempt, and revulsion for the Other, the foreigner.
- 14 How different was the image of the Other in the epoch of anthropomorphic⁵ beliefs, the belief that the gods could assume human form and act like people. Back then you could never tell whether the approaching wanderer, traveler, or newcomer was a person or a god in human guise. That uncertainty, that fascinating ambivalence, was one of the roots of the culture of hospitality that mandated showing all kindness to the newcomer, that ultimately unknowable being.
- 15 Cyprian Norwid writes about this when he ponders, in his introduction to the *Odyssey*, the sources of the hospitality that Odysseus encounters on his journey back to Ithaca. "There, with every beggar and foreign wanderer," Norwid remarks, "the first suspicion was that he might have been sent by God. . . . No one could have been received as a guest if the first question were: 'Who is this newcomer?' But only when the divinity in him was respected did the human questions follow, and that was called hospitality, and for that very reason it was numbered among the pious practices and virtues. There was no 'last among men!' with Homer's Greeks—he was always the first, which means divine."
- 16 In this Greek understanding of culture, cited by Norwid, things reveal a new significance that is favorable to people. Doors and gates are not only for closing against the Other—they can also open for him and welcome him inside. The road need not serve hostile columns; it can also be a highway along which one of the gods, in pilgrim's garb, comes to us. Thanks to such an interpretation, the world we inhabit

4. **apartheid** (uh PAHR tyd) *n.* South African policy of extreme racial segregation under which the native African majority was not allowed to vote and suffered intense repression. Apartheid ended in 1994 with the first free elections. The word is often used to refer to other systems of repressive ethnic segregation.

5. **anthropomorphic** (an thruh poh MAWR fihk) *adj.* described or thought of as having human behaviors or characteristics.

NOTES

Mark base words or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

doctrine (DOK truhn) *n.*

MEANING:

Mark base words or indicate another strategy you used that helped you determine meaning.

totalitarian (toh tal uh TAIR ee uhn) *adj.*

MEANING:

ideologies (y dee OL uh jeez) *n.*

MEANING:

starts being not only richer and more diverse, but also kinder to us, a world in which we ourselves will want to encounter the Other.

- 17 Emmanuel Levinas calls the encounter with the Other an “event,” or even a “fundamental event,” the most important experience, reaching to the farthest horizons. Levinas, as we know, was one of the philosophers of dialogue, along with Martin Buber, Ferdinand Ebner, and Gabriel Marcel (a group that later came to include Jozef Tischner), who developed the idea of the Other as a unique and unrepeatable entity, in more or less direct opposition to two phenomena that arose in the 20th century: the birth of the masses that abolished the separateness of the individual, and the expansion of destructive **totalitarian ideologies**.

- 18 These philosophers attempted to salvage what they regarded as the paramount value, the human individual—me, you, the Other, the Others—from being obliterated by the actions of the masses and of totalitarianism (which is why these philosophers promoted the concept of “the Other” to emphasize the differences between one individual and another, the differences of non-interchangeable and irreplaceable characteristics).

- 19 This was an incredibly important movement that rescued and elevated the human being, a movement that rescued and elevated the Other, with whom, as Levinas suggested, one must not only stand face to face and conduct a dialogue, but for whom one must “take responsibility.” In terms of relations with the Other and Others, the philosophers of dialogue rejected war because it led to annihilation; they criticized the attitudes of indifference or building walls; instead, they proclaimed the need—or even the ethical obligation—for closeness, openness, and kindness.

- 20 In the circle of just such ideas and convictions, a similar type of inquiry and reflection, a similar attitude, arises and develops in the great research work of a man who did his undergraduate work and went on to earn a Ph.D. at Jagiellonian University, and who was a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences—Bronislaw Malinowski.

- 21 Malinowski’s problem was how to approach the Other, not as an exclusively hypothetical and abstract entity, but as a concrete person belonging to a different race, with beliefs and values different from ours, and with his own culture and customs.

- 22 Let us point out that the concept of the Other is usually defined from the white man’s—the European’s—point of view. But today, when I walk through a village in the mountains of Ethiopia, a crowd of children runs after me, pointing at me in merriment and calling out: “Ferenchi! Ferenchi!”—which means “foreigner, other.” This is an example of the dismantling of the hierarchy of the world and its cultures. Others are indeed Others, but for those Others, I am the one who is Other.

- 23 In this sense, we’re all in the same boat. All of us inhabitants of our planet are Other for Others—Me for Them, and Them for Me.

- 24 In Malinowski's era and in the preceding centuries, the white man, the European, left his continent almost exclusively for gain—to take over new land, capture slaves, trade, or convert. These expeditions, at times, were incredibly bloody—Columbus conquering America, and then the white settlers, the conquest of Africa, Asia, and Australia.
- 25 Malinowski set out for the Pacific islands with a different goal—to learn about the Other. To learn about his neighbor's customs and language, and to see how he lived. He wanted to see and experience this for himself, personally—to experience it so that he could later tell about it. It might seem like an obvious undertaking, yet it turned out to be revolutionary, and it stood the world on its ear.
- 26 It laid bare a weakness or perhaps simply a characteristic that appears to a differing degree in all cultures: the fact that cultures have difficulty understanding other cultures, and that people belonging to a given culture—the participants in and carriers of that culture—have this difficulty. Namely, Malinowski stated after arriving at his research site in the Trobriand Islands that the white people who had lived there for years not only knew nothing about the local people and their culture, but also, in fact, held an entirely erroneous image characterized by contempt and arrogance.

✓ A village in the Trobriand Islands



- 27 He himself, as if to spite all colonial customs, pitched his tent in the middle of a local village and lived among the local people. What he experienced turned out to be no easy experience. In his *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term*, he continually mentions problems, bad moods, despair, and depression. You pay a high price for breaking free of your culture. That is why it is so important to have your own distinct identity, and a sense of your own strength, worth, and maturity. Only then can you confidently face a different culture. Otherwise, you will withdraw into your own hiding place and timorously cut yourself off from others.
- 28 All the more so because the Other is a mirror into which you peer, or in which you are observed, a mirror that unmask and denudes, which we would prefer to avoid. It is interesting that, while the First World War was under way in Malinowski's native Europe, the young anthropologist was concentrating on research into the culture of exchange, contacts, and common rituals among the inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, to which he devotes his excellent *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, and formulating his important thesis, so seldom observed by others, that "to judge something, you have to be there."
- 29 Malinowski advanced another thesis, incredibly bold for its time: namely that there is no such thing as a higher or a lower culture—there are only different cultures, with varying ways of meeting the needs and expectations of their participants. For him, a different person, of a different race and culture, is nevertheless a person whose behavior, like ours, is characterized by dignity, respect for acknowledged values, and respect for tradition and customs.
- 30 While Malinowski began his work at the moment of the birth of the masses, we are living today in the period of transition from that mass society to a new, planetary society. Many factors lie behind this—the electronics revolution, the unprecedented development of all forms of communication, the great advances in transport and movement, and also, in connection with this, the transformation at work in the consciousness of the youngest generation and in culture broadly conceived.
- 31 How will this alter the relations between us, the people of one culture, and the people of some other culture, or of Other cultures? How will this influence the I-Other relationship within my culture and beyond it? It is very difficult to give an unequivocal final answer, since the process is ongoing and we ourselves, with no chance for the distance that fosters reflection, are immersed in it.
- 32 Levinas considered the I-Other relation within the bounds of a single, racially and historically homogeneous civilization. Malinowski studied the Melanesian tribes at a time when they were still in their primal state, not yet violated by the influence of Western technology, organization and markets.
- 33 Today, this is ever less frequently possible. Cultures are becoming increasingly hybridized and heterogeneous. I recently saw something astonishing in Dubai. A girl, surely a Muslim, was walking along the

beach. She was dressed in tight jeans and a close-fitting blouse, but her head, and only her head, was covered so hermetically that not even her eyes were visible.

34 Today there are whole schools of philosophy, anthropology, and literary criticism that devote their major attention to hybridization and linking. This cultural process is under way especially in those regions where the borders of states are the boundaries of different cultures, such as the American-Mexican border, and also in the gigantic megalopolises (like São Paulo, New York, or Singapore) that are home to populations representing the most variegated cultures and races. We say today that the world has become multiethnic and multicultural not because there are more of these communities and cultures than before, but rather because they are speaking out more loudly, with increasing self-sufficiency and forcefulness, demanding acceptance, recognition, and a place at the round table of nations.

35 Yet the true challenge of our time, the encounter with the new Other, derives as well from a broader historical context. Namely, the second half of the 20th century was a time when two-thirds of humanity freed themselves of colonial dependency and became citizens of their own states that, at least nominally, were independent. Gradually, these people are beginning to rediscover their own pasts, myths, and legends, their roots, their feelings of identity and, of course, the pride that flows from this. They are beginning to realize that they are the masters in their own house and the captains of their fate, and they look with abhorrence on any attempts to reduce them to things, to extras, to the victims and passive objects of domination.

36 Today, our planet, inhabited for centuries by a narrow group of free people and broad throngs of the enslaved, is filled with an increasing number of nations and societies that have a growing sense of their own separate value and significance. This process is often occurring amidst enormous difficulties, conflicts, dramas, and losses.

37 We may be moving toward a world so entirely new and changed that our previous historical experience will prove to be insufficient to grasp and move around in it. In any case, the world that we are entering is the Planet of Great Opportunities. Yet these are not unconditional opportunities, but rather opportunities open only to those who take their tasks seriously and thus prove that they take themselves seriously. This is a world that potentially has a lot to offer, but that also demands a lot, and in which taking easy shortcuts is often the road to nowhere.

38 We will constantly be encountering the new Other, who will slowly emerge from the chaos and tumult of the present. It is possible that this new Other will arise from the meeting of two contradictory currents that shape the culture of the contemporary world—the current of the globalization of our reality and the current of the conservation of our diversity, our differences, our uniqueness. The Other may be the offspring and the heir of these two currents.

- 39 We should seek dialogue and understanding with the new Other. The experience of spending years among remote Others has taught me that kindness toward another being is the only attitude that can strike a chord of humanity in the Other. Who will this new Other be? What will our encounter be like? What will we say? And in what language? Will we be able to listen to each other? To understand each other?
- 40 Will we both want to appeal, as Joseph Conrad put it, to what “speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts: to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.” 🐼

Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read. Review and clarify details with your group.

1. According to the author, how would an early family-tribe discover that there were other people in the world?
2. What way of treating people began with the idea that any stranger might have been sent by the gods?
3. According to the author, why have Europeans throughout history usually left their own continent to visit others?

4.  **Notebook** Confirm your understanding of the text by writing a summary.

RESEARCH

Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the lecture?

Research to Explore Choose something that interested you from the text, and formulate a research question.



ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER:
THE CHALLENGE FOR THE
21ST CENTURY

TIP

GROUP DISCUSSION

Some group members may have very good contributions to make to the discussion but find it difficult to speak up. To make sure that you hear the best ideas, reach out to all group members by asking questions.

WORD NETWORK

Add interesting words related to outsiders from the text to your Word Network.

STANDARDS

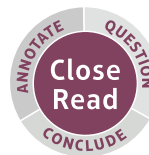
RI.9–10.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RI.9–10.5 Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text.

L.9–10.4.b Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech and continue to apply knowledge of Greek and Latin roots and affixes.

Close Read the Text

With your group, revisit sections of the text you marked during your first read. **Annotate** details that you notice. What **questions** do you have? What can you **conclude**?



Analyze the Text

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE
to support your answers.

Complete the activities.

- 1. Review and Clarify** With your group, reread paragraph 10 of the selection. Discuss the three choices people can make in dealing with the Other, reminding yourselves of the examples the author gives for each one.
- 2. Present and Discuss** Now, share with your group the passages from the selection that you found particularly important. Take turns presenting your passages. Discuss what you noticed in the text, what questions you asked, and what conclusions you reached.
- 3. Essential Question:** *Do people need to belong?* What has this lecture taught you about being an outsider and confronting others? Discuss.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Concept Vocabulary

doctrine

totalitarian

ideologies

Why These Words? The three concept vocabulary words are related. With your group, discuss the words, and determine what they have in common. Write other words that relate to this concept.

Practice

Notebook Confirm your understanding of these words by using them in sentences. Include context clues that hint at each word's meaning.

Word Study

Greek Root: -log- In "Encountering the Other," the author uses the word *ideologies*. The word *ideologies* is built from two Greek roots: *-ideo-*, which means "idea," and *-log-*, which may mean either "to speak" or "study or theory of." Write the meanings of these words from the selection that contain the root *-log-*: *archaeologists*, *anthropology*, *dialogue*. Consult a dictionary as needed.

Analyze Craft and Structure

Literary Nonfiction “Encountering the Other” is a **lecture**—a speech that is given to teach or inform listeners about a topic. The lecturer often uses special techniques to engage listeners and help them understand information. In the **introduction**, or beginning, he or she may use a **rhetorical question**. This is a question that the listener should think about, not answer out loud. In the **discussion**, or body, the lecturer may use **repetition** because hearing information more than once helps listeners remember ideas. In the **conclusion**, or end, the lecturer might summarize ideas or leave the audience with a challenge or lasting thought.

TIP

CLARIFICATION

A lecture often begins and ends with a memorable story, quotation, question, fact, or statement. The intention is to make the listener curious at the beginning and inspired at the end.

Practice

Work independently to gather your notes in the chart. Then, share and discuss your responses with your group.

CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE
to support your answers.

INTRODUCTION

Which paragraphs make up the introduction?

What story, surprising fact, or rhetorical question appears in the introduction?

What is the main idea statement?

DISCUSSION

Which paragraphs make up the discussion?

Cite statements that develop or explain the main idea.

Cite examples of repetition.

CONCLUSION

Which paragraphs make up the conclusion?

Is there a challenge to listeners? Is there another technique that creates a memorable ending?



ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER:
THE CHALLENGE FOR THE
21ST CENTURY

Conventions

Types of Phrases An **infinitive** is a verb form that generally appears with the word *to* in front of it and acts as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb. An **infinitive phrase** consists of an infinitive and its objects, complements, or modifiers, all acting together as a single part of speech. Like an infinitive, an infinitive phrase acts as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

The examples in the chart show uses of infinitives and infinitive phrases.

INFINITIVE	INFINITIVE PHRASE
Used as a Noun <i>To succeed</i> requires dedication. (functions as the subject of the sentence)	Used as a Noun We chose <i>to take the old foot path</i> . (functions as the direct object of the verb <i>chose</i>)
Used as an Adjective I wish I had the ability <i>to fly</i> . (tells <i>what kind of</i> ability)	Used as an Adjective Dana's <i>desire to do well</i> made Mama proud. (tells <i>which</i> desire)
Used as an Adverb When Derrick sat down <i>to study</i> , he concentrated. (tells <i>why</i> Derrick sat down)	Used as an Adverb She called the editor <i>to voice her opinion</i> . (tells <i>why</i> she called)

STANDARDS

W.9–10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

W.9–10.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation including footnotes and endnotes.

L.9–10.1.b Use various types of phrases and clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Read It

Work individually. Mark the infinitive or infinitive phrase in each sentence from "Encountering the Other," and label it as a noun, an adjective, or an adverb.

- Had it been smaller, it would have found it harder to defend itself effectively. . . .
- But it might be the case that . . . this family-tribe that we are watching decides to fence itself off from others. . . .
- Malinowski set out for the Pacific islands with a different goal—to learn about the Other.
- This is a world that potentially has a lot to offer, but that also demands a lot. . . .

Write It

Notebook Write three sentences about this lecture. Use an infinitive or infinitive phrase as a noun in one sentence, an adjective in the second sentence, and an adverb in the third sentence.