VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2. NOVEMBER 2019

ISSN 2517-4266

HUMANITIES BULLETIN



4

LONDON
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HUMANITIES BULLETIN

Humanities Bulletin

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Humanities Bulletin

Volume 2, Number 2
November 2019



London Academic Publishing
London, 2019

Humanities Bulletin, Volume 2, Number 2, 2019.
Editor-in-Chief: Victor Alexandru Pricopi; Executive Editor: Cristina Lucia Șutiu.
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ISSN 2517-4266 (Online)

Humanities Bulletin is a peer-reviewed open-access Journal.

Frequency:
2 issues per year: May and November.
First Printing: November, 2019.

Publisher:
London Academic Publishing Ltd.
27, Old Gloucester Street
WC1N 3AX
London, United Kingdom

Contact:
e-mail: contact@lapub.co.uk; humanities_bulletin@journals.lapub.co.uk www.lapub.co.uk
www.journals.lapub.co.uk

The British Library lists this publication in the British National Bibliography;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at https://www.bl.uk

Company Reg. No. 10941794
Registered in England and Wales

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Explanation-by-norms

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Abstract:

Philosophers' search for the best way to explain human actions has led many to accept a core psychological model that can be supplemented by other forms of action explanation when needed. Rather than settling for this model – where everything ultimately hinges on psychological explanation – this paper argues for a pluralistic view. It does not claim that the psychological view is wrong, only that it is not as universally applicable as it is often taken to be. Explanation-by-norms is suggested as an important form of explanation in its own right. It explains actions by revealing how they conform to norms and patterns and become intelligible in light of them. Explanation-by-norms is shown to be especially salient in the case of slips.

Keywords: Action explanation, norms, slips, belief/desire model, rationalization, Michael Smith, Donald Davidson.

"I have now been in fifty-seven states."
Barack Obama at a campaign rally in Beaverton, Oregon.

"No head injury is too trivial to be ignored."
'A verbal illusion', P. Wason & S. Reich.

"A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein."
J. Theisman, Washington Redskins Quarterback,
after being asked whether coach J. Gibbs was a genius.

Introduction

People sometimes say and do puzzling things, as the above quotes reveal. In such cases, it can be hard to explain what is going through the agents' minds; nonetheless, it is easy to make sense of their performance: one understands what the agents were trying to say or do. Obama should have said forty-seven states. Doctors generally advise that head injuries should *not* be ignored, however trivial they seem. Theisman should have said "Albert", not "Norman". The pattern is the same: a person makes a mistake; why the person made precisely *this* mistake is not known; yet one makes sense of the behavior.

A common philosophical view holds that *explanations for actions* ultimately reduce to *accounts of mental states*, typically by citing an agent's beliefs and desires (i.e. that actions ultimately

are explained *in terms of* mental states). However, not all action explanations can be reduced in this way. In the case of *slips*, like the three examples above, one understands what agents do – not by reference to what was going through their minds at the time, but by reference to the norms that apply in the context of the situation. In light of those norms, one grasps what the agent *should* have done and understands her behavior as an approximation to that. That is, one explains such actions by invoking the norms that would make the agent's performance intelligible, had she acted properly given her culture and physical situation.

Section 1 explores a common way of explaining actions, highlighting Michael Smith's account. Section 2 introduces slips by discussing examples, showing how they differ from other sorts of traditional mistakes. Section 3 introduces explanation-by-norms as contrasted with Smith's account. Section 4 discusses five possible objections. The concluding section claims that not all fundamental action explanation is a psychological explanation, or supplement a psychological explanation – as slips reveal. Psychological explanation and explanation-by-norms can well co-exist, but the former cannot supersede the latter.

1. The primacy claim

In philosophy of action, it is common to argue that human behavior is explainable in terms of an agent's psychological states.[1] One understands the movements of the agent in light of her mental states. For example, one might explain why Ella went to the refrigerator to get a glass of milk in terms of her desire for a glass of milk and her belief that the refrigerator was a good place to find it. Donald Davidson famously called such explanations *rationalizations*. By citing the beliefs and desires of the agent, one explains the action: that is, one reveals whatever valuable or otherwise positive outcome the agent saw in performing it (see Davidson, 2001: 3).[2]

According to many philosophers, this kind of explanation is not just common but *ubiquitous*. Even though actions are sometimes explained, say, in terms of the agent's feelings at the time, plans[3], habits[4], etc., such explanations only work as explanations insofar as they presuppose some Davidsonian rationalization. Michael Smith (1998: 17-18) makes the claim explicit:

> Philosophy of action begins with the claim that it is always possible to construct a Humean, belief/desire, explanation of action. The idea is that once we see the central place occupied by Humean belief/desire explanations, we see that all the other explanations we give simply supplement this basic Humean story.

Two claims are worth distinguishing here. First, there is a claim about *possibility*: for every action, one can always construct an appropriate belief/desire explanation. Second, there is a claim about *primacy*: whatever other explanation holds true of an action, that explanation is less fundamental than the belief/desire explanation.

One can interpret the possibility claim in two ways. Some see belief/desire explanation merely as a "useful fiction" (e.g., Dennett, 1987). On this view, the possibility claim is purely instrumental:

i.e., it is always possible to construct a belief/desire explanation, *true or not*. According to the alternate view, it is always possible to construct a *true* belief/desire explanation.

I do not dispute either version of the possibility claim. Given sufficient creativity, it seems possible to come up with belief/desire reconstructions of actions in every instance: a true account on the one view, a useful fiction on the other. Either might be correct. It is the primacy claim I wish to question: the idea that whatever other explanation holds true of a given action, the belief/desire explanation is and must be the foundational one.

The idea behind the primacy claim can perhaps best be illustrated with Smith´s discussion of an example originally presented by Rosalind Hursthouse (1991). Hursthouse discusses a husband who, in an expression of grief, rolls around in his dead wife's clothes. According to Hursthouse, the widower's action lacks the possibility of a Davidsonian rationalization. The grief explains his behavior, but he does not act with a *desire* to express his grief. Smith objects, arguing that – on the Davidsonian interpretation – the man need not have such a desire for his behavior to be rationalized. All he needs is an appropriate set of beliefs and desires that *make it true* that he was acting out of grief (Smith 1998: 22):

> The man is doing what he is doing because he desires to roll around in his dead wife's clothes and believes that he can do so by doing just what he is doing: that is, by rolling around in those particular clothes that he is rolling around in.

For Smith, the mention of grief is explanatory to the extent that it supplements this more basic explanation: i.e., the grief helps explain the husband's behavior by placing his desire to roll around in his dead wife's clothes into an emotional context.

According to Smith, this pattern of explanation and dependence is ubiquitous. It applies not only to cases in which someone's actions are explained in terms of her emotions but also to those explained by her commitment to certain values or her capacity for self-control. In such cases, one need not assume that she acts as she does because she wants to express that commitment or display self-control. One simply assumes that she acts from certain beliefs and desires: ones that make sense for her to have, given her commitments or her self-control.

An important motivation for the primacy claim is that it provides the core for a simple theory of action. If true, it offers a unified account of actions in terms of how they are to be explained: i.e., an action is a behavior explainable at base in terms of beliefs and desires. This minimal explanation can then be supplemented by other forms of action explanation like e.g. expression of emotion. Indeed, Smith argues that the only way in which philosophy of action can succeed is by finding such a unified account.

Recent years have seen psychological explanations along these lines subjected to much criticism. Some have even questioned whether desires are necessary for action explanation at all (e.g., Platts, 1979; Dancy, 2002). The worry is that such explanations cannot really explicate what it is for an agent to act for a reason (Stoutland, 2007) and unduly leave the agent out of the picture

(Hornsby, 2004). My more modest concern is that this way of explaining actions is not as universally appropriate as the primacy claim suggests. In my own treatment of action explanation, I appeal to the phenomenon of slips. I must first describe what they are though before I can show why they pose a challenge to the primacy claim.

2. Slips

Mistakes are a pervasive fact of life; they come in many forms, under many guises. Yet philosophers' focus has generally been narrow.[5] Most attention has been on cases in which the mistake ultimately can be traced to the agent´s ignorance of some state of affairs relevant to her action.

Consider Davidson's discussion of a man who mistakenly boards a plane heading to London, Ontario. The man is ignorant of the plane's destination; he intends to go to London, England and falsely believes that the plane marked "London" is crossing the Atlantic (Davidson, 2001: 84-85). It is easy to see how the primacy claim applies. To explain why he boarded the plane marked "London", an appeal is made to his ignorance. The problem is that such explanations only work to the extent that an agent has certain false beliefs, combined with desires that prompt her to act.

Not all mistakes fit this mold. Consider Obama's verbal slip in Oregon: "I have now been in fifty-seven states". Unlike the case of the man boarding the wrong plane, Obama's mistake cannot be explained in terms of ignorance.[6] One can safely assume that, as a US presidential candidate, he knows how many states there are in the Union. Had he been asked, he would have offered the correct answer. Similar reasoning applies to the doctor's verbal illusion (Wason & Reich, 1979). Her seeming advice that head injuries ought to be ignored is clearly not due to lack of medical or linguistic information. As a competent speaker of the language, she knows that the pattern <*no* NOUN *is too small to* VERB> is equivalent to <*All* NOUN*s*, *however small, should* VERB>, as in "no occasion is too small to warrant a gift" implies "all occasions, however small, warrant a gift." On reflection, she knows that the phrase "no head injury is too trivial to be ignored" implies that all head injuries, however small, should be ignored.

Slips and so-called *verbal illusions* are mistakes that occur in performing an action. The agent acts on an intention; she does something other than what she intends; her action does not reflect what she knows or thinks she knows (Amaya, 2013; Amaya and Doris, 2014). Slips are spontaneous: they cannot be traced to an error in prior deliberation. They tend to be puzzling: the agent normally does not know why she made them. They are typically surprising[7]: the agent expects herself to perform correctly.

Not all slips are verbal. One also finds the non-linguistic equivalent of verbal illusions. Suppose one takes the usual left turn heading home, instead of turning right to the supermarket as planned. Or, consider the person who, having traveled from Norway to the US, acts under the illusion that it is 8 pm when it is (according to local time) 2 pm. She knows her plane took off at

noon; she knows the flight was approximately eight hours; she knows about the time difference. Yet, upon arrival, she runs to make her 8 pm connection.

Mistakes due to ignorance aside, slips differ from other kinds of error commonly discussed in the action-theoretic literature: e.g., those involving akrasia and self-deception.[8] Akratic episodes need not surprise the agent. A dieter breaking her diet by eating a piece of chocolate cake likely knows and accepts that she acts against her better judgment. Episodes of self-deception likewise are often not spontaneous. The mother who refuses to believe that her son is guilty of murder must spend time and effort to deceive herself. Slips, on the other hand, happen on the spur of the moment.[9] The agent is unaware that she will commit an error prior to committing it; if something makes her aware that she is about to slip up, she corrects her behavior. This is why Amaya suggests that slips "have a quick and easy "cure"" (Amaya, 2013: 564).

3. Explanation-by-norms

This section lays out the explanation-by-norms of the three cases which feature in the epigraph. The aim is not only to introduce explanation-by-norms, but also to demonstrate that slip-cases are not reducible to belief/desire explanations. Moreover, the notion of explanation-by-norms is shown to be available in cases of ordinary actions.

Rather than explaining by means of beliefs and desires, explanation-by-norms exploits the knowledge people have of what they are supposed to do to explain what they actually do. Confronted with a slip, one's attention is not on the internal factors that led to it. One rather considers how to make the error intelligible in light of the concrete situation: both its factual and normative background. That normative background builds on assumptions about social roles, social class, career plans, and community beliefs; patterns of speech and gesture; prejudices concerning gender, age, occupation, life phases (child, youth, young adult, middle-aged, pensioner), etc. Norm here is used in an intentionally broadened sense, picking out not the moral dimension of action, but rather the social expectations for any given situation. Every human action is performed in a specific cultural context, which makes culture key to understanding behavior – just as every utterance must be judged against a linguistic background. I take this as a charitable and, indeed, obligatory strategy. To wit, knowledge of psychological states alone will not make slips intelligible, because agents who slip up do something other than what their psychological states would indicate.[10]

Explanation-by-norms looks beyond what an agent desires in the moment of action and her instrumental beliefs on how to achieve it. Instead, it explains action in light of norms, along with the facts (however interpreted) and patterns of thought and behavior informing those norms. This is of considerable advantage for explaining slips: the behavior becomes intelligible without any need to go into details of the psychological machinery giving rise to it: a job that may be left to the psychologists, psychiatrists – and, perhaps, linguists. The philosopher can explain the slip just as well without them, as can the agent herself and those around her, as they coordinate their ongoing actions with each other.

To see how this works in practice, consider Obama's (Obama, 2008) statement in full:

> It is just wonderful to be back in Oregon and over the last fifteen months we have travelled to every corner of the United States. I have now been in fifty-seven states. I think one left to go. One left to go – Alaska and Hawaii, I was not allowed to go to even though I really wanted to visit, but my staff would not justify it (Beaverton, Oregon, 9 May 2008).[11]

Some (e.g., Sorensen 2011: 404) hypothesize that Obama reasoned as follows. He first thought about the Union having fifty states. Because his staff did not allow him to visit Alaska and Hawaii, he subtracted them. Finding himself in Oregon, he subtracted it as well and concluded that he had visited forty-seven states. After months of intense campaigning, he was exhausted. When he opened his mouth, his previous utterance of "fifteen months" primed him to say "fifty-seven states".

The explanation seems logical. Yet, on reflection, it leaves loose ends. Why did Obama claim, after saying "fifty-seven states," that he had only "one left to go"? Did he, in addition to his verbal slip, make an arithmetic mistake? Was he thinking of Oregon as the one state he had left? The utterance "fifteen months" might indeed have primed him to say "fifty-seven", but so, too, might the thought of fifty states. Which was the "real" primer?

Such questions are hard if not impossible to answer. At the same time, not knowing what went through Obama's mind causes no difficulty to everyday life. Understanding his performance requires only to characterize it as a mistake and then appeal to the facts and norms of the situation. One explains the action by showing how the actual behavior approximated what would have been the most relevant and appropriate thing to say under the circumstances.

Consider how this works in more detail. In talking of fifty-seven states, Obama failed to represent basic facts correctly. Everyone (or nearly everyone) knew he made a mistake. That there are fifty states (and have been since 1959, though that is less often remembered) is a fact drilled into every American child in school. As an educated man of seemingly above-average intelligence – surely competent in basic arithmetic – and a successful campaigner, he acted neither from ignorance nor stupidity. His clarity on other occasions reveals this as an isolated incident, a classic slip. Yet, for all that it *was* a mistake, his performance came close (on some metric) to being correct. Imagine Obama saying not "fifty-seven" but "two" or "one hundred and one". *That* would have been exceptionally puzzling and give his audience genuine cause for concern.[12]

An explanation-by-norms such as I propose does not take the form of a Davidsonian rationalization. With Obama's remarks as with countless similar cases, one may as well give up making sense of the action in light of what the agent believed or desired at that point in time – except insofar as these offer clues as to what the agent actually intended. One understands the agent's action against the background of norms, associated facts, and patterns of thought and behavior presumed to be known and held in common by all observers. What might otherwise be puzzling becomes instead a cause to chuckle.

Now consider the doctor who says that "no head injury is too trivial to be ignored". Linguists agree that grammatical awareness diminishes under conditions of syntactic complexity, as clearly apply here.[13] The noun phrase "no head injury" – the object which functions as the theme of "ignore" – does not appear in the usual position for a direct object: *cf.,* "we ignored the head injury". The sentence is somehow in the passive voice, but it's not a standard passive-voice construction, either: *cf.,* "the head injury is ignored by us". It effectively contains three negatives: one explicit (the negative quantifier "no") and two implicit ("to be ignored": i.e., take no notice; and "too trivial": i.e., not serious). Part of the difficulty is that it is superficially similar to sentences like "no missile is too small to be banned" (i.e., "all missiles, however small, should be banned"), giving the false impression that it operates in the same manner.

Such linguistic intricacies are hard for most people to follow. Fortunately, in everyday life, one need not give them too much thought, and one can understand what the doctor is saying. After all, doctors are meant to *help* people (that is the norm that doctors are expected to act in accordance with), and "everybody knows" that head injuries are generally not to be ignored. The doctor surely cannot mean what the linguistic pedant claims her to say – and one can safely conclude that without relying on any complex analysis of sentence structure or the doctor's mental state.

These examples and countless others like them show just how common normative action explanations are in everyday life. They are especially salient where psychological explanations are beyond easy reach. Sometimes, as with Obama's slip, one lacks the information to provide a proper psychological explanation. Other times, as with the doctor's verbal illusion, the psychological story is too complicated to follow in detail.

Why did Theisman say "*Norman* Einstein"? Given the common stereotype of football players as intellectually challenged, one might plausibly think he believed "Norman" to be Einstein's first name; his mistake was one of ignorance. However, when questioned by journalists, he claimed he knew the correct name all along. If so, why did he slip? One can suppose that he wanted to mention an intelligent person. In an interview with *Sports Illustrated*, he said he actually went to school with a clever student named Norman Einstein (Hallinan, 2009: 29-31). Possibly Theisman was referring to him – and not his more famous namesake. Likely Theisman made an honest mistake, a slip of the tongue, given the stressful setting of TV cameras and aggressive journalists.

In Theisman's case, it is easy to provide psychological explanations; it is only hard to tell which one is correct – assuming there even *is* one single, correct account (there need not be). At the same time, and even though it is difficult to know what Theisman thought or knew when he said what his audience took to be the wrong name, what he meant is easily understood: namely, the concept of genius does not apply to football. He invoked an epitome of genius.[14] Theisman may have failed to refer correctly (or maybe he *did* refer correctly to *Norman*?), but context makes clear what he meant. What he said was sufficiently close to (what his audience judged to be) the "correct" answer for it to be understood. Like Obama and the hapless doctor, Theisman probably made an honest mistake: a slip.

Explanation-by-norms is particularly useful in the case of slips because, in these cases, one often does not know the agent's beliefs and desires – but one *does* know the norms that govern the situation and so can appeal to them for explanation; the difference between belief/desire explanation and explanation-by-norms becomes especially clear. This does not mean that these are the *only* cases amenable to explanation-by-norms. Explanation-by-norms plausibly applies in normal, everyday action explanation as well. Consider a man running towards a bus stop.

What is he doing? He is probably trying to catch a bus. How does one know this? Well, people running toward bus stops, from experience, are generally doing just that. Explanation-by-norms works by interpreting an agent's behavior in terms of what is normally and normatively expected. When approaching the idea of explanation-by-norms it is helpful to think about actions as social patterns, i.e. instances of how a culture behaves and operates. Consider what John Rawls called "the basic structure:"[15] the arrangement of all the basic institutions of society (the political constitution, the legal system, the economy, the family, and so on). Rawls saw the basic structure as the location of justice. It makes sense as well to see the basic structure as a source of action explanation. The rules of any basic structure will be such that agents within the structure act according to them. Thus, their actions can be explained considering those rules.[16] Roughly, this is what normative action explanation is all about. People act according to the ground rules that shape the society they live in. These rules contain the fundamental terms of social cooperation. They shape the social conditions within which people live their lives and their actions are understandable in light of them.

The common, psychological, view on action explanation is compelling. The claim put forth here is not that it is wrong, only that it is not as universally applicable as it is often taken to be. Sometimes the best explanations are psychological as in Dancy's example of "the crumbling cliff": It can be the case that S's reason for acting is S's genuine belief that the cliff is crumbling. This belief *per se* is S's reason not to climb it. What S does is not dependent on whether the belief is true or false, S's reason would remain even though S were to recognize that the cliff is *not* crumbling (S would simply continue to treat it as if it were). (Dancy, 2002: 124).[17] In this case the most reasonable action explanation is psychological. Other times, for example with slips, the most reasonable explanation is normative. However, I foresee five possible objections to my account.

Objections

The psychologistic objection

One might argue that explanation-by-norms *presupposes* psychology. After all, I seem to allow that one relies on psychological assumptions to make an action intelligible: Obama knew and knows how to do proper arithmetic, and he meant to act according to this knowledge. Explanation-by-norms traces back to the agent's mind and what is in it.

Explanation-by-norms does presuppose that the agent generally acts rationally and in light of norms. Specifically, one assumes that the agent wants to act in accordance with the norms that govern the situation she is in, respond relevantly to facts, and so on. However, although it makes

reference to such matters, explanation-by-norms is not explanation *by virtue* of anything "inside" the agent. It does not deny that the "inside" is there; but it proceeds by revealing how an action conforms to norms in relation to facts and to patterns of behavior – not how it expresses an agent's psychology in general or her beliefs and desires in particular. Explanation-by-norms underscores how action always takes place within a normative setting. If this were not so, observers would have no expectations regarding what is going on – and no way of understanding it, either. Precisely *because* actions take place against a normative backdrop, observers have a stock of knowledge about them – at least, insofar as they partake in the culture defined by the norms. In fact, a psychologistic explanation presupposes an explanation by norms, rather than the other way around – for how else, other than by recourse to the norms and facts of the situation, can one know that Obama surely meant to say forty-seven? This paper, however, does not argue for the primacy of explanation-by-norms.

To clarify, the problem with slips, when it comes to psychologistic explanation of action, is the complexity of the situation. To know exactly why somebody did what they did when they did something they did not mean to do is an exhausting endeavor. Any number of factors may be involved. Yet, we do understand automatically what the agent did as an *approximation* of what ought to have been done in the given situation given facts and normative context. Thus, we can explain it *as* a slip through explanation-by-norms. Something that is not open to the belief/desire theorist because an action *cannot* be an *approximation to a belief/desire-pair*, that just means you have the wrong belief/desire-pair.

The belief/desire theorist could of course object that this does not prove that there does not conceivably exist a psychological explanation of the action, and the belief/desire theorist would be correct in this. There does exist a psychological explanation of slips, even if complex. But just as actions are psychological phenomena, they are sociological ones as well, and the action can be explained as such, through a recourse to norms and facts.

Slips are not actions

The belief/desire model is meant to explain intentional action, but performing a slip is doing something one does not intend. Slips seem to fall outside the scope of what the belief/desire model seeks to explain.

Admittedly, slips *per se* are not intentional, any more than any other isolated mistakes. That does not mean however that the performance as a whole is not intentional. Slips are thoroughly intertwined with intentional action: though they themselves are (clearly) not intended, they occur within a sequence of behavior that is. While one has diminished control over them, *some* sense of control remains, particularly within the larger context. Consider linguistic mistakes: the agent stays in control of her speech; she does not speak gibberish. In the case of verbal illusions, the agent intends – in some sense – to say the words she does; it is only that her words do not strictly reflect her intended meaning, knowledge, and competence.

The vacuity objection

One could argue that explanation-by-norms does not *explain* anything: it merely offers re-description. Even if that is true, explanation-by-norms finds good company with some of the most famous action theories around: e.g., Anscombe's and Davidson's. To be sure, re-description does not always aid explanation – but often enough it does. So e.g. the rising of an arm could, given the appropriate circumstances, be re-described as trying to catch a ball, signaling to a team player to pass the ball, preparing in case the ball comes one's way, etc.

However, though it has elements of re-description – it re-describes what an agent does as a mistake – explanation-by-norms amounts to more than this. It characterizes the erroneous performance as approximating to what the relevant norms prescribe, thereby placing it into the larger picture.

The scope objection

One could insist that belief/desire explanations are universally applicable but that some such explanations must be given in terms of a modified (or "shallow") belief. So e.g. Sorensen (2011) has suggested that Obama's slip could be explained by appeal to such a belief: Obama has no "deep" belief that there are fifty-seven states, but tiredness, perhaps along with other factors, makes him believe it in the moment.

This solution could work, but it seems *ad hoc*: one does not normally appeal to "shallow" beliefs for understanding actions. Supposing that the agent is acting on a "shallow" rather than "deep" belief – that she makes a mistake – is based on the normative constraints of the situation, thereby echoing explanation-by-norms. To conclude that an action was caused by a "shallow" belief, one must already have understood what the agent did as a mistake – making the appeal to "shallow" belief seemingly superfluous.

The primacy objection

I have argued that explanation-by-norms does not take the form of Davidsonian rationalization: i.e., explanation can be offered without attempting to make sense of the action in light of the agent's immediate beliefs and desires. The concern is that belief/desire explanations nevertheless remain fundamental; explanation-by-norms are parasitic on them.

To argue this, the defender of belief/desire primacy needs to show that the agent who is subject to explanation-by-norms has some relevant belief/desire pair that can plausibly be construed as the most fundamental explanation for her behavior. Mirroring Smith's reply to Hursthouse, this amounts to the claim that explanation-by-norms can always be reduced to belief/desire explanation – where, perhaps, the desire is to abide by the relevant norms, and the belief is that performing a certain action is the best means of doing so. Such a reduction is necessary to make sense of how the relevant norms are operative in the agent's behavior.

That claim notwithstanding, citing such belief/desire pairs does not suffice to explain slips. Whatever belief/desire explanation one produces must be supplemented by further factors

explaining the failure of the action to subserve the relevant desire: Obama was tired or nervous, the doctor's sentence was syntactically complex, etc. The belief/desire primacist can respond that this picture is consistent with thinking of belief/desire explanation as the most fundamental.

However, making that claim is tantamount to sweeping slips under the rug. The problem is that one misses a core aspect of explanation-by-norms. Its attention is not on the agent's psychology but on her actions. It explains those actions by placing them into context with relevant norms, related facts, and established patterns of behavior. Explanation-by-norms shifts the theoretical perspective from the psychological to the normative and the social. It takes no position on what is going on "inside" the agent – something that may, or may not, correctly be theorized through the belief/desire model.

Conclusion

Explanation-by-norms and belief/desire explanation are not incompatible; indeed, they can fruitfully be combined in various ways, as I have tried to point toward. My preferred view on action explanation is pluralistic. That said, I believe that the belief/desire model is not quite as important as often supposed, and belief/desire explanation far from universally applicable -- particularly in the case of slips.

Such pluralism is, of course, unacceptable to a theorist like Smith who thinks it crucial for the very possibility of having a philosophy of action that the account of action explanations be unified (Smith, 1998). Needless to say, I do not think that such a unified account can ever be provided – although, *pace* Smith, I do not take this to be in any way devastating for philosophy of action. Certainly, what happens when one acts can often if not usually be described by appeal to psychological states like beliefs and desires – but what happens can *equally well* be described by appeal to norms, interacting with habits, memories, plans, character traits, cultural traits, other patterns of thought and behavior, etc.[18]

Acknowledgements:

I want to thank Santiago Amaya, Henrik Andersson, Dan Egonsson, Olav Gjelsvik, Ingvar Johansson, Katarzyna Paprzycka, Joel Parthemore, Björn Petersson, Wlodek Rabinowicz, Andreas Seland, Caj Strandberg and Frank Zenker for valuable feedback. I am also grateful to the audience at Rutgers University where I presented an early version, a special thank you to Robert Matthews who commented on my talk.

Endnotes:

1. The origin of this view is normally attributed to David Hume, so it is sometimes called "the Humean story" (M. Smith, 1998). Probably the most famous contemporary source of the view is Donald Davidson's 1963 paper "Actions, Reasons and Causes", reprinted in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (2001).
2. J. E. Malpas (1992) offers an excellent introduction to Davidson's account.
3. See M. E. Bratman's (1987) theory of planning agency.
4. For an attempt at explaining actions in terms of habits see T. Lekan (2007) and B. Pollard (2006).
5. Exceptions include S. Amaya (2013), G. E. M. Anscombe (2000), J. L. Austin (1956-1957) and K. Peabody (2005).

6. At least, it seems farfetched to do so. That said, see the discussion on Sorensen's notion of *shallow beliefs* in the last part of the paper.
7. ...If noticed: many slips, including so-called *slips of the tongue*, go undetected.
8. See S. Amaya (2013) for a thorough treatment of the distinction between slips and other forms of behavior.
9. What is interesting about so-called *Freudian slips* – one kind of "slip of the tongue" – is the suggestion from Freud and others that they can be explained by hidden beliefs and desires. In that case, they are not slips in the way I am intending.
10. For a similar strategy, see R. Grandy (1973).
11. Obama's speech is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpGH02DtIws.
12. President Donald Trump's famous Tweet about "covfefe" seems to belong to this latter category.
13. For more details on this particular case see Cook and Stevenson (2010), Dabrowska (2004), Libermann (2009), Wason and Reich (1979).
14. Such invocation is very common in Western culture. Roland Barthes (2009: 77) writes: "...the supermen of science-fiction always have something reified about them. So has Einstein: he is commonly signified by his brain". He continues (2009: 78-79): "popular imagery faithfully expresses this: *photographs* of Einstein show him standing next to a blackboard covered with mathematical signs of obvious complexity; but *cartoons* of Einstein (the sign that he has become a legend) show him chalk still in hand, and having just written on an empty blackboard, as if without preparation, the magic formula of the world".
15. See Leif Wenar's 2017 SEP-article on John Rawls.
16. The basic structure is complex. There are contradictory norms like norms saying one should not smoke because of health issues, and norms saying you ought to smoke because it is part of what it means to be a rock'n'roll kind of guy. There are also people that consciously act against social norms. However, their actions are easily understood by appeal to norms. The norms they break are the very parameters against which their acts make sense, had not the norms been there, they would have had nothing to protest.
17. Dancy credits Joseph Raz for these sorts of argument (Dancy, 2004: 124, Raz, 1986: 142-3).
18. Though Hume is commonly described as a "pure" belief/desire theorist, Annette Baier (2009) has written an excellent article showing that he was not as narrow-minded in his action explanation as is often thought.

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Virtue Ethics and Meaningful Work: A Contemporary Buddhist Approach

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Abstract:

This study adds to the existing literature on meaningful work by presenting a contemporary virtue-focused Buddhist view. While a virtue-ethics interpretation of Buddhism is now widely accepted and has been applied to several issues, not much has been written about meaningful work using a Buddhist-Aristotelian comparative framework. To develop a Buddhist approach, I draw heavily on the works of Buddhist scholars, particularly in the West who use a virtue framework in interpreting Buddhism. The aims of my essay are dual. The first is to articulate a straightforward application of Buddhism to the contemporary ethical discussion of meaningful work. The second is to discuss the similarities, clarify the differences, and demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses relative to each other of the Buddhist and the Western virtue theories. In my analysis, I argue that while Buddhism is not an alternative to Western virtue theory, it offers significant contributions to the latter's approach to meaningful work and even corrective to some of its limitations. Integration of Buddhism in our theorizing of meaningful work from a virtue-ethics perspective helps us to better understand ourselves and the virtues that we cultivate in the workplace and develop a holistic and cross-cultural conceptualization that is relevant to our global economy.

Keywords: Meaningful Work, Virtue Ethics, Buddhist Ethics, Aristotle, MacIntyre, Business Ethics, Work Ethics, Buddhism, Cross-Cultural Ethics, Comparative Philosophy, Philosophy.

Meaningful work (MW) is defined as the degree of significance that employees believe their work possesses. Although it is an established area of scholarship, researchers who have studied this topic still encounter a number of difficulties. To begin with, there is little consensus on what exactly makes work meaningful. From a philosophical standpoint, the search for meaning is an essential part of being human. Thus, MW according to Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009, 657) "finds its roots in the humanities rather than in management theory." They also (2009, 508) express the need to consider differences in cultural and spiritual beliefs in studying MW. Most studies in this area are Western-centric, with very few attempt to consider non-western and cross-cultural perspectives (Michaelson et al. 2014). The question on whether MW varies across cultures is rarely addressed. In this global economy where major companies outsource their production in different countries and people of diverse cultural and religious background interact in the workplace, there is a growing need to compare and contrast how different cultures view MW.

Since work shapes the kind of person that we are and plays an important role in our wellbeing, some theorists have adopted a virtue-theory approach to MW using an Aristotelian-MacIntyrean framework. For lack of a better term, I call this western virtue theory (WVT). My essay presents a contemporary virtue-focused Buddhist perspective on MW. Various studies have demonstrated the relevance of Buddhism to managerial practice and the impacts of Buddhist analysis of human cognition to modern psychology have also been explored. Buddhism is an important cultural component not only of Asian countries but of other societies that have come in contact with it. By contemporary Buddhism, I refer to an approach to Buddhism that results from its encounter with western philosophy and "seeks to make itself understood in modern times and to respond to contemporary conditions." (Whitehill 1994, 1) To develop a Buddhist approach, I draw heavily on the works of Buddhist scholars, particularly in the West who use a virtue-framework in interpreting Buddhist ethics.[1] According to Keown (1992, 21) "Aristotle's ethical theory appears to be the closest Western analogue to Buddhist ethics, and is an illuminating guide to an understanding of the Buddhist moral system." Aristotle's argument is predicated on the claim that we have a final end (*telos*) and virtues enable us to achieve it. For the Buddha this goal is *nibbana* – the escape from the karmic cycle of rebirth. "In Buddhism virtuous choices are rational choices motivated by a desire for what is good and deriving their validation ultimately from the final good for man (nirvana)" (Keown 1992, 221). *Nibbana* is the realization of both the highest morality and unconditioned reality. Both Aristotle and Buddhism postulate the human potential for perfection through practices of self-development. Rather than a set of moral rules, Buddhists interpret the 8-fold path as a list of virtues in conjunction with the doctrine of the middle way.

The aims of my essay are dual. The first is to articulate a direct application of Buddhism to contemporary discussion of MW. The second is to discuss the similarities, clarify the differences, and demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses relative to each other of the Buddhist and the WVT perspectives. In my analysis, I argue that while Buddhism is not an alternative to WVT, it offers significant contributions to WVT's approach to MW and even corrective to some of its limitations. Integration of Buddhism in our theorizing of MW from a virtue-ethics perspective helps us to better understand ourselves and the virtues that we cultivate in the workplace and develop a holistic and cross-cultural conceptualization that is relevant to our global economy.

WVT AND MEANINGFUL WORK

Virtue (*arête* or excellence) is a stable disposition to act, desire, and feel in a way that helps us achieve our *telos* by enabling us to fulfill our distinctive human function. For Aristotle, our actions when habitually performed have a major influence in the kind of persons we become and in our overall wellbeing. His thesis rests on the notion that human beings, like all other things have a particular *telos* which is found in their proper function. Having a rational soul, the human function is to think and act in accordance with right reason. Thus he distinguishes virtues as virtues of action (moral) and of thinking (intellectual). Virtues enable us to live a flourishing life (*eudaimonia*).

Nicomachean Ethics explains *eudaimonia* as the highest form of activity that satisfies all the conditions for human good. The ideal life is that which is devoted to intellectual contemplation (*theória*). Excellence in moral action lies in moderation. This refers to a choice lying in the mean relative to a situation as appropriately determined by practical wisdom (*phronesis*). *Phronesis* is one of the most important intellectual virtues, the latter includes wisdom (*sophia*), scientific knowledge (*episteme*), intuition (*nous*) and skill (*techne*). It is the complete virtue as it implies understanding the relationship between the universal good and particular circumstances and the capacity to figure out the appropriate response. "And it seems then to belong to someone with practical judgement to able to deliberate beautifully about things that are good and advantageous for himself." (Aristotle 2002, 106) *Phronesis* unifies all virtues and is a necessary condition for them because it involves our ability to perceive morally relevant factors.

According to Beadle, MacIntyre's notion of practice is of paramount importance if we are to understand employment as the setting to exercise virtue and achieve the good life. Virtue ethicists regard professions as the context in which practices occur. Following Aristotle, MacIntyre develops the concept of practice that provides the framework in which virtues are acquired. Practice is

> any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre 2007, 187)

Practice refers to activities that have standards of excellence and specific goals. It entails competence that comes as a result of training, discipline and commitment. Practices are distinct from skills. Skills do not admit innovation, contrary to practice. Compared to skills, practices have dynamically complex aims rather than fixed. Although MacIntyre does not speak of employment itself, he includes productive crafts (e.g. fishing) in his examples. Practices are human activities that serve as medium for human excellences. Every practice contains specific internal goods, i.e. goods valued for their own sake. They are "particular excellences or products realized through the activity of a particular practice, goods that cannot be gained without engaging in the activity of the practice itself." (Vodehnal 2010, 66-67) Internal goods are transformative. They are "goods of character that make a claim on our identity and give definition to life – they shape who we are and make us persons of a particular sort." (Muirhead 2004, 155-156).). An excellent portrait is the result of the actualization by the painter of the standards of excellence required in painting. The former also actualizes something else, the good of a certain life, e.g. "the painter's living out of a greater or lesser part of his or her life *as a painter*" (MacIntyre 2007, 190).

Virtues are acquired qualities that enable a person to achieve internal goods. "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which prevents us from achieving any such

goods." (MacIntyre 2007, 191) They are excellences that produce internal goods that include excellence in the product and the flourishing of the individual. The person who exercises virtue pursues a practice for the sake of its internal rather than external goods (e.g. fame, power, reputation, or money). Since what is required to excel in one profession is not the same in another, there are role-virtues that are specified within a framework of a given profession in contrast to everyday/ordinary virtues. Role-virtues are specific to a practice while ordinary virtues such as courage, patience, or temperance are needed for any practice.

"In order to survive, however, practices need to be housed within institutions which are concerned with external goods." (Fernando and Moore 2015, 186) External goods are the ends of institutions. They are goods in so far as they are instrumental in the actualization of internal goods. Unlike internal goods that are practice-specific, external goods are generic. MacIntyre warns against the corrupting effects of institutions, including corporations, that make workers focus on external goods rather than acquisition of virtues. While he recognizes the interdependence between internal and external goods (MacIntyre 1989, 35) as institutions provide the material goods and structural support for practices, he identifies an unavoidable tension between the goal/success of institutions and the integrity of practice so that it is always necessary to protect practices from the corrupting power of institutions.

"It is a part of practicing a particular profession that you deal with a particular kind of situation... and so virtues you display have to be in some way tailored to these situations, not a matter of going from one situation to another." (Annas 2015, 13) Role-virtues are more specific than ordinary virtues and are learned in a more particular way. They are found in a virtuous agent who exhibits competencies required for her profession. Role-virtues make ordinary virtues more precise while ordinary virtues are prototype virtues that anchors our moral thinking and alert us to possibilities of excess and deficiencies. The distinction is between being good in a role and being good qua human being. While Aristotle emphasizes the latter, his function (*ergon*) argument in *Nicomachean Ethics* begins by considering the different functions that humans are capable of such as flute playing or ship-building, and from this he inquires regarding our proper activity qua human beings. This shows that there is a connection between our proper or generic function as rational beings and our specific or role-related function, and this seems to be obvious for the very reason why we are capable of certain functions that require the use of reason is because we have a rational nature. Virtues have different application from one function/ role to another, and a truly virtuous person has the practical wisdom to know the difference.

MW enables us to develop our character and achieve our *telos*, which is not wealth, fame or power, but living "fulfilled lives in which we make the most of our talent and abilities." (Marchese et al. 2002, 149). It allows workers to practice deliberative and self-developing activities, requires application of intellectual virtues and provides decision making opportunities where workers can exercise their ability to search for the mean as well as to make sound moral judgment. "From an Aristotelian perspective, identifying and learning how to meet such challenges requires the exercise of the virtues" (Beadle, R. and Knight, K. 2012, 435). We perfect ourselves through work

and at the same time our work is perfected because of our virtues. Thus, all forms of exploitative labor such as slavery, indentured servitude, bonded labor and sweatshop production cannot be MW. But "Other things equal, a complex, interesting job that demands the use of skilled, practical judgement enhances the capacities and satisfaction of the worker, whereas a boring, unskilled job dulls the mind. The former is also likely to bring more recognition than the latter, providing the skilled worker with a source of self-esteem." (Sayer 2009, 2) MW contributes to the development of our potentialities. "We enjoy activities that are skilled, varied and complex more than simple, repetitive ones, and we may try to emulate others whose skills we admire." (Sayers 2009, 5) Work that does not provide opportunities for perfection and acquisition of virtues because either it is too tedious or it lacks room for the exercise of autonomy and judgment is non-eudaimonian and cannot be meaningful. Because virtue is not taught but rather self-learned through practice, virtuous work requires high job engagement, autonomy, and exercise of practical wisdom. For Arneson, MW "involves some development or exercise of the individual's intellectual or craft talents." (Arneson 1987, 522) MW must entail activities that are open ended rather than mechanical or determined, i.e. activities that allow a continuous dialectical process between the subject's intent and practice, and it is through this process that decision making, communication, and improvement of task take place (Walsh 1994). To be open ended requires performing complex roles that give opportunities for self-expression, innovation, critical thinking, and creativity.

BUDDHIST VIRTUE ETHICS

The term virtue has no exact equivalence in Buddhism. For Keown, the terms *kusala* (skillful or wholesome) and *akusala* (unskillful or unwholesome) are the Buddhist equivalent of good and bad respectively in virtue ethics. Whether an act is good or bad is determined by motive or intention (*cetana*). The Buddha says "Bhikkhus, whatever qualities are wholesome, partake of the wholesome, and pertain to the wholesome, all have the mind as their forerunner. Mind arises first followed by the wholesome qualities." (*Anguttara Nikaya* [*AN*] Bodhi 2012, 98) Intention in Buddhism has both affective and cognitive aspect as it refers to both motive and volition. For an act to be virtuous it must be well-motivated, well-intentioned, and wise. The act must be done from selfless motivation with the intention of the good of the other (compassion) and has good consequences (wisdom). Since mental intention plays a significant role in Buddhist ethics, meditation is essential for one to be ethical. It helps us explore deeply and clarify all our intentions. Cultivation of virtuous character entails three paths of purification: conduct (ethics), understanding (wisdom) and mind (meditation).

The term *kusala* also connotes "skillfulness." A virtuous act must be effective in bringing out the intended good results. Buddhist ethics requires "the need for skillfulness, fittingness, and appropriateness in applying morality to the situation." (Nelson 2009, 202). Good intention is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for virtuous acts, for the latter must ultimately lead to the realization of *nibbana*. Like WVT, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of wisdom in enabling the agent to decide and choose which means is effective in attaining *nibbana*. But it is not enough to do

good and avoid evil, because even good actions can lead to attachment. "When a *bhikkhu* is... Not attached, he does not tremble. Not trembling, he personally achieves *nibbana*." (*Mahanidana Sutta* [*MS*] Holder 2006, 38) One must eliminate attachment to all actions, whether good or bad. To realize *nibbana*, unwholesome thoughts of desire, hatred, fear and delusion which are the roots of evil actions must be purged (*Sigalovada Sutta* [*SS*] Holder 2006, 193). It is in this sense that Buddhism speaks of an *arahant* who is beyond karmic fruitfulness and has transcended all rebirths. Harvey (2000, 49) defines *nibbana* as the destruction of attachment.

As a moral theory, Buddhism "is not ultimately concerned with the development of individual virtues." (Case and Brohm 2013, 63) Virtue is the result of eliminating greed, hatred, and ignorance - the mental roots of unwholesome actions - by following the 8-fold path. Although one can find a list of virtues in Buddhist commentarial literature, some are for laypersons, others for monks and nuns and some are for more advanced practitioners, these are all extrapolated from the 8-Fold path. The Buddhist approach to moral cultivation is holistic since the path includes cognitive, ethical and meditative or affective aspects. The cognitive domain includes right view and understanding, ethics covers right speech, right action and right livelihood, and meditative pertains to right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Following tradition I take these three domains as the principal classification of Buddhist virtues: cognitive pertains to virtues of understanding, ethics to virtues of conduct, and meditation is the integration of the two (virtues of the mind). These virtues are not only instrumental good but good in themselves in the sense that they are constitutive of the highest good.

In terms of practice, these virtuous domains are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Ethics is intertwined with wisdom and meditation. To achieve enlightenment, the 8-fold path must be practiced simultaneously, rather than numerically or sequentially. Central in Buddhist ethics is the virtue of compassion to all beings which is usually formulated into five precepts or *sila*.[2] Rather than a set of rules, these precepts are taken as training guidelines that shape one's character. The idea is to develop them to the best of one's ability according to one's actual conditions. One must equally care for one's welfare and the welfare of others – to alleviate suffering itself regardless who is the one experiencing it. Living an upright life is necessarily connected to wisdom – understanding reality as it is: that all things are unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), non-substantial (*anatta*) and transitory (*anicca*). Wisdom is the best use of knowledge for establishing and achieving desired goals. Because it is accompanied by ethical reflection and meditation, "it refers both to an ability to act wisely in the conventional everyday world and to supra-mundane access to non-conventional truths" (Case and Brohm 2013, 61). Wisdom includes knowledge of the 4 noble truths (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 555). It eliminates all distortions, including personal prejudices and other defiling mental states. We see that the conflict between self and other is false or apparent because the truth is that there is no individual or non-relational self (*anatta* doctrine) (*Potthapada Sutta* [*PS*] Holder 2006, 145-146). What we designate as *self* is a contingent collection of conditioned processes that cannot exist independently. (*Samyutta Nikaya* [*SN*] Holder 2006, 83-86; *MS* Ibid., 36-38) One can accept the doctrine of *anatta* in theory, but it takes intensive meditation on no-self to fully overcome ego-

centeredness. With this view, cooperation and sharing, rather than competition and self-interest are the characteristic marks of rational action. "[A] wise person of great wisdom does not intend for his own affliction, or for the affliction of others, or for the affliction of both. Rather, when he thinks, he thinks only of his own welfare, the welfare of others, the welfare of both, and the welfare of the whole world." (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 555) Finally, virtues are also states of mind, cultivating them mentally through meditation predisposes one to act accordingly. Regulation of acting, thinking, and emoting depends more on meditation rather than habituation. Being truly virtuous requires constant mindfulness to the act being performed at present (*PS* Holder 2006, 134).

MW AS RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

Buddhism acknowledges the importance of work since it includes right livelihood in the 8-fold path. Because what is ethically right is also virtuous in virtue ethics, we can call right livelihood as virtuous livelihood, which is the Buddhist conception of MW. Unfortunately, the Buddha has little to say about right livelihood. Early Buddhism proscribes all kinds of economic activities for monks. The lack of focus on right livelihood reflects the tendencies in Buddhist tradition, especially during its earlier stage to emphasize monastic life as a means to *nibanna*, while life of a layperson is a means to attain better rebirth. "Still the Buddha did support and teach laypersons. No aspect of the Eightfold Path was barred to them" (Gowan 2003, p. 169). In addition, Buddhism manifests positive attitude toward wealth acquired through hard work. Buddhism does not condemn wealth, what it condemns is greed or craving which is the origin and condition of attachment. "Therefore, Ananda, just this is the root, the cause, the origin, the condition for attachment, namely craving." (*MS* Holder p. 30) Like Aristotle, the Buddha says that wealth cannot be an end in itself. The Buddha acknowledges possession of wealth, economic independence, and freedom from debt as legitimate forms of happiness for a householder. (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 665-666).

Buddhist scriptures usually define right livelihood by contrasting it with wrong livelihood**,** common examples of the latter are working as a butcher, armament maker, prostitute and in occupations that involve stealing, lying, and harming innocent beings. These trades lead to bad rebirths. They cultivate wrong habits that predispose one to break the precepts under the virtuous conduct in the 8-fold path. Wrong livelihood is an obstacle to enlightenment because it causes harm (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 1493) to people and to the environment, including the workers themselves through overwork or dehumanizing working conditions. Likewise, work that has to do with production and sale of superfluous luxury goods and inferior products that will need to be replaced in a short period of time belongs to this category as it makes us use natural resources for unnecessary purposes. Wrong livelihood is also defined as any economic activity that is based on trickery or greed. We can include here insurance and accounting fraud, false advertising, doing harmful experiments on animals and work that depletes the environment. "Buddhism gives freedom to everyone in seeking wealth. All people have the right to choose an occupation according to their skills and ability, but that occupation should be within the frame of ethics." (Numkanisorn 2012, p. 46)

Distinguishing right from wrong livelihood requires wisdom (discernment) and meditation (heightened awareness) on how we choose to earn a living.

Positively, right livelihood is that which is free from the influxes of desire, anger, and delusion. As something inseparable from the other elements of the 8-fold path (*AN* Bodhi 2012 1503-1505), it must be wise, ethical, and mindful. It includes occupations that are wholesome, beneficial, skillful and effective (in terms of quality of goods and services) in producing positive effects, i.e. liberation from suffering and spiritual growth for the individual and the community. Right livelihood entails the wise (i.e. efficient and careful) use of natural goods in order to satisfy the authentic needs of our community now and in the future. Right livelihood must also be done with mindfulness. This means consciously choosing the work that we do, being committed to it and doing it well, even if at times we do not enjoy what we are doing. We must develop the skills and abilities needed to do our work competently. Mindfulness "is cultivated by purposefully paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment's thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacities for relaxation, attention, awareness, and insight." (Whitmayer 1994, 252) In our daily work, we can be fully present in the actual tasks we are doing, and in the process, become more mindful of our own thoughts, emotions and things we ordinarily do not notice. Although it is difficult to maintain this level of awareness, we can find opportunities to cultivate this virtue while doing some of the repetitive aspects of our work. "A further criterion for a justly applied right livelihood" according to Baumann (1998, 131), is that it "should not be carried out alone, but jointly with others. This feature provides the possibility of working together in a group with people who share the same ideals and thus encourage and inspire each other."

Right livelihood is a setting for the cultivation virtues. For instance, we can cultivate right speech in our corporate communications by being truthful and respectful. We must not exaggerate or embellish our words. The Buddha says that our words are powerful, they can hurt even unintentionally. In our company parties and celebration, we can practice moderation. In dealing with our clients, we have the opportunity to serve them honestly and lovingly. The presence of adversity, conflict and failure in the workplace enables us to exercise diligence and equanimity that make us resilient to such challenges.

It is true that employment involves roles since we relate to each other in the workplace according to the rules of expectations that come from our position in the firm's structure. From a Buddhist perspective, it is not so much because of our roles that we develop our specific human capacities that make our livelihood virtuous/meaningful. Rather, it is because in economic activity, we enter into a relationship with our fellow humans and the natural world. Every time we practice virtues such as compassion or sympathetic joy, we do something incremental to our character, regardless of the outcomes. We become the kind of person who has the wisdom to apply virtues in our daily interaction. In Buddhism, virtues are situation-specific but they are not role-specific. What takes prominence is the relationship between the practitioner and other persons. It is impossible to practice the virtues of compassion, non-harming, or loving kindness in a non-relational context.

Even when one meditates on these virtues, she first meditates on how they are practiced to oneself, then projected progressively to friends and family, to strangers, then to enemies. Through work, we also become a part of a business organization that makes use of natural goods, establishing a relationship between us and the natural world. Many companies engage in activities that directly or indirectly exploit the environment.

Without virtues, any type of livelihood will degenerate into wrong livelihood, causing us to be attached to our careers, achievements, and wealth. Any type of work can generate greed and attachment. There are many factors in our working life that reinforce our egoism and alienation, not only form our fellow humans but from other sentient beings too. We face challenges that may cause anger or frustration, these have to be tempered by equanimity. The competitive nature of doing business in the free market can be destructive to ourselves, to our community, and to our environment unless we practice compassion and loving kindness. Failures can cause depression, and success over-confidence. Even socializing and friendship in the workplace, which are focused on human relationship, are often "reduced to a kind of networking that facilitates getting ahead." (Muirhead 2004, 99) With regard to the practice of virtue, right livelihood has a dual role: it gives us opportunities to practice virtues, but as it happens, virtues also enable us to cope with many of challenges we encounter in the workplace.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

At the outset, the Buddhist right livelihood is in harmony with the human fulfillment model of MW which WVT advocates where work is considered as a teleological activity having the perfection of human potential as its final end. Both descriptive and normative, Buddhism and WVT avoid subjectivity in understanding MW without imposing a single normative definition by considering the worker's actual conditions and purpose or ends. Rather than a subjective notion, meaning is intrinsic to certain types of work because it relates with activities involved in their performance, either because these activities promote excellence or alleviate suffering. The two perspectives provide adequate and relevant account that distinguishes MW from a non-meaningful one, while avoiding the pitfall of a circular definition (MW is the kind of work that workers find meaningful) found at times in a purely empirical approach. Because virtues involve structured activities directed at specific aims, virtue ethics is amenable to empirical research in so far as those activities can be identified and measured, including comparative assessment of virtues develop by people engage in the same practice but work in different companies. Both Buddhism and WVT view work in a positive light and articulate evaluative judgment regarding noble/good or enlightened mode of life that rules out certain occupations as unworthy of human pursuit. But despite the difficulties we encounter in our workplace, the latter could be a place where we can become fully developed. Together with the 8-fold path, right livelihood leads to our moral, affective, and cognitive transformation. Like WVT, Buddhism gives emphasis on intrinsic goods derived from work as craving for external goods can cause suffering (*Dham.* 334-35 Wallis 2004, 70). While Buddhism recognizes the value of external goods, what is more important is the acquisition of internal goods. The Buddha says that what is significant is

not the increase/decrease of wealth or fame, but cultivation of character (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 02).

Although Buddhism contains some elements of WVT, there are substantive differences between the two. "For the Buddha, our unenlightened nature is deeply flawed, and only extraordinary measures can overcome this. Aristotle's conception of human nature is quite different: the virtues develop our nature, but they do not radically transform it." (Gowan 2003, 163) In WVT, *eudaimonia* has a positive content, it is not merely the absence of suffering. Buddhism is not only teleological but soteriological: the ultimate end is liberation or *nibbana*. Aristotle's account of a good life is based on his anthropological view of a well-functioning rational individual that gives emphasis on reasoning as the prime human activity. "The good of human being then, will be exercising that capacity well." (Pakaluk 2005, p. xii) Intellectual virtues are considered the best and complete virtue. "Aristotle appears to claim that happiness is to be identified with just one good, that of philosophical contemplation" (Pakaluk 2005, xii) or *bios theoretikos*, the mode of existence that distinguishes us from animals. (Lysenko 2007, 65)[3] While there are those who interpret *Nicomachean Ethics* as expounding an inclusivist view that defines *eudaimonia* as comprising of different kinds of activity, the notion that speculative thought is the highest good remains central. As MacIntyre (2007, 219) points out, "the good life for man is the life spent in seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is." Unlike the Buddha who directly addressed the question, Aristotle and MacIntyer were not concerned with the topic of MW. The practices of definitive work, as understood by Macintyre are not reducible to work as experienced in employment relationship. Complexity is central to practice and many of MacIntyre's examples are drawn from fine arts, sciences, and games – they are not readily compatible with market or organizational bureaucratization. If one makes a straightforward application of the notion of practice to MW, primary consideration would be the on the "standards of excellence and the systematic extension of human powers to achieve excellence" (Moore 2005, 250). While practice involves more than skills, a number of virtue ethicists consider the complexity of skills in determining MW (Clark 2017; Yeoman, 2014; Moore 2005, Simon 1997; Walsh, 1994).

If virtue is excellence in human function, MW must involve high degree of understanding and mastery to promote the flourishing of human powers, especially the intellectual ones. Many individuals however, either through lack of education, talent or both, are not fit to share in the internal goods that some types of work offer. In addition, not every work is sufficiently complex to qualify as practice. Blue and lower white-collar jobs that are boring, too simple, mechanical, and do not involve much decision making or intellectual stimulation would fall short of these standards. But to eliminate them will lead to massive unemployment as they provide decent livelihood to many semi/unskilled workers. Because of automation, even professionals engage in some form of routine activities. Most tasks can become repetitive when done frequently over a period of time. Distribution of less challenging work as proposed by Sayer (2009) does not really eliminate repetitive work, it only makes the latter available for more workers. While this may satisfy our demand for distributive justice as Sayer (2009) argues, the issue of trying to cope with or make sense of these tasks is still a challenge.

Contrary to WVT, Buddhism does not speak of human's proper function (*ergon*) in theorizing virtue. The foundation of Buddhist ethics is the reality of suffering. Rather than habituation, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of meditation or spiritual formation as a necessary condition for the acquisition of virtues. Because of the absence of the *ergon* argument, Buddhism avoids the *areteic* tendencies of WVT.[4] As an integral part of 8-foldpath, every productive manual or intellectual activity that qualifies as right livelihood has internal goods in the sense that it shapes our character and is an essential part of a life well lived, even if it is not complex enough to count as practice. The most important aspect of MW in Buddhism is that it alleviates suffering. It does not matter whether it involves higher skills or not. In Buddhism according to Whitmayer (1994, 255), MW "is interesting, absorbing work. Not so much because it is exciting, glamorous work, but more because the mindfulness practice involved makes it possible to be fully present in the work, whatever its day-to-day reality might be." Nonetheless, this does not mean that no measure should be done to change the conditions of employees on the production-line through improvement in work design, job rotation or reduced working hours, especially if their condition is deplorable. Nor does this imply that we should resign ourselves to jobs that are below our talents or abilities even if a more complex and challenging occupations are available. The Buddhist goal of alleviating suffering applies to all beings, including workers themselves.

A common criticism against WVT is that "it emphasizes the goodness of the agent's own life and character." (Walker and Ivanhoe 2007, 7) Aristotle of course thinks that a virtuous person is one who has considerable concern for the good of others. While the goal in WVT is the development of one's character, the person for Aristotle is a political animal who has the ability to regard the good of the other as one's own. He further adds that humans have a natural friendship for each other (Aristotle 2002, 144). Both MacIntyre and Aristotle stress the importance of community in character formation as virtues are practiced in a social context. Developing virtues needs community support. Individual flourishing can only take place in a peaceful and orderly society so that there is an interdependence between the flourishing of the individual and the society where she lives. *Eudaimonia* is first achieved through the combination of internal goods we acquire in practices we engage in, but MacIntyre also adds the significance of the common good through which the individual good is achieved since practice is a cooperative human activity. "Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it. Now the virtues are those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationships to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices." (MacIntyre 2007, 191)

However, the Buddhist virtue of universal compassion for all sentient beings is more inclusive than WVT's regard for the common good. Aristotle does not speak of universal compassion in the way Buddhism speaks of it. He does not include compassion in his list of virtues (although he considers friendship as a virtue).[5] Buddhist virtues, not only in the moral domain of the 8-fold path but the derivative ones such as compassion, loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, and equanimity (*Kalama Sutta*, Holder 2006) are relationship-oriented. What they promote is not

necessarily professional excellence but better human relationship in and outside of the workplace. This does not mean that professional excellence is unimportant. An incompetent physician for example, can cause harm to her patients. A virtuous physician is not only competent, she is also compassionate. Further in considering what is MW from a Buddhist perspective, we have to look at the consequences of our actions, not just to the human community but to the environment as a whole. The external goods we create though work, if they are used to benefit others are essential part of MW, even if they are not goods internal to our profession.[6] It is only when we pursue external goods for our selfish gratification that they become obstacles to MW. Buddhism rules out certain types of work as non-meaningful because they are harmful regardless of the complexity of skills or high intellectual challenges that they provide (e.g. production of violent video games, forgery, manufacture of nuclear weapons). On the other hand, work that includes menial tasks like cooking or sweeping floors is highly valued when performed with mindfulness and in the spirit of service.

Buddhism and WVT agree regarding the instrumental value of external goods and their corrupting influences that we have to wary about. But even internal goods for the Buddha can lead to suffering. Many professionals are so attached to their work, causing them to neglect their own wellbeing and the welfare of their families. The Buddha teaches: "Do not be attached to what is pleasing. Not seeing what is pleasing is painful as is seeing the unpleasing.... There are no bounds for those people for whom there is no notion of pleasing and unpleasing." (*Dham.* 210-211 Wallis 2004, 46) Our job roles are only a superficial aspect of who we are and do not constitute our true identity. They can hinder us from our ultimate end if we become attached to them. Buddhism does not pay much attention to the distinction between internal and external goods in relation to MW, unlike MacIntyre who views the two goods as almost diametrically opposed. "Only reluctantly does MacIntyre concede that practices might have vicious effects on the larger society. Because he focuses mainly on the way practices constitute the good life for those who participate in them, he tends to neglect the relation between internal goods and the common good." (Muirhead 2004, 69) It is not that there is an 'inherent' conflict between internal or external goods that is the issue, but the motivational hold of external goods on workers, oftentimes reinforced by management itself. The excessive valuation of external rewards, the practice of linking the latter with the (intellectual) complexity of work, and the devaluing of front-line jobs make work all about earning a living rather than finding fulfillment.

While WVT considers the importance of our social nature since flourishing cannot be a purely individual endeavor, the central ethical goal is still one's own virtue or flourishing, which may be interpreted to suggest that a person who desires virtue is motivated by egoism. WVT generates what Rosso et al (2010, 102) call a self-oriented perspective that "does not do justice to the relational nature of experience at work." (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003, 94) Rosso et al (2010) criticize the overreliance on an independent conceptualization of the self of western orientation in management research. "In contrast an interdependent conception of the self (typical of Eastern cultural orientation) which conceives of the self as fundamentally interconnected with others might suggest that greater interdependence is more meaningful for people than the

pursuit of individual goals." (Rosso et al. 2010, 99) According to Ho (1995, 128.) the view of "self-contained individualism, characterized by firm self-nonself boundaries, personal control, and an exclusionary conception of the person or self; this psychology is dominant in U.S. society today." Each person is an individuated self with rights and privileges that need to be protected. One problem with this is that it may lead to the view that management and worker relationship is adversarial "because individuals within the organization are viewed as separate, autonomous and independent of one another, playing the win-lose or zero sum game of controlling available resources." (Kanungo 1992, 421) How we manage employees depends on how we view human beings.

In Buddhism, persons are historically situated beings embedded in mutually dependent relationships. With its *anatta* doctrine, an *egoistic* interpretation of virtue ethics, even if misleading is not possible. Buddhism calls for a radical transformation by challenging our conventional notion of an isolated and independent self. But Buddhist altruism does not imply a complete denial of oneself. One must equally care for one's welfare and the welfare of others. A statement attributed to the Buddha is "Whoever loves himself will never harm another." Good acts can have self and other-regarding motives as the two are not inherently opposed. Moreover, Buddhism teaches that all beings are interconnected in the natural processes of birth, suffering, old, age, and death. "Individual wellbeing cannot be separated from the wellbeing of all." (Swearer 1998, 92)[7] The Buddha considers the person who is practicing virtues for his own welfare and for the welfare of others as more preeminent than a person who is practicing for the welfare of others but not for herself. (*AN* Bodhi 2012, 477)

What takes primacy in Buddhism is not how we cultivate and perfect the competencies required for our professional roles, but how we relate with each other. It is not that Buddhism is against the development of human talents and abilities, but this is not sufficient in determining MW. We need certain skills to do our work effectively or create harmonious relationships. However, what is essential is not only the role of virtues in facilitating excellence in profession, but how virtues establish good relationships at work and improve other lives. Rather than role-oriented virtues what Buddhism emphasizes are relationship-virtues. Many managers may not share the metaphysical commitments of Buddhism but it is a fact that in today's global economy where most things are interconnected, no work is accomplished in complete isolation without connecting the worker with other persons and with the natural world. The dominance of relationship-virtues such as loyalty, cooperation, compassion, tolerance, patience and empathy has been empirically verified in companies that operate in regions that are heavily influenced by Buddhism. (Fernando and Moore 2015) There are evidence-based studies that indicate how harmonious interpersonal relationship in the workplace, perceiving one's job to benefit some greater good, and work-life balance are positively connected with MW (Fouche 2017; Fourie 2015; Munn 2013; Steger, et al 2012; Marques 2010; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Service to the community is identified as a source of meaning for what many degrade as *dirty work*, e.g. grave digger or garbage collector (Klerk 2005). Michaelson et al. (2014) also identify company's prosocial impact as a source of MW. Cartwright and Holmes (2006) observe that majority of employees consider friendly colleagues and close working relationship as more important than

money. On the other hand, rather than any specific job task, a common source of frustration among employees is antagonistic relationships in the workplace. Many employees resign because they could not take an environment of constant pressure and harassment. Based on their research findings, Wrzesniewski et al (2003, 129) conclude that "The interpersonal dynamics that unfold between people at work create powerful contexts in which work meanings are composed." In many companies at present, much emphasis is given on the so-called hard skills such as cognitive and technical abilities in job hiring and career development because these skills are directly connected to one's function/role in the company. Few studies have specifically examined interpersonal and relationship virtues, which are called soft skills, as sources of MW, especially in non-Western societies.

CONCLUSION

While Buddhism gives more emphasis on relationship-virtues, I do not see irreconcilable conflict between Buddhism and WVT as long as our specific occupational roles and the virtues that we exercise on account of them are not separated from our goal to pursue the good life, not only for our individual self but for our community and for all sentient beings. To further synthesize the two ethics, we need to revise the notion of excellence in WVT to include not just mastery of skills or complexity of work. Standards of excellence of MW should incorporate the quality of our relationships in the workplace and how the goods and services we create satisfy human necessities rather than desires. They should also take into account the overall effects of our productive activities to the environment.

Since motivation is important in WVT, the latter agrees with Buddhism in giving consideration to the relation between actions and mental states. Although Aristotle does not speak of meditation, he emphasizes the importance of developing intellectual virtues. The practice of meditation can help cultivate these virtues. WVT tends to undermine work that "is devoid of opportunities for the performance of eduaimonian activity." (Walsh 1994, p. 243) On the other hand, Buddhism locates the ethical good of MW both in the activities and in personal relationships in the workplace. Under the rubric of right livelihood, there is no need to distinguish different types of employment or job roles. This makes employment itself as a kind of practice that requires virtues so that we can experience enlightenment in our working life. In Buddhism, we must not only be wary of the corrupting influences of external goods, even internal goods can lead to attachment. We cannot be considered virtuous in the Buddhist sense if we succeed in our professional life but not outside of it. This does not imply that there cannot be any conflict between our professional and personal lives or between role-virtues related to professional excellence and relationship-virtues, but I do not see any reason why such conflict should be inherent.

Consideration of Buddhism in the deliberation of MW from a virtue-ethics perspective leads to a broader, inclusive, and holistic framework because it calls for integration of our professional, interpersonal, and spiritual life. Buddhism offers the possibility of changing our attitude toward work and cultivating wisdom to discern ways to improve working conditions and create a more compassionate economic system for all beings.

Endnotes:

1. I make no claim of presenting with finality *The Buddhist Philosophy* of MW. "Since Buddhism is an amorphous movement with no clear hierarchy or locus of authority, it is difficult to make authoritative statements of the kind 'The Buddhist view on issue x is...' without qualification." (Keown 2004, p. 174) Neither do I intend to represent any particular school of Buddhism. The term Buddhism does not refer to a single and systematic body of teaching, but is rather made up of historically and culturally diverse sects and perspectives that evolved from the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama.
2. "Buddhist cultivates moral virtue by observing ethical precepts, the most common of which are the 'five virtues' (pañca-sīlāni; BW.172–4). The avowal of each of these begins 'I undertake the rule of training to abstain from... '. The five abstentions are from: (i) 'onslaught on [i.e. killing] living beings', (ii) 'taking what is not given', (iii) 'misconduct concerning sense-pleasures', (iv) 'false speech', and (v) 'alcoholic drink or drugs that are an opportunity for heedlessness'." (Harvey 2013, pp. 268-69)
3. "Nevertheless, Keown's argument for the parallel between Buddhist and Aristotelian ethics is problematic given that Aristotle's *phronesis* (prudential judgment or sense of appropriateness) is primary an aristocratic mastery, an accomplishment for the practical householder and active citizen, whereas Buddhist moral skillfulness (Pali: kusala) transcends the *ekos* and polis to a kind of freedom in relation to people and things." (Nelson 2009, 203)
4. "[T]he Aristotelian word *arête*, [which] is translated both as virtue and excellence helps in the realisation that, in practical terms, this would mean endeavouring to produce the best of which the individual is capable. Thus the marketing manager would design and execute not just a marketing plan but *the best* marketing plan of which she was capable. And, bearing in mind the virtue of *phronesis* (practical wisdom), the concept of "best" would involve not just a plan that was conceptually and creatively excellent but one that would "deliver" as far as the organisation was concerned." (Moore 2005, 249)
5. See Aristotle 2002, 143-45.
6. In WVT, external goods are genuine goods. But unlike internal goods that are goods of excellence, external goods are goods of effectiveness.
7. See doctrine of *paticcasamuppada* (*SN* Holder 2006, 83).

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Same-Sex Marriage not an Equal Rights Issue, Yet

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Abstract:

The present paper takes its point of departure from "McDonough's Logical Argument" (hereafter MLA) that "gays" have traditionally had the same marital rights as "straights", namely to marry one eligible person of the opposite gender. The present paper argues that, although it might not seem so at first glance, MLA is consistent with full legal rights being accorded to "Same Sex Marriage" (SSM). That is, MLA takes no stand on the substantive issue whether SSM should be legalized, but is merely an attempt to make a purely logical point about the "individuation" (the precise specification) of the right to marry. An illuminating social science fiction example is provided to show that MLA is neutral on the legalization of SSM. The paper argues that philosophical argument *per se* is largely impotent on these kinds of issues, and that the justification for legalizing SSM is to be found, rather, in the democratic process.

Keywords: Same-sex marriage, equality, miscegenation, limitations of philosophical argument, democratic process

The blessedness of being little.
Shakespeare, *Henry VIII* (IV, ii, 66)

In response to an editorial in *The Economist* in 2004 that claimed that the case for allowing same-sex marriage (SSM) "begins with equality pure and simple", Richard McDonough provides what he calls a "logical" argument that SSM is *not* an equal rights issue. He argues that "gays" have traditionally had exactly the same marriage rights as "straights", namely, the right to marry any *eligible* person (not underage, not already married to someone else, not a member of the immediate family, etc.) of the opposite sex, and many "gays" have exercised this right, e.g., Rock Hudson was gay but he married Phyllis Gates and many other "gays" have done the same. Hudson was not permitted to marry anyone of his same gender but no "straights" had that right either. Call this McDonough's Logical Argument or MLA! Various objections have been raised against MLA by Held (2007; 2009; 2013), Rajczi (2008), Drabek (2014), Reitan (2014), and Chambers (2107). These objections are mistaken, but for an unusual sort of reason. As a certain kind of logical point, MLA explicitly states that it does not argue for *any* substantial conclusion in this connection: It "does not argue against [SSM] ... or even address that issue" (MLA, 52, 56). MLA only purports to provide a "little" logical point the individuation of the relevant right.

§ I rehearses MLA's core argument. § II survey's the objections to MLA. § III employs a science fiction example to show that MLA inherently neither supports nor opposes legalizing SSM. § IV argues that although Held and Chambers appear to reject MLA, they tacitly accept its main point. § V shows that Rajczi's objection fails. § VI refutes Reiten's claim that MLA is committed to a "principle of Nondiscrimination" that permits discrimination and argues that MLA's point is logically prior to the question whether denying SSM is morally or legally discriminatory. § VII argues that although MLA holds that SSM *is* not justified on grounds of equal rights, it is *consistent* with the view that SSM could *become* justified on the grounds of equal rights - for it all depends on *how* one gets there.

I.) A Recapitulation of MLA

Held (2007, 228), who appears to reject MLA, summarizes the core argument,

> The historical civil rights movements have been based on the idea that all people should have the same rights. So if men can vote then women should be afforded the same right. But gay marriage is different. As it stands, nobody has the right to marry a person of the same sex. Straights do not possess that right any more than gays. And the right that straights have, to marry one person of the opposite sex, is also shared by gays. Since nobody currently possesses the right to marry an individual of the same sex, denial of same-sex marriages is not discriminatory.

MLA's point is that rights are *individuated* in very complicated ways. One might think that there is some abstract "right to marry" granted to some groups and not others, but it is not this simple. In the United States, these conditions have, until the Supreme Court legalized SSM in Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 in 2015, been, roughly, that a marriage is a union of one eligible male and one eligible female. For simplicity, call traditional heterosexual marriage "Opposite Sex Marriage" or OSM! To specify the traditional OSM right to marry *is* to specify that complex set of conditions. Lara may feel she is being discriminated against when she is told that she cannot marry John, but the fact that John is her father nullifies that charge. No one has the right she wants. MLA claims that the Defenders of Same-Sex Marriage (DSSM's) by an appeal to "equality" fail to see this. Since in 1960 Bob and Ted do not satisfy the conditions specified in that right at that time, they are not being treated unequally when they are not allowed to marry any more than Lara and John are being treated unequally when they are denied that same right.

MLA also argues that the logic of DSSM's argument could be used by the Defenders of Polygamous Marriage (DPM's) and the Defenders of Incestuous Marriage (DIM's). For if, as DSSM's argue, the case for SSM is "equality pure and simple", then if adult siblings A and B love each other, one can argue that their being allowed to marry is also justified by appeal to "equality pure and simple". Similarly, if the already-married people C and D love each other, then one can argue that their being allowed to marry is also based on "equality pure and simple". In opposition to this, MLA argues that, as Hegel points out, if one is willing to consider things "under some abstracted aspect", i.e., apart from the complex nexus of social relations and conditions that *constitute*

that *concrete* right, then a "reason can be given for anything" (Taylor 1975, 283 n 1; MLA, 62 n 19). Mommy tells little Susie, age 6, that she can have any pet she wants, and she says she wants a bunny. Her brother, Johnny, age 7, asks if he has the *same* right, and mommy says Yes, whereupon little Johnny announces that he wants a Gaboon Viper (because it has the longest fangs of any poisonous snake). Little Johnny protests that he only wants equal rights with little Susie, but Mommy, perhaps a Hegelian, is not amused.

It is important that MLA (57-58, 62 n18) does *not* argue that one cannot change the set of conditions that individuate a legal right (the case of slavery or a woman's rights to vote). MLA only claims that DSSM's cannot justify their view *merely* on the basis of an appeal to equality, but, rather, must argue for a *new right* that, prior to 2015, no one had. For no one, neither gay nor straight, in 1960, had the right to marry in the same sex (Held 2007, 226; Chambers 2017, 32-33). MLA's (57-58) point is *only* that a *good* argument for SSM must be a very different kind of argument and even alludes to one sort of argument that *might* be more successful.

II.) The Objections to MLA.

Held (2007; 2009; 2013) states the most detailed critique of MLA and so his objection is considered first. Note that Held, borrowing an expression of Stich's (1982, 153), helps himself to "a healthy serving of assumptions." Held (2007, 221) dismisses all objections that contradict United States politics and legal theory, e.g., people are entitled to their personal religious beliefs, but the religious view that homosexuality is a sin is not relevant to the *legal* question of *public* policy in the United States (Held, 221-222). Thus, questions of morality and ethics are not relevant (Held, 221-222, 224). Similarly, one cannot base one's opposition to SSM on "metaphysical" views, like the view that males and females have complimentary "essences," that appear to support traditional OSM (Held 2007, 223-114). Appeal to tradition, "though dicey," is "not strong," for slavery and the oppression of women were traditions, but they were wrong (Held 2007, 224). Held (2009) also rejects appeal to dictionary definitions of marriage (as a union of a man and a woman): "The last time I checked we did not refer constitutional issues or the matters of rights to *Webster's* dictionary". That is, Held (2007, 227) presupposes the *liberal* (in the broad sense) tradition tracing to Mill's principle of negative liberty: "[T]he only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his [or her] will, is to prevent harm to others". Our views "ought to be a positive force for progress rather than acquiesce to hatred and bigotry" (Held 2007, 225). By pointing out that Held helps himself to so many assumptions, the present author is not disparaging him. In fact, Held does a useful service in making explicit the assumptions that many writers on such topics make but fail to make explicit. Further, although the present author is broadly sympathetic to these assumptions, he does hold that some greater clarification and qualifications are required in some cases – and one of these, involving the role of dictionary definitions, is discussed later.

Against the background of such assumptions, Held (2007, 228) and Chambers (2017, 32-33) argue that MLA is flawed for the same reasons that the miscegenation laws (which require that a

person marry within their own race) were ruled unconstitutional. For MLA appears to be committed to the view that everyone was equal under the miscegenation laws in the sense that everyone, both black and white, has exactly the same right, to marry someone within their own race. Held (207, 228) references Koppelman's (2000) argument, which cites *McLaughlin vs Florida*, where *Supreme Court* "Justice White makes the obvious point that miscegenation laws treated married interracial couples differently without compelling state interest for doing so" and that "there is no reason for singling out interracial couples as different and inferior ... [which means that miscegenation] is discriminatory". For good measure, Held adds that "some" argue that "the 9th amendment implies a right to marry" and "others have referenced Loving v. Virginia to argue that the pursuit of happiness includes an implicit right to marry".

Since Held apparently takes MLA to hold that DSSM's must argue for a "new" right that no one, prior to 2015, has, rather than equal rights *per se*, he distinguishes two approaches one might take in order to get some kind "gay" marital parity with "straights",

> One approach attempts to demonstrate that marital and family law is discriminatory in its exclusion of homosexuals and so marriage should also include homosexuals, and the other argues for equal treatment through the creation of equivalent rights. Often times this [latter] reduces to the view that both forms of marriage, straight and gay, should be subsumed under the same law, through a legal redefining of marriage as a union of two spouses. So even if this is not technically an equal-rights issue it is a matter of civil rights. (Held 2007, 228)

At this point, Held (2007, 229) declares victory and states that ultimately "the best case for gay marriage is that there is no compelling legitimate case against it." That is, whether, with, for example, the 2004 *Economist* editorial, one construes the argument for SSM as an argument for equal rights simpliciter, or whether one construes it, allegedly with MLA, as recommending an argument for a new but "equivalent" right that no one currently has, this all "reduces" to the view that marriage should be "redefined" in such a way as to include equality for both "straights" and "gays." Later in the paper, Held (2007, 230) adds supplementary arguments that mere civil unions or equivalent rights are not sufficient because those solutions would only grant "gays" some kind of *second class* union, which will be seen by society at large as unequal: Linda and Bruce are *really* married, but Fred and Jack, *only* have a civil union.

Similarly, Chambers (2017, 32), referring to MLA's conclusion that "same sex marriage is not then a requirement of equality, and so [the DSSM's claim] fails," argues, following Held, that "anti-miscegenation laws gave every person the right to marry someone of the same race, but that way of stating the right to marry does not capture its intrinsic importance". She then suggests that, to take just one of her examples, the intrinsic importance of the right to marry "may" involve the right to marry someone with whom one is in sexual love. Thus, both Chambers and Held, although in slightly different ways, use the analogy between the apparent commitments of MLA with the historical outrage of miscegenation to argue that MLA is wrong. One might think that since

Chambers argues against all marriage, and for "a marriage free society", she is inconsistent in defending SSM from the alleged attack by MLA, but there is no inconsistency. Chambers may, in the final analysis, reject both SSM and OSM, but she might still be correct that MLA makes a distinction between SSM and OSM that is not there.

Reitan (2014) offers several criticisms of MLA. The first is that since MLA argues that the DSSM's argument has the same logic as the DPM's argument (for polygamy) and the DIM's argument (for incestuous marriage), MLA "gestures" towards a fallacious "slippery slope" argument. The second is that MLA "segregates straights and gays into separate communities-which is ... a highly problematic way of putting things." However, his most basic criticism is that MLA shares a misguided principle of non-discrimination with Michelle Bachmann's rejection of SSM. To make this case, Reitan distinguishes between justified discrimination and unjustified discrimination. Bachmann, he claims, does not claim that denying the right to marry to gays is *justified* discrimination, but that is not discrimination at all. He then formulates the Bachmann-McDonough Principle of Non-discrimination (or BM-POND): "When laws subject all persons to identical restrictions and opportunities, no persons are subject to legal discrimination". However, "all of us know intuitively" that BM-POND is false. Consider two hypothetical student lunch programs. P_1: A city adopts a school lunch program that offers a free lunch to all non-redheads. P_2: A city adopts a school lunch program that offers a free lunch consisting of a peanut butter sandwich and a carton of milk to all students, but anyone who wants something else for lunch must pay for it. P_1 is "overtly" discriminatory against redheads because it singles them out as a special group that does not get the free lunch. However, P_2 is also discriminatory, but in a more disguised, way. Consider "eight-year old Joey, a lactose intolerant redhead with a life-threatening allergy to peanuts". Whereas P_1 discriminates against him "overtly", by singling him out as a redhead, and, therefore, not eligible for the free lunch, P_2 also discriminates against him but in a hidden way. For though P2 theoretically permits Joey to get the free lunch, he cannot take advantage of this "good" because, given his medical conditions, he may die if he eats it. Whereas P_1 is "overtly" discriminatory, the second is "formally discriminatory" because "it makes a good available in a form that is not equally accessible to all". It is this kind of discrimination, Reitan observes, that is addressed by the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Reiten concludes that BM-POND, and, therefore, MLA, is correct that denying SSM is not *overtly* discriminatory, but he holds that it permits "formal discrimination." That is, the marital laws before 2015 make marriage available to all, but "in a form that is not equally accessible" to gay people. Marriage is here likened to the free peanut and butter sandwich and carton of milk and "gay" people to people that have life-threatening medical conditions. The government says to all citizens, both gay and straight, that they may feel free to get married but it is just too bad "gays" have a condition that prevents them from equal access to this "good." MLA and Bachmann are correct that MLA does not endorse "overt" discrimination against "gays", but both presuppose a faulty principle of Non-Discrimination BM-POND that commits them to permit "formal" discrimination against "gays."

In the same vein, Rajczi (2008, 482) argues that "some opponents of" SSM, like MLA, are easily refuted by the following example: "Suppose a racist majority decided that citizens could only name Caucasians as the beneficiary of their social security ... [and defended this on MLA's grounds that everyone, including minorities, gets that exact same right]. Would anyone seriously consider this to be a policy that was applied equally?" All are treated "equally" in a sense, but this bizarre law is "applied" unequally.

Finally, Drabek (2014, 126), signaling his general support for Calhoun (1997) and Cuomo (2007), rejects MLA because it couches opposition to SSM "in the language of philosophical argumentation": "Social conservatives use the language of social effects, but SSM supporters are justifiably suspicious about that language when it comes from social conservatives."

III.) Science Fiction: The Opposite-Sex Marriage Revolution of 2120

Consider the following scenario! It is the year 2120 and the United States has witnessed a massive social transformation. SSM is the law of the land and OSM is illegal and viewed with the same disdain once directed at SSM. But not everyone is happy. A small but passionate group of Defenders of OSM, or DOSM's, brave the ridicule to propose a "brave new world" in which opposite sex couples can marry just like everybody else! Their core argument is that it OSM is justified by "equality pure and simple". It is time to put an end to the discrimination and bigotry. Heterosexuals, as difficult as it is to get one's mind around this unpalatable prospect ("Good Lord! They want to do what!"), deserve to be treated "equally" with homosexuals.

MLA is, in fact, committed to the view that DOSM's cannot legitimately argue for their view on the grounds of "equal rights". For, the DSSM's (which is in 2120 the majority), reply that everyone already possesses the same marital rights, namely, to marry one person (at a time) of the same sex. The DOSM's want a new right that in 2120 no one has and so they will need a very different kind of argument that everyone, including the "gay" people who do not want it, deserve to have. The fact that Bob, who suffers from the disturbing affliction of being attracted only to females, and is, therefore, not mollified by his right to marry Bruno, has the same SSM-rights as everyone else, is, 2120 DSSM's claim, referring to MLA for support, not relevant.

This example shows that MLA is *logically neutral* with regard to the question whether SSM should be legal. For, properly understood, MLA only makes a "little" logical point about how the relevant marital "right" should be *individuated.* The reason MLA is important is that many people, illustrated by the 2004 *Economist* editorial, have a highly oversimplified idea of what it is to specify a right, and, consequently, of what it means for two people to have "equal" rights, leading to unnecessary bitter disagreements. Given this highly oversimplified idea, found on both sides of the SSM-debate, it is very difficult to determine precisely what is really at issue, each shocked that the other side cannot see the obvious truth. This is, perhaps, analogous to the sort of difficulty, pointed out by Kuhn (1970), that persons with different scientific *paradigms* have even understanding what their opponent is saying. However, nothing in any philosophical debate worth the effort is ever that "pure and

simple." In the present case, MLA only attempts to clarify how one individuates the relevant marital right, and, with that, clarify what is required to produce a good argument *for or against* legalizing SSM.

Since MLA only makes a little logical point about the individuation of the relevant right, Drabek's and Rajczi's claims that MLA opposes SSM are vitiated by the fact that MLA does not oppose SSM any more than it opposes OSM. Recall that MLA explicitly states in several places that it does not argue against SSM. Similarly, unless there be liberal and conservative logics, Drabek's claim that MLA advances a "socially conservative" view is mistaken. MLA makes a non-political *logical* point that might be employed equally by conservatives and liberals depending on the circumstances and the issues. MLA is "logic," not social policy.

Indeed, both Drabek's and Rajczi's readings of MLA are refuted on even more basic grounds. For MLA purports to argue against one particular argument, the "equality" argument, for SSM. If a certain community has a poisonous snake problem, and someone A argues that one can solve the poisonous snake problem by killing all the snakes, and B argues against A that this would not be a good way to solve the poisonous snake problem, it does not follow that B does not want to solve the poisonous snake problem. MLA does not argue against SSM itself and even sketches one example of how one might provide a better substantive argument *for* SSM (MLA, 58).

Similarly, since MLA advances no substantive argument for or against SSM, it does not, as Reitan thinks, make, or even "gesture" at, slippery slope arguments against SSM. It is, however, easy to see why Reiten might think it does. For MLA points out that the "equal rights" argument for SSM could also be used to by DPM's to argue for polygamy and by DIM's to argue for incestuous marriage. However, as a purely logical exercise, MLA nowhere says that it would be *right* for DPM's and DIM's to reply: "Exactly so! We are happy MLA points out that our cases are just as strong as the DSSM's case". A real slippery slope argument would be of the form: "Good Lord! If you allow SSM then you will end up with polygamy and incestuous marriage and only God knows what else, which is unacceptable!" MLA mentions DPM and DIM only in order to display the *logical analogy* between these different kinds of cases. Held (2007) appears to see this, for though he discusses slippery slope arguments, he separates this into a different section. Similarly, Chambers' discussion of MLA blends into a discussion of slippery-slope argument, but she does not explicitly attribute such an argument to MLA. Drabek and Reitan's respective mistakes are to construe MLA as arguing for a substantive position on the legalization of SSM when, in fact, MLA only makes a "little" logical point.

IV.) Held's and Chamber's Objections to MLA

Perhaps the most compelling argument against MLA is Held's and Chamber's argument that MLA could be cited in defense of miscegenation laws. The present section provides only the first installment on the reply to this objection. The second installment is given in § VI.

In fact, though Held and Chambers *appear* to disagree with MLA on the basis of the miscegenation counterexample, they do not really do so. However, before moving on to that serious miscegenation counterexample, note first that Held's claims, made in the context of his critique of

MLA, that "some have argued that the 9th amendment implies a right to marry" and that "others have referenced Loving v. Virginia to argue that the pursuit of happiness includes an implicit right to marry," both beg the question against MLA. First, since MLA stresses that prior to 2015 everyone has the same right to marry, and, therefore, the same marital rights to happiness, Held would have to provide *additional* arguments that, for example, the right to marital happiness requires that the marital right be reconfigured in some specific way.

Consider now Held's and Chambers' important miscegenation counterexample. The moral that Chambers draws from her discussion of the miscegenation counterexample, namely that MLA's "way of stating the right to marry does not capture its intrinsic importance," whereupon she suggests the right to marry for sexual love as one possible example of the "intrinsic importance" of the marriage institution. However, this *admits* that the issues surrounding the question whether SSM should be legalized are not "equality pure and simple" but, rather, are based on what one sees as the "intrinsic importance" of marriage. Thus, she concludes that we cannot even debate this issue without out asking what marriage "means" and why it is valuable. Chambers here admits, therefore, that *these additional considerations go far beyond the limits of any simple appeal to equality*. Held's position is even more explicit. For after his apparent argument against MLA, he concludes that "even if this is not technically an equal-rights issue it is a matter of civil rights," and proceeds to argue that the rough edges in our concepts can be repaired by "redefining of marriage as a union of two spouses". Held thereby admits that MLA is "technically correct," but that this inconvenient logical point can be made more palatable by a bit of conceptual gerrymandering. But that admits that the eventual marital right that emerges from the creative *redefinition* is, in MLA's terms, "a new right that currently no one has".

One might also see why the miscegenation counterexample fails by considering the following hypothetical case. One can fill out this case in several ways, but, due to considerations of brevity, only one is undertaken here to illustrate the central point. Consider society S* which, like ours, is composed of both homosexuals and heterosexuals. The marital laws in S* are that everyone can marry anyone that matches their own sexual preference. Homosexuals can marry homosexuals and heterosexuals can marry heterosexuals. There is, however, a catch. Everyone must at age 18 declare their sexual preference. A "bisexual" must declare their *choice* at age 18, heterosexual or homosexual, after which they must abide by that choice. After all, everyone is for "choice", and this society, obsessively devoted as it is to "equality pure and simple," cannot abide the horror that some might have more choices than others. Predictably, however, there is trouble on the horizon ("The best laid plans ..."). Jake, who declared himself a homosexual at 18, when he was involved with Larry, has fallen in love with Barbara and now wants to change his declared orientation to heterosexual. Soon others join his crusade (some wanting to change from "straight" to "gay," others from "gay" to "straight"). MLA's point is that Jake cannot legitimately argue his case on the basis of an appeal to "equality pure and simple". Although most of us would be sympathetic to Jake, he is not being treated unequally. S*'s laws were drafted precisely to ensure that everyone is treated precisely equally.

If we are sympathetic to Jake and these other rebels, it is because *we have very different views about choice (freedom), interpersonal relations, human development, and many other matters*. That is, we have a very different view about "human flourishing" (Putnam 1981, 148), and believe that our laws should not sacrifice our complex *multifaceted* ideal of human flourishing in the service of some monolithic ideal of "equality pure and simple." Similarly, miscegenation laws, which, by the way, the present author is in violation, is an abomination, not because it is refuted by some principle of abstract equality, but because it is incompatible with our multifaceted ideal of a good human life that are far too complex for mere slogans about "equality pure and simple".

V.) Reply to Rajczi's Objection

It has already been shown that Rajczi errs in assuming that MLA opposes SSM. But the argument in the previous section shows that there is also a flaw in his counterexample of the law passed by a racist majority that all citizens have the equal right to donate money only to a Caucasian. Rajczik (2008, 482) asks: "Would anyone seriously consider that this is a policy that is applied equally?" First, there is a difference between the law and the way it is "applied". There are horrific laws all over the world that are "applied" in a humane way. MLA is addressed only to the logic of the case, not issues concerning the "application" of laws. With regard to the logical question, it would have been preferable for Rajczik to end his argument with a proposition, rather than a question, but MLA can answer the question. It is consistent with MLA that Rajczi's racist law, like miscegenation, is an abomination that should be rejected on civil rights grounds designed to promote our ideal of human flourishing, not by appeal to some abstract idea of "equality". Rajczik fails to see that though this racist law is not rejected because it is "applied" unequally, it can be rejected on other grounds. Finally, it is argued in § VII that it is also consistent with MLA that *both* miscegenation and Rajczi's racist law could *become* "equal rights" issues. This might seem to be a contradiction, but § VII shows why it is not.

VI.) Reitan's Objection to MLA's Alleged "Principle of Non-Discrimination"

Reitan's criticism that MLA "gestures" at a slippery slope argument has already been refuted. Reiten also criticizes MLA on the grounds that it "segregates "straights" and "gays" into separate communities - which is ... a highly problematic way of putting things." In fact, MLA (55, 58-59 n's 3 and 4) makes this same point in some detail. A certain economic theory might divide people into buyers and sellers, but that does not mean that sellers are not also buyers. MLA does not make that mistake. However, it is illuminating to discuss Reiten's more developed claim that MLA embraces a flawed "principle of nondiscrimination".

The heart of Reitan's objections is that MLA, with Michelle Bachmann, is committed to a certain Principle of Non-Discrimination called BM-POND: "When laws subject all persons to identical restrictions and opportunities, no persons are subject to legal discrimination". First, the present author does not know much about Bachmann's view on SSM except that she is against it and is so for, roughly, moral-religious grounds. By contrast with Bachmann, MLA does not oppose

SSM, but only opposes one particular kind of argument for it and allows that better arguments, presumably unacceptable to Bachmann's moral-religion, might be provided. The present author does not, therefore, undertake the burden of defending Bachmann's views (whatever they are), but only defends MLA. Second, and perhaps more important, the present author cannot find Reiten's BM-POND in MLA. Indeed, since MLA only deals with one case, SSM, and since MLA only makes a "little" logical point about the individuation of marriage rights, it does not undertake the formulation of *any* general principle" of non-discrimination. Perhaps, however, Reitan will claims that BM-POND can be gleaned from the text in MLA. However, this is not the case, and there is no better way to show this than by showing how MLA easily deals with Reiten's example of the formal, but non-overt, discrimination of the lactose-and-peanut-intolerant child.

Recall that in Reitan's example, the city's laws, P_1, state that everyone except redheads at school get a free lunch of a peanut butter sandwich and a carton of milk. P_1 *overtly* discriminates against little Joey because it denies him the free lunch because of his overt characteristics (being a redhead). The case is entirely different for P_2 which, since it, offers Joey a free lunch that he, because of his special medical conditions, cannot eat, P_2 "formally" discriminates against him. Little Joey here represents "gay" people and his unfortunate medical condition represents a "gay" person's homosexuality. The analogy is that a pre-2015 United States laws offer a "gay" person a heterosexual marriage that s/he cannot, by analogy, eat. However, MLA does not deny that, just as there is a wrong against little Joey that needs to be righted, there is a wrong involving gay people that needs to be righted, and MLA (57-58) even suggests one possible solution, civil unions, as an example of a possible solution. It is true that MLA does not defend this or any other particular *substantive* solution to the problem, but that is because MLA only purports to make a logical point, not a substantive one. MLA's treatment of this case shows, therefore, that it does not accept BM POND. That is, MLA explicitly admits that the fact that everyone in the United States pre-2015 has exactly the same marital rights, to marry one eligible person of the opposite sex, is not the final word on the matter. MLA can consistently say that BM POND only states a *necessary* condition for nondiscrimination and endorse instead BM POND*: "When laws subject all persons to identical restrictions and opportunities, no persons are subject to legal discrimination – unless sufficiently weighty considerations can be adduced to show otherwise". The problem the present author has with BM POND* is that it does not say very much. For everything depends on what these additional weighty considerations might be like, and the present author assumes that these, like the various views about the possible "intrinsic" importance of the marriage institution that Chambers mentions, or the various different ideals of "human flourishing", might turn out to be of the most diverse and unexpected kinds. There is no way to survey what all of these might be in advance.

There is, however, an interesting issue raised by Reiten's remarks about discrimination. For Reiten lays great stress on the fact that Bachmann does not view her denial of gay marriage as justified discrimination, but as not discriminatory at all. As stated earlier, what Bachmann thinks about this, the present author does not know. However, there is an important sense, connected with Held's

dismissal of the importance of dictionary definitions, in which the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman is *not* discriminatory. Presumably the *Chicago Bulls* are not practicing legally unjustified discrimination when they hire Michael Jordan instead of someone who is 5 feet tall and uncoordinated because Jordan has basketball skills that better qualify him for the job. However, if the choice were between a Caucasian with decent basketball skills, and Michael Jordan with his massive skills, and the *Bull's* signed the decent Caucasian, that *would* be legally unjustified discrimination. There is no debate about that. However, there is another use of the word "discriminate" in English that is logically prior to questions about legal discrimination. This is the kind of case in which someone says that Jack has a "discriminating" judgment. An *Advanced Oxford English Dictionary* defines "discriminate" in this sense as the ability to make distinctions, to be able to see small differences, for example, between good and bad books (Hornby 1983, 246). It is, in this sense, often *good* to discriminate. In fact, for an English speaker to be able to discriminate in this sense, is, roughly, for them to understand the English language. Thus, in response to certain kinds of philosophical questions, Wittgenstein (1958, para. 381) says that "It would be an answer to say 'I have learned English"?

Recall the case in which little Johnny, apparently a philosopher in the making, replies to mommy that since she told little Susie she can have any pet she wants, she is discriminating against him because she refused his choice of a Gaboon viper. In fact, mommy is not discriminating against little Johnny in any moral or legal sense. For a Gaboon viper is not the kind of thing English-speakers *mean* by a "pet". The *Oxford* dictionary defines a pet as a "companion, treated with care and affection, e.g., a cat or a dog" (Hornby 1983, 625). Thus, when mommy denies little Johnny a Gaboon viper for a pet, she is not "discriminating" against him. She is simply speaking English. Further, this kind of "discrimination" is logically prior to the kind of legal discrimination emphasized by Reitan or Held. For if one is even to be able to raise the higher order questions about moral or legal discrimination raised by Reitan and Held, one must first be able to make the kinds of *discriminations* inherent in the English language.

Thus, when MLA suggests that a prior to 2015 both gays and straights had exactly the same marital rights (the right to marry one person of the opposite sex ...), it is not "discriminating" against anyone. It is pointing out that this is how that right is individuated in English at that time. Held *overstates* the case, therefore, when he states that we do not decide "constitutional issues or matters of rights by appeal to *Webster's* dictionary." That is surely true, but it neglects the fact that we do refer to *Webster's* dictionary to determine what mean by our words when we are discussing legal and constitutional issues. Indeed, since Held (2007, 221-222) stresses that the issue is *not* morality or ethics, but the *legal* question, and, since, "the last time [this author] checked," the laws on the books prior to 2015 define a marriage as a union of one man and one woman that satisfy certain eligibility conditions, Held *must* acknowledge legal (if not the moral) significance of those definitions. MLA can (and does) consistently accept that there is a moral issue in this case that needs to be rectified, and that this *may* involve changing the relevant definitions of marriage, but that does not change

the fact that if one is to argue the legal case either for or against SSM, and if one is the represent the logic of the relevant arguments correctly, one must individuate the relevant rights the English language (that is, make the "discriminations" recorded in the dictionary) in which the legal code is written. This is why Held does and must admit that MLA's core point is "technically correct". One can only make a hash of the proposed conceptual changes without respecting those linguistic "discriminations", not as the final word but as specifying how the concept is in fact individuated at a given time. Since MLA is about logic (broadly construed), not substantive legal (or moral) issues, the kind of "discrimination" required by MLA is only the kind required to understand the English language.

VII.) MLA's Consistency with Equal Rights for SSM

Many commentators have understood MLA incorrectly by construing a "little" logical point about the individuation of the relevant marital rights as the assertion of a substantive position on legalizing SSM. Drabik and Rajczi think that MLA opposes legalizing SSM. Held (2007, 228), by contrast, understands MLA to support the strategy of arguing for SSM as an "equivalent" right, but not the full-fledged marriage right that Held himself supports. Are there not many passages in MLA that support Held's interpretation, for example, MLA's claim that "DSSM's are free to argue for the right to marry persons of the same sex, but this must be an argument for a new right, for the right which they want is not the 'same' one already possessed by heterosexuals" (MLA, 53). Are not Held (2007, 228-228) and Chambers (2017, 32) are on solid ground when the interpret MLA as endorsing, or at least suggesting, that the proper road to go is to argue for "equivalent," but not fully equal, marital rights for "gays"? In fact, however, since MLA only makes a little logical point and does not propose any positive theory, it only mentions equivalent rights as one of the *possible* compromises one might propose to resolve the issue, but MLA itself is entirely *consistent* with the view that the final resolution of the problem is granting full equal rights to SSM. Indeed, the present author regards this as one of the most important points in the present paper, but it is a point, not about SSM *per se*, but about the limitations of most "philosophical" argument.

Note that MLA (51) begins with the assertion that it is concerned with the kind of argument proposed in *The Economist*, but in many other places as well, that the case for gay marriage "begins with equality pure and simple". Those who employ this kind of *argument* are called DSSM's. MLA argues that this argument fails. However, the fact that one cannot get to a certain point by this means does not imply that one cannot get there by some other route.

There are ways in which the SSM can *become* an equal right. One of these was illustrated in the United States in 2015 when 5 people wearing black robes, perhaps relying on a lot of bad "philosophical" arguments like those in *The Economist*, *decreed* that same sex marriage is an equal right. However, Romeo's instincts were right when he said, "Hang up philosophy! Unless philosophy can make a Juliet!" (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 3). Philosophy cannot conjure a Juliet any more than it can conjure an equal right, but that never stops people from trying. Perhaps there is some truth to

Hegel's (1967, Preface) remark that philosophy should content itself with painting "it's grey in grey", rather than attempting to conjure new rights and forms of life from sterile abstractions.

There are, however, other, and superior, ways to "make" an equal right. For the "rights" enunciated in the United States constitution were not found written on some tablets that "fell from heaven" into a burning bush. They were worked out in a broadly democratic process. Similarly, in November, 2015, predominately Roman Catholic Ireland voted by a huge and surprising majority, 62% to 38%, to legalize SSM (Healy 2017). Since the Irish authorities condescended to put the matter to a vote by "the people", someone having, apparently, remembered that they are there (that is, to settle the matter by genuine democratic processes), it is difficult to see how anyone, except a few extremists, can legitimately refuse to accept the verdict, if not in their heart, then at least in their public behavior. Since, by contrast, the ruling in the United States was made by 5 people in black robes, who, evidently, suffer from the belief they know better than "the people", their verdict is guaranteed to cause longstanding acrimony.

Since MLA only argues that one cannot justify legalizing SSM by a "pure and simple" logical inference, it is consistent with the Irish decision to *make* SSM a full-fledged equal right via the authentic democratic process. MLA only suggests that, with, perhaps, a few exceptions, it is an intellectualist illusion that such major cultural institutions as OSM are founded on some obviously fallacious logical inferences (e.g., about what "equality" means) that, because they are so simple, can just as simply be overturned when new "interpretations" of equality arise. For, despite the fact that *The Economist's* inference is so "pure and simple," 3,000 years of recorded human history, including such figures as Thomas Jefferson, John Kennedy, and Bill and Hillary Clinton, all somehow managed to overlook it – although Hillary's intuition of the newly minted inference conveniently emerged to fit the base of her party on the inception of her presidential run in 2015. In opposition to this intellectualist view that social institutions are based on simple logical inferences that can be easily brushed aside by trendy new "logical" intuitions, MLA (62 n 19) suggests that such cultural changes should grow *organically* in the development of a society, which will involve philosophical argumentation as a proper part, but which will also involve a plethora of historical and cultural issues that cannot be reduced to simple intellectual concepts. In a *democracy*, a genuine democracy, as opposed to the much more common mechanisms of mass manipulation, this would require going through the long and frustrating democratic process. However, the democratic process is, or used to be, *supposed* to take a long time to lessen the likelihood that hasty decisions will turn out to have unintended negative consequences. This is why genuine democracies, slow and frustrating as they can be, have tended to do better over the long run than political systems in which a few special people in impressive costumes can decide that views that have been controversial, even rejected, for 3,000 years of recorded human history, have suddenly been revealed, as if by a light from on high, to be "pure and simple". MLA sees it as an unfortunate fact in the United States has been overwhelmed by such a sense of haste to reach "social justice" that weighty cultural decisions can be decided by noticing that certain core cultural institutions, like OSM, rest on fallacies so obvious that any child can see them (though none

did until recently).[1] MLA, being consistent with democracy, is also consistent with the Irish route to SSM (or *whatever* the Irish might have chosen in the democratic process) because MLA does not place *any* restrictions whatsoever on the outcome of the democratic process, but only makes a logical point about the individuation of a concept that is useful to the rational working out of that process.

Summary

The objections to MLA are, for the most part, misguided because they misrepresent a "little" logical point as a substantive objection to SSM. Held and Chambers may be a partial exception because although they appear to object to MLA, they tacitly acknowledge its core point, and proceed to emphasize other approaches. Since MLA merely states a "little" logical point, it does not state any objection to SSM, let alone a "socially conservative" one. Since MLA does not state an argument against SSM, it does not state or suggest any slippery slope fallacy against SSM. MLA is not committed to defend miscegenation, but is consistent with the view that it is an abomination that is wrong, not on equal rights grounds, but, roughly, on larger civil rights grounds or views about "human flourishing." Reiten's Principle of Non-Discrimination is *not* presupposed by MLA and his counterexample (little Joey) can be easily handled by MLA. Held is certainly correct that we do not go to the dictionary to decide constitutional issues, but we do go to the dictionary to decide what words mean, and since, as Held stresses, he is concerned with legal, not moral issues, and since the relevant words, like "marriage", were present in the law books before 2015 which defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman, it will still be necessary to give dictionaries their due. MLA is only an attempt to clarify how that fact about the individuation of the concept of marriage gets baked into the final wedding cake. There are different ways one might do so. Finally, although MLA seems to urge an "equivalent"-rights, rather than and "equal"-rights, solution to the SSM-question, MLA is consistent with full equal rights for SSM, so long as this is arrived at via the genuine democratic process. MLA is only opposed to the attempt to justify SSM by means of an abstract appeal to "equality pure and simple".

Endnotes:

1. Brake's (2016, §2) account of the history of marriage makes no reference to SSM. Further, although one can find references to various sorts of same-sex "unions" throughout history, "the precise meaning (and incidence) of such unions remains unclear" (Dabhoiwala Jan, 2015).

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Religion as A Form of Life: Some Remarks on Wittgenstein's Concept of "Religion"

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Abstract:

Wittgenstein's remarks on religion and religious language has some bearings on the current discussions on place of the religion in the secular societies. Early Wittgenstein represents a restrictive concept of religion as the religious language remains beyond the limits of ordinary experience and senses. In the Investigations religious life regarded as one form of life among other life experiences and hence the religious expression may as well constitutes a particular language game in itself. Wittgenstenians are divided on implications of this new conception of religion later works of Wittgenstein indicates.

In this article I will analyze the implications of Wittgenstein's concept of religion and religious language in the context of his later works. The question about the religion as a form of life needs to be answered as follows: Is religious language, according to Wittgenstein, a closed discourse that only within particular religious language game becomes meaningful? Or does Wittgenstein take religion in the sense of religious experience or just a set of beliefs? These questions are important to re-evaluate the legal, moral discussion about the place of religion in the modern public life.

Keywords: Wittgenstein, Life Form, Language Game, Religion, Religious Experience.

There is almost a general consensus that one of the cardinal notions in Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that of "form of life". However, when it comes to the application of this concept to religion a controversy surrounds it. On a quite literal reading of the term in the *Investigations*, religion is obviously one of the forms that life takes. Several writers have applied the concepts of "form of life" and "language-game" to religion. The attempts to apply Wittgensteinian notions to religion in theological studies and in philosophy of religion are due to the appealing features of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the religious field.

Wittgenstein's philosophical attitude towards religion seems to have followed different lines during his philosophical career: *Tractatus*' mystical silence and its religious implications; transitory period's truth pictures of religious belief; and finally religion as a form of life and religious language as a language game. In the *Tractatus* there were external boundaries of language. Ordinary religious discourse is possible in this limit, but metaphysical and theological discourse was not possible. Wittgenstein said to Waismann some years after the *Tractatus*, that he could imagine a religion in which nothing is said. On the same occasion he went on to say: "If the speech does occur this itself is a component of religious behavior and not a theory. Therefore nothing turns on whether the

words are true, false, or nonsensical."(Waismann 1968, 19)[1]

In his second period, Wittgenstein considered religious discourse and activities as springing from religious beliefs which are absolutes in the mind of the believer. There are some kinds of mental images or pictures in the mind of the believer which provide a point of reference for activities and their justification. (O.C., 19)[2]

In yet a later period the notion of the external boundaries of language is totally dismissed; instead there is now a whole range of internal boundaries. There is not only one. But according to this new position, the internal boundaries do not in general assume the same role which Wittgenstein, in earlier period, assigned to the external boundaries. Indeed, the domain of the 'transcendental', about which, in the *Tractatus*, we must remain silent, is now placed in its own religious, ethical etc., language-games. In the *Investigations* religion appears to be a form (or forms) of life alongside other forms of life, containing activities verbalized in language-games. The dissatisfaction of some philosophers and theologians with the way some Wittgensteinians applied form of life and language-game to religion seems to be partially related to the question of whether or not it encompasses other forms of life.

After briefly touching on the reductionist results of Wittgensteinians' "one among many form of life" oriented approach, this paper will deal with the following questions: What does Wittgenstein precisely mean by the term "form of life"? How does it apply to religion?

According to the reductionist followers of Wittgenstein, for example D. Z. Phillips, religion could only be properly understood from inside, because it is a complex of certain human activities, responses and relations.(Phillips 1965, 83) Malcolm too, following the same line of argument says that there is no justification in a language game, it can only be understood from inside. "Religion is a form of life", he says, "it is language embedded in action -what Wittgenstein calls a 'language game.' Science is another... Neither stands in need of justification, the one no more than the other." (Malcolm 1986, 332)

Wittgensteinians seem to apply the notion of meaning as use to religion. But in doing so, they take use as the standard of truth. They argue that religious language originates in certain primitive reactions, not in speculative reasoning and for this reason the practice of religion cannot rightly be thought to involve belief in the existence of any sort of queer transcendental being. (Cook 1988, 429-452)[3]

Religion may be described, in a quite simple way for this purpose, as containing verbal and non-verbal activities with a language which is used for performing verbal religious activities and for explaining beliefs in which religious discourse and behavior take place; this description fits well into the conceptual framework provided by language-games and forms of life. This conceptual framework allows us to think that religion involves certain activities and that it plays various roles in human life, with its own verbal activities, its own concepts and language-game. But Wittgensteinians do not stop here, and they are also attacking what they regard as a misguided demand for justification by both philosophers and theologians. In their attempt to do so, they fall into a kind of reductionism.

Wittgenstein's later philosophy seems to be a defense against any kind of reductionism, including his own approach in the *Tractatus*, because it shows that there are internal limits in different regions of discourse; if you step over these boundaries nonsense arises. This attitude does supply a comfort against any 'external- reductionist' approach. However, I am not sure about whether the same attitude provides a comfort against 'internal-reductionism' which seems to me committed by some of Wittgenstein's followers. They seem to reduce the religious language to religious behaviors. This is what I mean by internal reductionism.

For instance, in both scientific discourse and religious discourse people refer to or talk about the same universe. When the scientist demands from religion the same methodological approach in explaining the origin of universe he wants a reductionism in which religious belief must depend on empirical evidences. This is an example of external reductionism. When one claims that in religious discourse the believer is actually not talking about the same universe, he reduces religion to certain human concepts and activities. Some Wittgensteinians seem to think in this way, namely, that when a believer uses religious language-game he does not talk about something over and beyond the context in which religious discourse takes place. (Keightley 1976, 118)

Literature on these issues is so massive and discouraging that it is impossible to bring some of relevant discussion in the scope of this paper. But, more or less, certain philosophers following similar lines of argument repeat such themes as: Religion is a way of life, and not a body of doctrines; Religion is "given" so that it needs not to be justified, indeed cannot be. Its concepts are in their order as they are, for "this language-game is played" (PI., 654). It seems difficult to define religion as just one language-game and one form of life as far as the *Investigations* is concerned. In many cases Wittgensteinians seem to apply to religion what they consider to be Wittgenstein's philosophy of religion, rather than the "form of life" found in the later Wittgenstein. In the rest of the paper we will discuss the place and the context of the term "form of life", in other words, how "form of life" is to be understood.

Wittgenstein, to my knowledge, does not say precisely what he means by "form of life." He uses it only five times in the *Investigation*:

1. "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (PI., 19).
2. "the language-game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity or of a form of life" (PI., 23).
3. "It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life" (PI., 241).
4. "the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life" (PI., 174).
5. "What has to be accepted, the given, is -so one could say- forms of life" (PI., 226).

Some of his early references to "culture" (B.B.B., 134; L.C., 34) seem to run parallel to the term "form of life". Also other expressions such as "activities", "whole life", and the "occasions" of use (L.C., 2, 3) might have crystallized into "forms of life" in the *Investigations.* Wittgenstein also speaks

about "the common behavior of mankind" (PI., 206), "natural history" (PI., 25), "custom" and "institutions" (PI., 199).

However, it is difficult to say precisely what Wittgenstein means by "form of life", because he does not give a specific example of a complete form of life. He speaks of hope (PI., 174) and certainty (O.C., 358) as forms of life. His interpreters, too, are unjustifiably silent on how a form of life is to be understood. N. Malcolm, for instance, gives the following as a good example of what Wittgenstein means: "the gestures, facial expressions, words, and activities that constitute pitying and comforting a person or a dog." (Malcolm 1970, 91)[4] Malcolm thinks it is hardly possible to over-emphasize the importance of the term "form of life" in the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, though he himself is, as has been seen, unhelpful regarding the problem of how "form of life" is to be understood.

"Form of life" as meaning a whole way of life should not be readily dismissed. Janik and Toulmin provide some historical material which arguably supports the interpretation of form of life in a broader sense. The notion of "forms of life" (lebensformen), they argue, was an abstract scheme concerned with the categories and forms of thought. To this existing notion in the Viennese intellectual circles of 1920s, Wittgenstein gave an "anthropological" dimension. Wittgenstein stressed the actual features of human thought which provide the context for those categories. (Janik and Toulmin 1973, 230) Dallas M. High, on the other hand, cites an unpublished manuscript to the effect that Wittgenstein wanted "form of life" translated as "way of life of human beings."(High 1972, 245)

It follows, from these remarks and interpretations, that Wittgenstein uses the term "form of life" in both a broader and a narrower sense. In the former sense, it appears that agreement in language, possession of common concepts is what he calls a "form of life" (PI., 240-241), a common way of conceptualizing experience together. On the other hand, the term denotes something on a smaller scale, e.g., measuring, hoping, pitying.

Now we might ask: can religion be construed as a "form of life" in Wittgenstein's sense of this term? If it can, in what sense is religion a form of life? Wittgenstein, as far as I have seen, never describes religion as a form of life. However, he seems to come close to so doing when he asks "why should one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in the Last Judgment?" (L.C., 58). Probably, Malcolm had in mind this remark when, in his *Memoir*, he says: "I think that there was in him, some sense, the possibility of religion. I believe that he looked on religion as a 'form of life' (to use an expression from the *Investigations*) in which he did not participate, but with which he was sympathetic and which greatly interested him." (Malcolm 1962, 72)

The importance of Malcolm's remark is that he sees that religion is a form of life in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, especially in the *Investigations*. It also provides strong evidence for the application of the term "form of life", as employed by the later Wittgenstein, to religion. No one can deny the fact that, in an ordinary sense, the religious way of life is one of the forms people try to live by. It is not a discovery for Wittgenstein to see religion as a form of life in this sense. What is important here is whether we treat religion in the same way as we do to his concept of "form of life". However, there is only one reference to religion and/or theology in the *Investigations*: "Grammar tells

us what kind of object anything is." (Theology as Grammar) (PI., 373). Also, a similar remark can be found in the *Zettel* (144): How words are understood is not told by words alone. (Theology.)

W. D. Hudson offers a few comments to the effect that "Theology stands to religious belief... as its grammar does to a language." (Hudson 1968, 58) Thus understood, the cryptic remarks to theology become more intelligible. Theology gives expression to a particular way of life. Words alone are empty of life. Language or religion, then, has -or should have- an active grammar. In short, the correlation between grammar and theology implies that theology, as grammar, articulates the standard of intelligibility implicit in the language and activities of a religious tradition. (Keightley 1976, 55) There is an issue at stake here because of the close connection between form of life and the justification in *Investigations*. If religion is a form of life, then religious belief and the religious language are totally "the given" and "accepted".

Wittgenstein maintains that language-games, like forms of life cannot and need not be justified. But, this attitude does not support the position that the activities associated with a form of life are the absolutes for every reference. For the "form of life" to be given or accepted does not mean it is an absolute criteria of truth and falsity. Rather, as a whole, the speaking of a language itself is part of a form of life. Languages-games are forms of life in the sense that we cannot understand language except as a part of an activity which is not simply oral. So we cannot conclude from the 'givenness' of language-games and forms of life to the effect that their origin is in the "history of nature". History of mankind, culture and the like refer to the basic human conditions in the past and the present and probably same in the future. Where do they come from? He does not seem to deal with this question; rather he draws attentions of philosophers to the fact.

Wittgenstein does not talk about the absolutes for determining the truth and falsity at all. He is simply trying to show that in any attempt to ask or supply any justification for any kind of activity or language game, we simply forget that these are basic 'givens' of human life. Once this point becomes clear, I do not think Wittgenstein would oppose the idea that in every complete form of life, insofar as it remains in its own language-game, any reference to transcendental and the like is possible. In this sense to call a language-game a "form of life" means to conceive it "as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" (PI., 25). How absurd to ask why we eat as a demand for justification of it. We can explain it in detail to the extent we know it, but this is not a justification.

In this sense, philosophy must not define anything, but rather must describe and explain it. "Form of life" underlies, in one way or another, everything that we normally say or do from an awareness of moral, aesthetic, or religious values and so on. These and similar things which deserve to be called a form of life or a language-game are all basics of human life and they are the way we act. The origin or the reason for the existence of such forms of life is out of the question, or Wittgenstein avoids talking about this. A form of life, whether containing other forms of life or not, has rules regulating the actions or the discourse within itself. Since the speaking of a language itself is a form of life, regulating rules of using a language is called grammar. For religion, theology assumes the same

role, i.e., specifying what is true, and what is false in a religious discourse in a particular religion.

Religion, is certainly a form of life in the broader sense of the term, and within religious form of life there are certain others forms of life. To describe religion as just one form of life altogether falls short in explaining how a religious man integrates different aspects of his life into a single whole, as a life in the way to God. Religion should be described as a form of life containing forms of life. These forms of life can have something similar to other non-religious forms of life. For instance, thanking is one of the examples we can give. One thanks his lucky star, the other thanks God. Through these kinds of commonalities religious forms of life can permeate other domains of human life. Religion, as sociological, historic and psychological evidences suggest, tends to dominate all aspects of human life. If it is one and only one form of life, it could be possible to draw a line between religious and secular forms of life, which prevents any possibility of understanding each other. One can avoid looking for any religious significance in some aspects of human life and he is able to put aside or prevent religion to penetrate other aspects of life. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily entail that religion itself must occupy only one form among others which human life can take.

Wittgenstein's philosophical attitude towards religion seems to have followed different lines during his philosophical career: *Tractatus*' mystical silence and its religious implications; transitory period's truth pictures of religious belief; and finally religion as form of life and religious language as language game. In the *Tractatus* there were external boundaries of language. Ordinary religious discourse is possible in this limit, but metaphysical and theological discourses were not possible. Wittgenstein said to Waismann some years after *Investigation,* that religion could only be properly understood from inside, because it is a complex of certain human activities, responses and relations. (Phillips 1965, 83)

For this reason philosophy must not define anything, but rather must describe and explain it. "Form of life" underlies, in one way or another, also the religious forms that an individual follows in his private or public life. On a quite literal reading of the terms in the *Investigations*, religion is obviously one of the forms that life takes. Several writers have applied the concepts of "form of life" and "language-game" to religion. These attempts to apply Wittgensteinian notions to religion in theological studies and in philosophy of religion are due to the appealing features of Wittgenstein's philosophy in the religious field. It justifies the religious language in both public and private life in the modern secular societies as various expressions of a certain form of life that is called in many traditions 'religion'.

Endnotes:

1. Two articles about the mysticism of Wittgenstein are worth mentioning: E. Zemach, "Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Mystical", in I. M. Copi and G. W. Beard (eds), *Essays On Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, pp. 359-375; and B. F. MacGuiness, "The Mysticism of Tractatus", *Philosophical Review*, (1966), Vol. 75, pp. 30.
2. L.C., p.58; *Cf.* Alan Keightley, *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God*, London: Epworth Press, 1976, pp. 70 ff.
3. Cook criticizes the notion of language games in general and its application to the religion. See, John W. Cook, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief", *Philosophy* 66 (Oct. 1988), pp. 429-452.

4. P. J. Sherry suggests that there are more than one religious forms of life within religious form of life. See his "Is Religion a 'Form of Life'?", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, April 1972, Vol 9, No 2, p.159-167.

Abbreviations for Wittgenstein's Works the text:

B.B.B.: *The Blue and Brown Books*. Ed. by R. Rhees, trans. R. Hargreaves and R. White. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967.

L.C.: *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Ed. by C. K. Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

O.C.: *On Certainty*. Ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Von Wright, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969.

PI.: *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe. New York: Basil Blackwell, 1958 (References to Part I are by paragraph numbers and to Part II are by page numbers.) Tractatus: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness. London: Routledge, 1974

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Post-Truth: *I lie, therefore I exist*

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Abstract:

Mythos and Logos always come into contact sharing a common opinion, which tends to be stronger than that which is supposed and admitted. Indeed, everything indicates that the perennial battle of antagony, that is Mythos ↔ Logos, is to establish and to impose the *truth*, and he who in the end is *invincible* is the *common sense* that remains immune to faith and *reason*; he who only shows himself to be *vulnerable*, thus *succumbs* to *passion*. In the same way, Mythos and Logos also begin to *wilt* and to *give in*, just as is proven by the *unrestrained subjectivism* of *postmodernity* and its hegemonic *post-truth*, in which one's *own opinion* has become *sacred* and the art of lying is based on *words* that '*feel*' like the *truth*, but *have no 'real' basis*.

Keywords: Post-truth, Mythos, Logos, information, reality, lies, pretence, veracity, digital, Homo Deus.

'Twas but my tongue, twas not my soul that swore'
Euripedes (480 – 406 BC)

Introduction: The ascent to digital waste

With each day that passes the exponential growth in the power possessed by computers and networks leaves human faculties behind. As the capacity for having access to information increases, we become closer to the point in which this access exceeds our ability to process it. The abundance and availability of digital information, on the whole free to all, both dazzles and illuminates. Technology does not make a distinction between *value* and *waste*. The internet, explains Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), says practically everything, except how to filter, choose, accept or reject irrelevant opinions and false information that dominate and clog up the network (Eco 2016, 41, 91, 492).

The history of culture and civilization, Eco continues, is made up of masses of *information* that has been buried. A culture, understood as a system of knowledge, opinions, beliefs, customs and historical inheritance shared by a defined human group, is not only an accumulation of data; it is also the result of its filtering. As a result, culture also means the capacity to part with that which is unnecessary or of no use (Eco 2016, 98).

Thus, before fretting over the distinction between fiction and reality, we need concern ourselves in differentiating the diverse forms of fiction that make up the galaxy of the imaginary of what it entails to be human. Furthermore, even before differentiating such fictions, we must distinguish between waste, data, information and digital knowledge.

1. The Homo Deus Prophecy: Mythos with a scientific mask

A prophecy is a supernatural gift that consists of knowing, via divine inspiration, distant or future things. In this way, the successful, best-selling book *Homo Deus*, written in intelligent and enjoyable prose by the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, and translated into more than thirty languages, cannot be strictly classified as prophecy. In fact, the author himself defines his work as a 'historical prediction'.

Nevertheless, a careful reading of the book brings to light a Mythos with embellishments of Logos that cannot observe its prophetic imprint. Instead of giving basis to its myth in divine inspiration, Harari grounds his work on a wide scientific armory that comes from the most diverse of disciplines, such as history, statistics, economics and biology to name a few. They are disciplines that, as sciences, do not aim to give support to myths of the highest metaphysical profundity, such as those which man has risen to thus far (or, in the near future when he will be elevated to God). Harari, in no way, considers this proposition in metaphorical terms.

Harari, with a PhD from Oxford, maintains that when technology is allowed to 'remodel' the human mind, Homo Sapiens will disappear and human history will meet its end. He states his '*historical opinion*' with the confusing explanation that, although it is 'impossible' to remodel the human mind, it is 'probable' that people 'similar' to ourselves will utilize biotechnology in order to remodel their 'own' minds. However, Harari is emphatic in his idea that the great project for 'humantity' in the 21st century will be to acquire '*divine*' powers, and to promote Homo Sapiens to Homo Deus. Harari is convinced that, in the 'not too distant' future, we will be able to create 'superhumans' who will move ahead of the ancient gods in their physical and mental faculties, and when we arrive at this point, 'divinity' will be something so 'commonplace' as *cyberspace* is to us today (Harari 2017, 59, 60, 61).

The Israeli historian also argues that man will not be satisfied with attaining any immortality, for which reason the second great project for humanity in the 21st century will be to find the key to eternal happiness and to guarantee it globally; who would want to live eternally in *misfortune*? Many scientists believe that people are happy owing to one, and only one, cause: the pleasant sensations that are intrinsically ephemeral and rapidly disappear due to the '*sin*' of *evolution*. Our biochemical system has not been adapted to increase happiness but rather as a recompense with pleasant sensations that stem from actions that ultimately lead to *survival* and reproduction. Yet these sensations are merely an *ephemeral 'trick' to 'sell'* us an ultimate end (Harari 2017, 42, 48, 49, 55).

If science is in the right, the only way to assure a lasting contentment is to 'rig' the biochemical system of man. Let us forget, says Harari, economic growth, social reforms and political revolutions.

In order to globally increase levels of happiness, that is necessary to 'manipulate' human biochemistry, and this is precisely what 21st century man has begun to do. The use of psychiatric medicine to deal with attention disorders, mild depression and occasional episodes of despondency is now more commonplace in schools. Pills to aid sleeping and to get through the depression, fear, anguish and trauma of war make soldiers happier and *armies* more efficient. Such medicine is just the beginning, as research laboratories work on more refined ways to manipulate human biochemistry, exemplified by genetic modifications and direct electrical stimulus aimed at specific points of the brain (Harari 2017, 51,52, 53, 54).

Evolution did not adapt for Homo Sapiens Sapiens in order to experience constant pleasure, and besides, if that is what humanity wants, there will never be enough new flavours of ice cream or more addictive games for smart phones that will go beyond tedium. Our biochemistry will need to be changed and our mind remodelled. While there is debate on the good or bad in this, we are already working on it. The exact method is of no importance: to obtain happiness via biological manipulation will not be easy because it requires the altering of the fundamental patterns of life. Yet, concludes the Israeli historian, neither was it *easy* to overcome hunger, plagues and war (Harari 2017, 54, 55).

Whilst sustaining ourselves with the help of biotechnology and information algorithms, the 21st century will also see us create virtual worlds, in which differentiating between fiction and reality will be more difficult, yet more necessary than ever. Harari predicts that science will eliminate the concept of the '*soul*' and the majority of factual affirmations in religion, while museums and digital libraries will take the place of churches and temples. It will be a world in which the subjectivity and superstitious spirit will be eradicated, in which the emerging Homo Deus will be a web of biochemical and electrical algorithms, without obstacles, borders or dogmatic atavisms. Humanism will die in order to give way to the 'dataism' in which the barrier between animals and machines will collapse, the difference between fiction and reality will disappear and social networks will become insatiable monsters whose supreme databases will even store the alcove of individual conscience (Harari 2017, 201, 203, 400).

Finally, the Israeli historian warns that there is no need to get frightened; at least not immediately, as the 'bettering' of sapiens will be a gradual historical process. It is likely that Homo Sapiens Sapiens will improve themselves, and align themselves with robots and computers step by step, and then when our descendants look back, they will realise that they are no longer the class of '*animal*' that wrote the bible, built the Great Wall of China and laughed at the wit of Charlie Chaplin; they will then notice that they are no longer 'humans' (Harari 2017, 62).

2. Homo ↔ Deus: conlusive antilogy

Man took eight centuries to make divine quality *descend* from the virtuality of the enigmatic metaphysical universe, where Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274) had placed it, to arrive at the intelligible and simple human technological world in which *part* of this virtuality is rapidly becoming an intuitive *game*, even for the babies of Sapiens Sapiens.

With the '*descent*' from the virtuality of the divine and human metaphysical world, *Homo Virtualis* of the 21st century longs for and aims to reconstruct the stairway that allows him to ascend again to heaven in order to establish himself as *Homo Deus*. Faced with his inherent precariousness apparent in his inferiority, weakness, dependency, fallibility and finite nature, in his reconstruction of this stairway, man has not stopped for even one instant in his never-ending objective to acquire for himself divine attributes, that he himself attributes to the gods: immortality, superiority, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, infallibility and infinite nature, all divine powers that merge into one: virtuality.

Yuval Noah Harari distinctly qualifies his meaning of 'divinity'. He states that it is related to neither omnipotence nor any other 'vague metaphysical' quality, and that when he refers to 'transforming' humans into gods, he thinks primarily of Greek gods or in Hindu divas before the omnipotent biblical father who is in 'heaven'. He specifies that, as Zeus and Indra had their descendants, our divine descendants will conserve their obsessions, weaknesses and limitations, but they will be able to love, hate, create and destroy at a scale vastly superior to ourselves (Harari 2017, 60).

The Israeli historian explains that throughout history it has been the belief that the majority of gods did not delight in their omnipotence but rather in their 'super capacities', such as to design and to create living beings, to transform their own bodies, to control the environment and the weather, to read minds, to communicate from afar, to travel at elevated velocities, and of course, to free themselves from death. Humans, Harari affirms, are decided in obtaining all such capabilities, and even more (Harari 2017, 60).

In this regard, it is pertinent to point out that in man's battle against old age and death, the 20th century saw him practically double his life expectancy, from forty to seventy years of age. Furthermore, it is projected that this will double again in the 21st century to one hundred and fifty years of age, and it is foreseen that new and successful treatments for 'renovation' as we approach the years 2050, 2100 or 2200 will make it possible to live for five hundred years, and even 'better', 'beating' or 'cheating' death, decade by decade, via the use of genetic cloning and regenerative nanotechnology. In no way does this verify that man will certainly reach immortality, and even less that he has obtained or will obtain the status of God.

It is also convenient to highlight the fact that human beings have finally realized that hunger, and the epidemics and the violence that starvation provokes, the plague and war are their exclusive responsibility and they are not inevitable demonic forces that are out of control, and neither are they an integral part of their gods' cosmic plan. Instead of praying, man has invented innumerable tools, institutions and social systems to control the aforementioned problems that have beset him over the ages, to the point where they become manageable challenges. In no way does this verify that Homo Sapiens Sapiens has certainly ascended to, or is going to be elevated to Homo Deus, as is argued by Harari.

These achievements of man, so fought over and important, do not constitute any of the two classic and today debilitated modes through which medieval man managed to participate in the

divine attributes. Clearly, these successes do not make up man's ascension or ascendancy to the heavenly spheres, and they do not even manage to be catalogued as anointment, or rather as the descent from divine attributes to the worldly human universe.

Such achievements are repeatedly the unveiling of Mythos by Logos, an unveiling which to man, at first, seems to always be surprising, astonishing, supernatural, magical, miraculous and even divine or demonical, but with the passing of time then become plain and expiring scientific axioms. This is exemplified in the great law of universal gravitation 'discovered' by Isaac Newton (1643 – 1727), that in the cosmic scale of history was immediately disproven by Einstein's theory of special relativity (1879 – 1955).

Einstein's contributions, with those of other great thinkers, have permitted man to '*fly*' at unimaginable speeds, and to far-off universes of which not even Zeus, Newton or Einstein himself were aware of. His popular and passive contemporaries did not '*turn*' from men into gods, a mutation that did not even take place in the field of medicine, when Hippocrates (460 – 370 BC) 'discovered' that the cause of sickness is material and resides in the *imbalance* of humours and fluids that make up the organism, an imbalance that has nothing to do with the *irritation* of the gods.

Thus, man's attributes may be considered as wonderful. His powers or 'super capacities' have allowed him to create, destroy and re-programme nature, life and human beings in body, mind and feelings, shaping himself as a virtual being. Yet, ancient, contemporary and modern man has not been able to, nor will he be able to, become the virtual being. His metaphysics, philosophy, science, history, semiotics, logic and, above all, his antilogy, all prove it.

The term virtual expresses the distinctive quality that defines positivity, and it expresses something more than mere possibility and simple potentiality; it is something that lacks nothing in order to be, to possess plain reality. That which is virtual is real with being veritable, and is complete without being definitive. Virtual is a relational concept in which the movement to 'otherness', from the possible to the real, from the potential to the veritable, was already carried out. Virtual is a concept that belongs to the dimension of the infinite, in which exist the capacity to project oneself in a non-place and of being another. That which is virtual is that which lies apart, the indeterminable, yet which can function as determination (Parra 2016, 6, 7).

In Thomas Aquinas' (1225 – 1274) metaphysical designation, the quantity that is virtual or of virtue, belongs to the genus of quality, or more precisely to the order of forms, in such that not only does it apply in the accidental sphere, but it also operates in the transcendental sphere in reference to a magnitude of perfection. It does not allude to extension but rather to that which is *intensive*. Thus, virtual quantity is a spiritual magnitude that measures the *intensity* of *perfection* (Echavarría 2013, 236, 237, 238).

God is the being, according to all the virtue of being, and as such can be the cause of being for all things. He does not exist in a certain form, or rather, according to some finite or limited form. In God, affirms Thomas Aquinas, his essence is identified with being and therefore it is being of unlimited form, and infinite by essence. The total of all entities created themselves form a *community*

and an *order* that, with respect to common *entities* and *beings*, *imitate* in their wealth the infinite plenitude of God's being (Echavarría 2013, 239, 243, 244, 245).

Hence, despite his magnificent achievements, Homo Virtualis is not Homo Deus, and neither is he close to being so, and even further does he find himself from being Zeus, Nut, Ra, Odin, Shangdi, Indra, Allah, Yahweh, Jesus or any other god, for biology, history and philosophy all declare that man is only an animal who imagined and dared to be man. Man imagined himself as God, an illusion after which at the beginning of the 21st century, he has not managed to construct himself into the Virtual Being, but rather into just one, among the many, virtual beings that have existed, exist and will continue to exist, a condition from which he keeps playing at imitating the plenitude of perfection that is attributed to his gods. Fundamentally, according to the categorical maxims of Epicurus (341 – 270 BC) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 – 1872), it is we humans who create gods in our own image and likeness, and as such, the secret of theology is anthropology.

Effectively, just as that which happened with their polar-opposite sisters Reality ↔ Appearance and Mythos ↔ Logos, and for behaving in a similar fashion to the two faces of the god Janus, despite being so *intimate*, the extreme opposites of the antagony Homo ↔ Deus never meet face to face, and much less do they touch. They remain at such a distance, as they have been and will be, just as Aquilles and the tortoise on the transcendent plane in Zeno of Elea's paradox. In fact, if we permit this metaphor, given that they march in opposite directions, Homo and Deus gradually double their distance apart, as man runs in his attempt to catch up with his gods. This further confirms the old adage extrema non se tangent, two extremes do not touch each other, but also the unfinished, calming essence of human beings, given that because of fortune, perfection continues to be one of the boring privileges of the gods.

3. *'Homo Deus'*, confused

We previously explained how a close reading of the successful book *Homo Deus*, written in 2015 by the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harrari, brings to light a Mythos with embellishments of Logos that cannot observe a prophetic imprint that states that very soon man will be elevated towards God, as Homo Deus who will move ahead of ancient gods in his corporal and mental faculties.

In his 'historical prediction', Harari predicted that digital museums and libraries will take the place of churches and temples, and that a world will surge up, eradicating subjectivity and the *superstitious* spirit. It will be a new world in which the emerging Homo Deus will be a mesh of biochemical and electronic algorithms, without obstacles, borders or dogmatic atavisms, a new world in which the barrier between animals and machines will collapse and the difference between fiction and reality will disperse (Harari 2017, 201, 203, 400).

Although he explicitly claimed that he is convinced that in a 'not too distant' future we will be able to create such 'superhumans', three years after bringing to light the great achievements and magnificent potentialities of Homo Sapiens Sapiens that drive him in his ascent to Homo Deus,

Harrari's most recent book titled *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, shows him to have become quickly disillusioned with 21st century man's abilities to differentiate between *fiction* and *reality*. For the man of future years, despite his quantum-computerized powers, the world will 'become' even more 'complex' than it is today.

In his third text, the Israeli historian seems to have realized that his prospects for Homo Deus now turn out to be ignorant, that he *knows less than that which he believes he does*. Although he recognizes that trusting in the knowledge of others has worked out well, he denounces the 'immense' confidence that free thought has developed in the rational individual. He affirms that rationality is a myth and that knowledge is an illusion. He declares that causal relationships are more ramified and more complex, and that our sense of justice could be *antiquated*, and that, although we do indeed desire the truth, the majority of us are not capable of understanding the principle moral problems of the world (Harari 2018, 241, 242, 243, 248, 249, 253).

The Israeli historian's thus announced and promoted Homo Deus now turns out to be less than a perplexed chimpanzee, confused and disorientated, who for having lived 'always' in the *era of post-truth*, lacks the capacity to realize that some false news lasts 'forever'. Homo Sapiens Sapiens, suggests Harari, are the species of post-truth whose power depends on creating fictions and believing in them. Man literally conquered planet Earth thanks to his definitive human capacity to create and spread fictions (Harari 2018, 256, 258, 259, 267).

As a consequence, affirms the Israeli historian, we cannot 'blame' Facebook, Trump or Putin for inaugurating a 'new' and frightening era of post-truth. Truth and power can travel together only for a stretch. Sooner or later, they will divert for different paths. Human cooperation depends on a delicate equilibrium between truth and fiction. As a species, humans prefer power over truth, as we invest more time in controlling the world than understanding it. If we want power, at some point we will have to spread fictions. If we encircle ourselves by sincere reality, few people will follow us. As such, states Harari, if the reader dreams of a society in which the truth reigns supreme, and myths are ignored, he or she will have 'little' to hope for from Homo Sapiens Sapiens. It will be '*better*' that he or she try their luck with the chimpanzees (Harari 2018, 258, 264, 267).

With this diminished diagnosis, Harari moves quickly on to provide a grain of hope, and he announces a formula in order to distinguish reality from fiction. He specifies that, in no way, does this regrettable situation mean that there exists license to lie with malice, and that it would be a mistake to arrive at the conclusion that everything is false news, that any intent to discover the truth is doomed to failure, and that there is no difference between propaganda and serious journalism. Following that, after recognizing that some newspapers make the honest effort to find the truth, he recommends that, instead of accepting false news as the norm, we must recognize it as a problem, and further make the effort to distinguish between reality and fiction (Harari 2018, 268).

The Israeli historian transmits this hoped for and encouraging formula so that the publicized, but now denigrated, Homo Deus avoids being brain washed and distinguishes between reality and fiction. Such a recipe is integrated by two simple general rules: 1) to pay, that is, to pay with 'good

money' for reliable information; 2) to read relevant scientific literature when a question appears to be of exceptional importance; literature formed of peer reviewed articles, books published by well-respected academic publishers and by professors from respectable institutions. As a 'plus' in the 21st century, given that science fiction can be seen as the most important literary genre for all, in reality it is not a 'bad idea' that scientists begin to write *science fiction* (Harari 2018, 269, 270)[1].

4. Boundaries between lies and pretence

In order to effectively combat the denounced problem of post-truth's contemporary hegemony, Harari should also make an 'honest effort' and decidedly recognize that his writing is in no way 'historical prediction' but rather science fiction. It is an abiding recommendation to go over certain formal protocols such as classic signs of fiction that are characteristic to the fictional narrative that, as stated by Umberto Eco (1932 – 2016), always help to establish the boundaries between *lies* and *pretence*.

Continuing with the idea of establishing whether a novel is a lie, Umberto Eco responded that, at first sight the 'facts' related in a fictional narrative would be a lie, for the author knows perfectly well that he has invented them. Naturally, the author does not wish to lie, only to pretend, and so relates the story as though it were truth, and asks the reader to suspend his disbelief, and to participate in the fiction, just as we accept it when a child brandishes a stick as if it were a sword. Of course, although at times narrative fiction begins with a sign of *false veracity*, it necessitates the emittance of the signs of fiction that range from the word '*novel*' on the front cover to the incipits such as '*once upon a time...*'. A prime example is the frontispiece of the first edition of the satire *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), where the name of the author, Jonathan Swift, does not appear as the author of the fiction, but as Gulliver giving his *true autobiographical* account (Eco 2016, 382, 383).

Readers tend to not allow themselves to be thus *deceived* because since the true story of Luciano de Samosata (120 – 192), considered the first work of science fiction, the exaggerated affirmations of veracity come across as signs of fiction. However, as fantasies and references to the real world become intertwined in a novel, there is no lack of readers who become disorientated, take novels seriously as though they spoke of facts that really have happened, and they read novels like a sequence of true affirmations. The situation for such readers has no *esthetic valence*, for instead of searching for reading material about life in general and about themselves, they are so concerned with taking a story seriously that they do not ask themselves if the story is told well, or not. This incurs and manifests that which Eco defined as fictional deficit due to the incapacity to *suspend belief* (Eco 2016, 383, 386).

Yet even before losing sight of the classic *signs of fiction*, it would be recommendable for the Israeli historian to distinguish between myth, religion, science, human conventions (economics, legalities and the regulation of movement, seen in money, companies and even traffic lights), ideology, narrative fiction, political and commercial propaganda, and *post-truth*.

As a historian, or a novelist, Harari would also be well reminded to be conscious of the risk and danger inherent in stating that all is fiction, for history and literature demonstrate that when tyrannical figures and their willing assistants take this maxim seriously, just as was denounced by

Arthur Koestler (1905 – 1983), and the I in human being becomes at the same time so unreal and indecent that it mockingly takes on the name of 'grammatical fiction', the body of *I* is quickly subjected to the rule of the dictator in charge and then darkness falls over the light of the day.

In affirming that everything is fiction, really it is saying that little or practically nothing is. Before indicting that all such examples are fiction, aside from establishing their specific differences, Harari should realize that fictions are 'real' and not mere 'weak duplicates', 'replicas' or 'imitations' of reality; that depth, color, shape, line, movement, outline and physiognomy are just some of the many ramifications of the being; that the illusion of accessing the universal and all-embracing '*reality*' is lacking in sense; and that the vacuum and weight that the being generates (which is never complete for man) is the deception of false imagining, that claims a positivity that precisely fulfills its vacuum (Merleau Ponty 1986, 67, 70).

Perhaps then, Harari might rethink his explicit objective in likening, for example, religion to false news, a comparison that the Israeli historian stops himself from extending to 'civil religion'. Possibly deep down he shares the conception '*virtus dormitiva*' from the Romans, a conception from which, as put my Umberto Eco, it is simple to arrive at the idea of religion as an *instrumentum regni*, a resource that a political power uses, inclusively represented by both sceptics and non-believers, in order to *control* its subjects or the people (Eco 2016, 283, 284)[2].

Were Harari to consider the specific differences that exist among myth, civil religion, science, human conventions, ideology, novels and propaganda, to name a few, it might aid him in noticing that false news born of bad intention is significantly distant from a reprehensible religious dogma, from an enigmatic indigenous myth, from a perishable scientific axiom, or from a *utopia* or an *explicit lie* born of *good intention*.

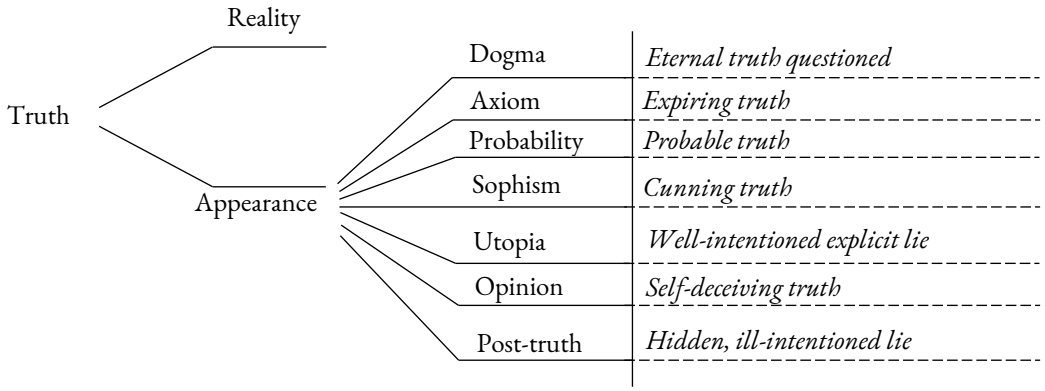
5. Gnosiological value of appearance: the difference between appearance and things in themselves

For this purpose, the Israeli historian might wish to take into account that concepts of appearance and reality run throughout the history of western thought, and vary according to the different conceptions that diverse thinkers have, and how they take on the challenge of understanding man and the world. This process shows a demand of the senses and a revaluation of the gnosiological weight of appearance, which after being conceived in a deprecatory manner as a devalued expression of truth and reality, is then considered as the only way which man has to know the world and to access his being and that which is true.

In effect, two distinctive and opposing meanings have been attributed to the notion of appearance. On the one side, it implies the contrary to the real, in such that it designates the fictitious, the false. On the other side, it implies the appearance of the truth, being present to everything, that which is the condition of the possibility of the truth and reality. In accordance with the first meaning, to know consists of ending that which is apparent in order to arrive at that which is real; regarding the second meaning, to know is to utilize appearance in order to see how the object under study is.

Each way of understanding the apparent corresponds to philosophical periods, of which we can extract the following scheme of epistemological fictions, perhaps offering us elements that contribute towards clarifying what post-truth is. With this objective in mind, Emanuel Kant's (1724 – 1804) distinction between appearance and things in themselves has particular pertinence. Kant called that which is apparent the appearance of being, the form of being from that which exists, distinguishing the sensed from real. That an object seems to be something other, is distinct from the appearance of this object. This is to say that that which lies within the subject's conscious is the only thing to which the subject, or the observer, is disposed, and to which the subject has access to in order to know and construct reality.

Modalities of epistemological fiction



If Harari acknowledged the distinction existing between appearance and things in themselves, and did not underestimate the specific differences between appearance, representation and fiction (only one of which today is considered post-truth), he would understand that not everything is the same in the galaxy of the human imagination, and that in no way is Homo Sapiens Sapiens the species of post-truth. Perhaps then, the Israeli historian would endorse the well-known differentiation of the French anthropologist Gilbert Durand (1921 – 2012) who advised that the mythical frenzy that gives rise to a dictator cannot be learnt in the same way as that which would be the mythical enthusiasm that manifests itself around a saintly creator of order, and warned that this is not only a difference in degree, but also in nature (Durand 2003, 14).

With this essential and fundamental distinction in mind, it seems relevant to point out that, quite differently to the field of literature in which this distinction is a defect, the aforementioned fictional deficit due to the inability to suspend belief is a virtue in scientific and political spheres. In fact, given the growing populism in the media that through a negative semantic faith sells false hopes, fictional deficit is a virtue that is progressively scarcer, particularly regarding the urge to stimulate the capacity for maintaining continual disbelief that allows the distinguishing between fiction and lie that is constantly radiated across social networks and impulsively replicated by the mass media.

6. Post-truth: a hidden and ill-intentioned lie

In light of the increase in its use, up by 2000% in relation to the previous year, 2016 saw the Oxford Dictionary declare the term post-truth as the word of the year. The dictionary's definition states that post-truth denotes circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in forming the public opinion than appealing to emotions and personal beliefs (Rubio 2016, 1).

The term was first used in an article titled 'A Government of Lies', written by Steve Teisch and published in 1992 in the magazine, The Nation. In his article, Teisch makes reference to the first Gulf War. He regrettably states that, despite the categorical warnings of Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677), when a falsehood is permitted, and then infinitely more follow, we have freely decided that we want to live in a world of post-truth, and therefore in a world in which dictators no longer have to work hard in order to suppress the truth because it no longer has importance or relevance (Rubio 2016, 1; García 2017, 1, 2).

After Teisch, the US sociologist Ralph Keyes published his book The Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty, and Deception in Contemporary Life in 2004. The book puts forward the idea that, in addition to truths and lies, we now have statements that are possibly untrue, yet are considered too 'benign' as to be called false. Subjects stop being referred to by their names, euphemisms abound and, under the shelter of a slogan, all ideas and positions are equally valid, while the harmful effects of the false tolerance and diplomacy of the politically 'correct' widen (García 2017, 2, 3).

In the era of post-truth, the line between truth and lies, between honesty and immorality, becomes blurred to the point that deceiving others becomes a challenge, a game, and in the ultimate instance, a habit that feeds itself from the viral propagation offered up by social networks and practiced by, in particular, new aspirants of persuasive 'principles' of the politics that determine who has power, not who possesses the truth (García 2017, 2).

Following Keyes' book, many more articles have been published. In particular those in the Independent, which, after the US elections in 2016, indicated that we have now begun to live in the society of post-truth, where the truth has been devalued to such an extent that, from being an ideal in political debate, it has now become a monetary unit without value. The Economist, under the title of 'The Art of Lying', highlights that the politics of post-truth are based on phrases that feel true, but do not have any 'real' basis (Rubio 2016, 1).

Post-truth, affirms Ruben Amon, can be a lie taken as the truth, or, even a lie assumed as a lie but reinforced as belief or 'alternative fact' shared amongst society. Words and images, says Alexi Ortega, create a reality and appearance of truth. The predisposition of the human mind to repeat an idea, even when the idea is erroneous or simply false is quite brilliant. It only needs a recognizable image, a phrase with 'spirit', to cut reality up and turn it into convenience, and into a convoluted simple idea that will generate a viral phenomenon (García 2017, 2; Ortega 2015, 1).

The appearance of the truth as a lie produces errors in the vision of reality. However, the appearance of truth can become more harmful than a plain lie that, per se, is relatively '*discoverable*'. Lies need the truth in order to survive and the appearance of the truth provides a semblance of

verisimilitude that makes the lie more difficult to detect. In order to subsist, a lie needs the support of its creator and the accomplices in the deception. It is here that the real victims stand out, who, with their mental lethargy and intentional blindness, set themselves up as the chief accessory that feed the cunning argument, under the conviction that fiction saves, reality kills (Ortega 2015, 2).

Under the title of Post-truth, or the decorated lie, and having asserted that we should be ashamed for using this deformed word, or '*palobro'*, Alfonso Bolado indicates that post-truth is that sociopolitical situation that, above all, is the fruit of emotional incitement and not of a sensible pondering of information in reality. It is what has always been known as manipulation. It is about the aforementioned '*palobro'*, a word that is poorly constructed, at least it is in Spanish, for none of the connotations inherent in the prefix 'post', connect to the noun, 'truth'. A lie, with its distinct meanings (fallacy, fraud, story...) do not come after the truth; perhaps at the side or in opposition, but they never make up part of it (Bolado 2017, 1).

Hence, the success and popularity of the 'word' post-truth does not owe itself to how well it is constructed. Does it respond to an urgency in defining something new? According to Bolado, no. Does it respond to any necessity? Bolado claims that it does: it responds to the necessity to hide, under the prestigious layer of the word truth, and behind the old, obscene and forever present demagogic manipulation that today favorably counts on the complicity or the negligence of the proprietors, administrators and operators of the sounding board that are the mass media and social networks. In constructing this hegemony, post-truth appears to have just one obstacle: the presence and long history in the political culture of populism that so efficiently serves the unruliest of both the right and the left (Bolado 2017, 1).

Conclusion: A pact of threatened veracity

The observance of the pact of veracity that underlies human communication is today threatened by the exalted maxim of the Nazi propaganda machine's mentor, Joseph Goebbles, and it even appears to be arriving at its climax: a lie told once continues to be a lie, but told a thousand times becomes a truth. Faced with this hegemony of semblance, everything indicates that Peter Sloterdijk is right when he affirms that it seems that now not only the gods, but also the wise have *retired* (Sibilia 2010, 191).

Undoubtedly, the establishment of the postmodern *Mentior, ergo sum* (I lie, therefore I exist), upon which the hegemony of the contemporary post-truth positions itself, and that fluctuates between the two extremes of the dominant antilogy Pain ↔ Pleasure, constitutes a severe simultaneous defeat of Mythos and Logos.

Nevertheless, this failure and capitulation will also be *transitory*, for history teaches that, from its divergent viewpoints, the antagony of Mythos ↔ Logos has always fought not only for freeing itself from the rustic doxa and the precarious appearance, but also for defining and establishing that which is real, true, good, just and correct, all of which are fundamental questions that do not diminish. They continue to be relevant though remain unresolved, and augur a continuous and great

epistemic, axiological and political war developed by man, the virtual being of the 21st century, who although is imbued in his digital culture, virtual reality, space of telematics, real time, artificial intelligence, binary language, algorithms of informatics, big data, predictive method, and probable truth, will continue, as human beings do, to dream and love, for as Auguste Comte aptly put it (1798 – 1857), we become tried of thinking and even of acting, but never of loving.

In the meantime, perhaps it is worth remembering that which Pythagoras of Samos (569 – 475 BC) taught, that if error prevails over the truth, the wise distance themselves and wait until the truth reigns again. But, let's consider that it might be better to welcome the advice of Gilles Deleuze (1925 – 1995): that it is not about fearing or hoping, but rather searching for new arms, and thus we come to that which we learnt from Zaratrustra, who, despite being tired of man, wanted to become man again, believing that the love of man will kill us.

Endnotes:

1. Regarding these two '*lessons*' and Harari's *plus*, it is worth keeping in mind Umberto Eco's *advice* in confronting post-truth in the 21st century. In spite of ending up like Jorge Luis Borges' *Funes el memorioso* (1899 – 1986), who despite *remembering everything*, is a complete idiot *blinded* by his *inability* to *choose* and to *reject*, it is important to *distinguish* between disconnected and well-articulated ideas, and between a false and reliable position. It is to define and to establish criteria and techniques to *choose* information; to form a critical capacity and ability to *compare* different *sources*; to analyze and report on virtuous positions and positions that spread imprecision, necessary challenges principally for schools, teachers, newspapers and journalists, those who report news that actually exists, but do not invent it (Eco 2016, 81, 84, 85, 98, 190, 492, 493). In the same vein, the recommendation is to promote policies in education and the self-regulation of platforms, as well as evaluating and adjusting diverse legislative initiatives in order to regulate and to sanction the circulation of false news in social networks. As an example, despite a fine of fifty million euros, the German law NetxDG insists that xenophobic content, or content against democracy, must be removed within twenty-four hours after the denunciation. This initiative has enabled the possibility of creating a mechanism for censorship in the hands of new, private '*ministeries of truth*', who are delegated with the power of *deciding* what *false* news is.
2. Although in his *Theological –Political Treatise*, Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) denounced that the great secret of the monarchical regimen and its maximum interest consist in keeping men deceived and disguising, under the specious name of religion, the fear of being controlled. He did not reach the extremity of likening religion, and much less 'civil religion', to *false news* (Eco 2016, 283, 284).

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Revisiting Science and Literature: Chateaubriand's Ecological Discourse

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Abstract:

Seemingly, science and literature don't have anything in common. Actually, fields such as medicine and ecology have maintained a close relationship with literature, this perhaps because they share the same humanistic values. This article examines this relationship, and relies on Chateaubriand's works as a writer and his deeds as a politician to explain how the ecology of forests inherited from a long aristocratic tradition which continued to exist during the French Revolution, and allowed the reforestation of France from 1827 on.

Keywords: Ecology, medicine, literature, science, deforestation, Chateaubriand.

In his recent book, *La Fibre littéraire. Le Discours médical sur la lecture au XVIIIe s.*, Alexander Wenger demonstrated that eighteenth-century doctors, such as Tissot in 1769, generally believed that women who were avid novel readers were bound to lose their sense of reality and develop certain pathologies such as nymphomania and onanism. As a consequence, not doing their domestic chores, they would become useless at home. As for novelists whose imagination and sensitivity were judged as equally uncontrollable as their female readers', they were held responsible for the effeminacy of society.

The "violent suspicion" which had always plagued literature was not only medical. As Marc Fumaroli points out in his latest book, this suspicion used to be also "philosophical" and "theological" in the past. Today, it has been replaced by a "tenacious" belief that literature is not "democratic" enough and worse, it fails to be "scientific" (Fumaroli 2019, 643).

I would like to address this last accusation, for, as long as we will continue believing that the method used in "natural sciences" is the only "model" worth using "to understand the world" and as long as literature educational programs will go on internalizing a "complex of inferiority" toward the scientific "idol", the place given to literature, its study, and its teaching "will grow smaller and smaller" (Fumaroli 2019, 644). Hence my intention to show how science and literature have always intersected at least in two fields which regard both man and nature: Medicine and ecology.

For a surgeon-poet such as Lorand Gaspar who doesn't recognize the scientific idol as his, there is actually not much difference between literature and science. For him both are eternal means "to understand humanity, its mental and physical functioning, its relationship with the world, and with the forces of nature" (Gaspar 2004, 111). Gaspar is convinced that "since humanity is a tiny

part of Nature, poets, artists, naturalists, explorers and scientists should join hands to explore the unknown they will never be short of" (117). Moreover, he sustains that poetry and science are both intuitive since they are ways to communicate to others a subjective experience and to propose openings "on the unknown thanks to the intuitive aptitudes of the brain" (112). Poets and scientists are trailblazers according to Gaspar and translators according to Proust. In any case, their observations, their reflections on reality, their "impressions" according to Proust (117), should be considered as starting material, unknown signs which are meant to be deciphered.

Lorand Gaspar is not the only specialist in medicine who is also a poet. There were always writers who were doctors from the Renaissance period on and even before. Both Rabelais and Fracastor were doctors. The former wrote his famous stories where his medical knowledge constantly perspires, from 1532 to his death. The latter wrote a poem on syphilis in 1530. Later on, authors such as John Keats, Chekhov, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Somerset Maugham, Gertrude Stein, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Michael Crichton, were either trained in the medical field or performed as doctors. For these writers, the medical *episteme* and its literary representation weren't conflicting, to the contrary of popular belief. Nor did the conflict exist for doctors who use literary works in their medical thesis or write critiques on fictions dealing with diseases. According to Martha L. Hildrethi, the novel written by Balzac, *Le Médecin de campagne*, even became "a myth" for doctors during the Third Republic: "As a narrative of medical practice, the country doctor story constructed an ideal vision of doctor-patient relations and a model of medical understanding, where medicine was represented as a social mission and doctors were portrayed as vectors of secular morality and rational knowledge" (Hildrethi 2004, 1).

Furthermore, in an article from the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, Mathilde Gérard provided a genealogy of literary works from writers who were not doctors but nonetheless dealt with diseases such as the plague, cholera, tuberculosis, syphilis, AIDS, etc. Her genealogy included the works of Sophocles, La Fontaine's famous *Animals afflicted with the plague*, Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Tony Kushner (Gérard, 2009).

Recently, a poetry contest held at the Yale University School of Medicine and at the University College London Medical School showed that students involved in medicine were highly interested in literature, this, even though the medical field is more and more invaded by "high-tech biomedical research". As the article pointed out, doctors generally believe that reading or writing requires "skills not that dissimilar from those employed in daily clinical work – an ability to connect emotionally with the subject, as well as careful attention to rhythm, whether it was in the form of verse or heartbeats and breathing". The article quoted a professor at Yale who recognizes that: "Poetry opens our minds to asking patients the right questions, while helping us address the emotional demands of doctoring, especially in the formative years". For another professor, "poetry does a better job in teaching because it is about embracing the human aspect of suffering, not just knowing how many lymph nodes are positive and where the pain is on a 1-to-10 scale." As a consequence, Yale has

"established a committee in charge of developing a required literary reading list for students that includes poetry" (Chen, 2011).

Let's finish with the article written by Alexandre Wenger, "Poetry and medicine". This article is precious in the context of our topic because it shows that, as long as a remedy to cure syphilis hadn't been found, doctors and poets interpreted syphilis as a disease transmitted by Venus. Wenger traces the use of the word syphilis in the medical and the artistic worlds from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century. As is well-known, the word syphilis came from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and, in particular, from the story of Syphilos, a shepherd failing to worship his god, and therefore punished with a disease affecting his genitals. What is less known is the painting attributed to Durer which portrayed a mercenary coming back from the New World, covered with pustules, and surrounded by the astrological signs responsible for his disease. Wenger also gives numerous examples of poets who celebrated this disease in verses holding Cupid's arrows responsible for it. He documents the fact that both artists and doctors dealt with syphilis: The Italian doctor, Fracastor, already mentioned, wrote a poem in Latin, *Syphilis*, whose explanations of the disease were similar to those of artists. The most interesting part of Wenger's research concerns the multiple translations of Fracastor's poems used by doctors and poets long after the Renaissance, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century. For instance, in 1830, a doctor, Giraudeau de Saint-Gervais, published *L'art de se guérir soi-même, ou traitement des maladies syphilitiques sans mercure* (The Art of Curing Yourself or The Treatment of Syphilis without Mercury). Then, stimulated by his success in 1840, he used the talent of a poet, Auguste-Marseille Barthélemy, to acclaim his treatment of syphilis thanks to a translation of Fracastor's poem, in a book entitled *Syphilis, Poem in Two Chants, written by Barthélemy, with Dr Giraudeau de Saint-Gervais's notes*.

Let's examine now the field of ecology, a science which is considered quite recent and unrelated to literature. However, as we will see, a politician-mathematician-poet-novelist-memoirist such as Chateaubriand could be considered as a pioneer in this field inasmuch as he expressed a great interest in nature, its fauna and flora, the environment and acted on this interest almost a century before the word ecology was coined.

As a matter of fact, Claire Robert's 2008 thesis regarding the roots of ecology and Ariane Debourdeau's 2013 book devoted to the archeology of the founding texts of ecology count Linnaeus, Buffon, and Humboldt as the genitors of ecology. Chateaubriand is not listed in these works on ecology, perhaps because historians of ecology have had a tendency to reject the facto "literary sources" focusing on nature on the basis that they are "by definition subjective" and "produced by elites", who cannot understand the point of view of scientists on nature (Cornu 2003, 173).

However, Chateaubriand was not only an admirer of Linnaeus, Buffon, a friend of Humboldt, and a colleague of Jacquelinot de Pampelune who wrote uncountable pages on the American, European and Oriental fauna and flora, he also acted, as a politician, on his belief that nature needed to be protected.

Chateaubriand's interest for nature and his love of wilderness started as a child in Brittany,

France. As all the family's small fortune was going to be inherited by his older brother who was sent to Paris, the young viscount stayed at the country-side and was raised with the local boys and girls, spending most of his time hunting and dreaming in the woods. Introduced at Versailles as a young man, he immediately disliked the Court. Along with the statesman and protector of philosophers Malesherbes, whose grand-daughter had married his older brother, Chateaubriand was part of the aristocracy favorable to the Revolution and to the continuation, after the Revolution, of the politics of forest protection which started at the end of the Medieval period, as we will see later on.

However, when he saw the heads of the two Bastille guardians at the top of spears with their eyes popping out, shown as trophies, he stopped supporting the Revolution: As the Bastille prison had hardly any prisoners, there was no reason, according to him, to massacre anyone. Besides, he believed, like his hero Rousseau, that the blood of one man was more valuable than the freedom of humankind. Convinced that there is no one more "servile, despicable, coward and narrow-minded than a terrorist," he decided to leave France and go visit America in 1791 as an explorer (Chateaubriand 1911, 235). He came back to France a year later when he heard that the king had been put in jail.

His trip to America allowed him to discover a while before Thoreau the American virgin forests which didn't exist anymore in France and in the Old World. Later on, in 1806, his trip to the Orient where primitive forests had somewhat expired reinforced his impression that North America and South America with the Amazon forest were the cradle of nature. According to the famous French ecologist politician Brice Lalonde, Chateaubriand's two trips, one in the West the other in the East, made him realize that: "Forests precede people, deserts follow them". Although this avant-garde ecological formula doesn't exist in his writings, a lot of Chateaubriand's pronouncements come close to it in his writing as we will see.

In America, the young traveler immediately noticed the exotic beauty of the American "blue birds". However, his meditation went beyond an aesthetic contemplation of the world laid in front of him: Seeing that the harvesters in the fields were forcing thousands of blue birds to flee away, he deplored their negative effect on them in the long run. His intuition was correct: Later on, in the nineteenth century, the population of blue birds almost disappeared. It reappeared only in the twentieth century thanks to strict ecological measures. This was not an isolated instance in his life where he showed awareness in face of the precariousness of an environment faced with human predation.

For instance, when his brother, his sister-in-law, and Malesherbes were sent to the guillotine the same day and when the rest of his family was put in jail in France, he was in London from 1793 to 1799. There, in exile, poor and unknown, starving at times and forced to chew on paper to get distracted from his hunger, he found solace sitting in the numerous parks full of birds in London, birds reminding him of his native Brittany that he thought he might never see again. When he came back to England as an ambassador in 1822, his new fortune didn't prevent him from immediately noticing the industrial smokes invading the atmosphere which didn't exist thirty years before in London, and the absence of the birds he loved with all his heart. The disappearance of birds in

London was as shocking as the disappearance of the blue birds in America.

Chateaubriand was well aware of living at a time when the ecologic equilibrium which had prevailed for centuries was coming to an end. Being born during the Enlightenment, he initially trusted progress and believed in perfectibility. However, after seeing blood in the streets of Paris, after the death and sufferings of his family and friends, after his trip to America where predatory settlers were annexing and destroying a land preserved for millenniums, after seeing the effect of wars on nature in France upon his return in 1800, a question regarding modern men, that he formulated in his first *Essay on Revolutions* (1797) and in the *Genius of Christianism* in 1801, started haunting: "What is this new Prometheus going to do ?" Are our scientists and those convinced of manifest destiny "going to create a world?" From an ecological point of view, his answer to these questions was again a prediction: "No, he will destroy it".

Before concentrating on his actions as a politician regarding the environment later on in his life, let's evoke his younger years to show how his sensitivity and political awareness toward nature came to fruition. During his exile in England, being sick and having been told by doctors that he didn't have much time to live, he wanted to write an essay, *Essai sur les Révolutions*, before dying, an essay in which he would use his literary and scientific training as a mathematician acquired during his youth to be "useful to his peers" (Chateaubriand 2009, 250). To do so, he tried to find not only « historic » (262), « mathematic » (972), and « moral » truths (578), but also « natural » truths (262). For him, at this early stage of his life, it was already clear that natural truths were the most "important" (262) ones. As a matter of fact, he was already convinced that men were "far from having invented anything new" since the Hellenistic glory days, this « except in natural sciences » (956-8).

A few years after his exile, having recovered from his sickness, he returned to France. As can be seen in le *Génie du Christianisme*, he regretted all his life having left America and abandoned his early dream of devoting his life as an explorer and a botanist there (Chateaubriand 1868, 65). As a full-time writer from 1791 to 1817, the year he also became a politician, he was dismayed by the separation which was starting to impose itself between abstract scientific studies and "literary studies", and considered this separation a major problem in education (210). For this reason, he particularly appreciated the work of the famous scientist, Erasmus Darwin, author of "The love of plants" and of Linnaeus who had based his approach to nature on the reproductive organs of plants and used poetic personifications to explain the « the sexual system of plants » (Duris 1993, 161). Needless to say, Chateaubriand immediately adopted Linnaeus' Latin binominal taxonomy which is still in use nowadays. This didn't prevent him, however, from admiring Buffon whose description of nature had revived the Italian descriptive poetry inherited from Homer, Hesiod, and Virgil. As Sebastien Baudoin pointed out, the "poetic and scientific discourse" could perfectly "coexist in the same poetics of effects" (Baudoin 2009, 223).

Ironically, science, scientists, botanists were not responsible for the dry prose which was starting to emerge and was going to prevail after his death in 1848 with Positivism. Very early, 1797, in *Essai sur les Révolutions*, Chateaubriand held the authors of the Enlightenment responsible for this dry prose and for the separation of nature and science. According to him, the authors of the Encyclopedia

had rejected *ekphrasis* on the basis that encyclopedic knowledge is based on reason (Baudoin 2209, 223) and can only be formulated in a dry objective prose. Inspired by the descriptive "prose of Buffon" who was hostile to the Encyclopedia, Chateaubriand reacted to this dry prose and was able to reach a beauty in his prose, "never known before" (Chateaubriand 1833, 167), prose that historians of ecology have a hard time nowadays to recognize as a valid tool of exploration because it belongs to the literary movement of Romanticism.

Neither Pluche in 1732 with his *Spectacle de la nature*, nor Delille with his scientific poetry in the *Jardins* or the *Trois Règnes de la Nature* in 1808, nor Rousseau or Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, have created a nexus of animals forming a natural "galaxy in prose" comparable to the one created by Chateaubriand in his work (Fumaroli 2006, 329): The number of different flying, rampant, walking, domesticated or wild, animals from all continents Chateaubriand evoked in his work is abyssal. Let alone the other animals, 150 different kind of birds are evoked in his work. The word 'bird' appears more than 550 times in his works. A century later, Proust came close to Chateaubriand with the thirty or so different types of birds that he introduced in his works. However, Proust focused only on continental birds, his interest in birds being only literary. In turn, Chateaubriand spoke about birds from a naturalist point of view. French writers after him such as Balzac, Zola, Flaubert, Maupassant or Proust mostly used birds in metaphors or comparisons. It seems that the more science advanced during the nineteenth century, the more the presence of nature receded in literature. The industrial era having caused havoc, Zola became its reporter: Ecology, which had become indispensable, had to be invented.

François de Chateaubriand whose saint was Francis of Assisi, patron of birds, placed birds in the famous "chain of beings" (Essai 968) created by Plato on the top of the scale. In the *Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem*, he even declared that migrating birds were superior to Aristotle because they already knew America existed, Aristotle didn't. A fervent reader since his childhood of Buffon's *Natural History* and amateur of the Garden of Plants in Paris that Buffon had transformed into a museum, Chateaubriand already knew the American "white bird" before going to America. Aware that the experts, Buffon, Linnaeus, Jussieu or Lamarck disagreed about this bird in particular (Martinet 1987, 5), he was right to think that ornithology was far from being an exact science: Buffon had recognized two thousand different species of birds, now ornithologists recognize eighteen thousand different species, and who knows how many will be recognized in a century. Obviously, the naturalists of Chateaubriand's time didn't have the information naturalists have nowadays. How could they know and then declare that the ortolan belonged to Europe and the snow bird to America?

The following example of the snow bird may explain why Chateaubriand had serious doubts that science would always have the final word on anything. As early as 1797, he expressed fear that science would become entirely mechanical and only focus on "matter" (Essai 966). He used the pompous word 'ornithologist', which was introduced in the eighteenth century, only one time in his entire work. Conscious that science had its limitations, when he saw a solitary couple of "birds"

in his *Voyage en Amérique*, he humbly identified them as "white birds" and added that "ornithologists" put them in the *passer nivalis* group (Chateaubriand 2008, 173). Later on, in his *Memoirs*, he simply named them "white sparrow" or "white passerine", passerine coming from *passer*, and snow from *nivalis.* For this bird in particular, Chateaubriand had consulted Buffon's works published between 1771 and 1786: There the white birds, *passer nivalis*, corresponded either to "the snow ortolan" or "the jacobin ortolan". However, for Linnaeus that he knew well too, "the snow ortolan" was an *emberiza nivalis*, and "the jacobin ortolan" was an *embeliza hyemalis*. And nowadays it is recognized as a snow bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)!

Indeed, the natural beauty of the American birds which were unknown in Europe and discovered by the young traveler during his year spent in America contributed to his defense of nature. The red cardinal was mentioned by him only in the context of America in his works. He admired the blue herons or jays and the feathers of the parakeets served as natural clothes for the Native Americans. The ruffed grouse with it magnificent blue tail was the equivalent of the European partridge. And America had a blue thrush that Europe didn't have.

But again, with the thrush, it wasn't only the beauty of nature which inspired him. If the thrush became an important symbol in his work it is because it encapsulated what is lost forever both on a personal and ecological level. When he heard a thrush singing in Montboissier, France, he was in his Fifties. This bird's song was so powerful that it resurrected his entire youth, the world before the Revolution, and before the industrial revolution. Curiously, the thrush which is so important in his work, appears only a few times whereas the nightingale is mentioned 80 times and the lark 35 times. However, the thrush appears at crucial times and each time, it corresponds to a different group of *passer*, which goes to show how informed Chateaubriand was. The first time the thrush appears is in his *Voyage en Amérique* when he sees "thousands of blue thrush" disappearing because of the agricultural progress and the violation of a land that Native Americans had kept intact for centuries (262). The American blue thrush which is endemic to American belongs to a different group than the thrush he heard in Montboissier, France. The latter belonged to the group of the musician thrush, *Turdus musicus*, according to Linneaus in 1758 and to the *Turdus philomelos* group according to Brehm in 1831. In his *Memoirs*, Chateaubriand mentioned Agrippine's thrush in the following comparison: "The people of Orinoco don't exist anymore; a dozen of words from their dialect has only been remembered by some parrots who repeat them at the top of trees, the same way Agrippine's thrush used to warble some Greek words on the railing of Roman balconies" (Chateaubriand 1911, 393). This thrush, *Turdus pilaris*, can imitate the sounds made by other birds or by humans. In all cases, all the thrushes mentioned always appear in the context of disappearance and exile: The blue thrush are disappearing, youth is forever gone, and so do languages which were once spoken. Needless to say, this bird is a perfect symbol also because the thrush has been the most hunted bird from the antiquity on, the purple thrush's flesh being a delicacy.

Let's turn now to the later years when Chateaubriand could act on the environment. Mentioned previously as one of the genitors of ecology, Jacquelinot de Pampelune was the

rapporteur of one of the first laws requiring an annual budget for the maintenance of pavements, and he pleaded for the esthetic importance of tree alignments along the roads in France in 1824. However, almost a decade before, when Chateaubriand became a full-time politician during the Restauration in 1817, he had already rejected Title XI financial bill recommending the sale of 370.658 acres of forests belonging to the State (Le Bot 2012, 16). Instead of selling this land to private investors, the State should sell this land, according to him, to certain regions so that their forests could embellish their cities' environment and benefit the poor. His rationale was that the whole country could preserve certain indispensable families of trees that private investors would undoubtedly destroy if given a chance to buy this land. To strengthen his argument, Chateaubriand quoted the disappearance of the larch trees which once covered the Cevennes and the dense thickets which used to protect the city of Boulogne and Le Havre from the western wind which tormented them (Le Bot 2012, 16). Not only did he advocate for the utility of ancestral forests, he also maintained that well-kept plantations could have saved a plethora of streams, a third of which had already dried up. Convinced that "nature knows more than men", Chateaubriand declared that "wherever trees disappeared, men would be punished for their lack of foresight" (Le Bot 2012, 15) --formula very close to the one attributed to him: « Forests precede people, deserts follow them » (Le Bot 2012, 15).

Being also a historian, Chateaubriand knew that forests had a long history. Whereas the Romans didn't have a legislation for forests, forest being "*res nullius*" for them, French legists started to defend the royal forests, "basis of the power of the crown", as early as the thirteenth century. The principle of their inalienability came a century after. During the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, the language previously used regarding forest continued to appear in edicts such as the Moulins Edicts in 1566 (the preservation of forest being in the king's oath when crowned) or the 1613 Treaty which contained two chapters regarding forests (Morin 2010, 25-6). In 1632, a treaty entitled "Woods" claimed that laws were needed to preserve forests. It underlined the fact that the king should protect forests from any abuse of individuals, this to preserve nature for the common good. High timber should be prioritized because it was precious for society in general and for the construction of boats or of temples, in particular. The 1669 Forest Order in favor of the protection of forests which condemned any abuse of the existing forests reaffirmed again the Old Regime "administrative dogma" regarding the protection and conservation of forests (Devèze 1966, 246). The language used from the Renaissance on in the edicts regarding the rules meant to sustain forests was so "concise" that it was used again later when physiocrats meant to turn into theories ecological sustainability. And, as these rules of sustainability remained the same from aristocratic times to modern times, one could conclude that ecology has in fact aristocratic origins (Pinceti 1993).

It is actually the rising tension between the interests of commoners and those of the common good represented by the aristocracy which in part led to the French revolution: Around the middle of the eighteenth century, the population growth and the birth of industry provoked the need to have access to more land and to more woods (Devèze 1966, 247). Under these pressures, even the protected royal forests were sacrificed, especially when Louis XVI took over and left those in charge

of the finance deal with money matters (Devèze 244). During the Revolution and Napoleonic wars, the need for wood to build boats provoked the sale of vast surfaces of forests. In 1817, when Chateaubriand became a politician, the situation regarding forests was so disastrous that it was high time to reverse this current of destruction. During the Restauration, Chateaubriand's efforts were instrumental and led to policies regarding the protection of forests in 1827, policies reinforced during the Second Empire and never interrupted since then.

One can understand why Chateaubriand's worries were justified: At the beginning of the Renaissance, the surface covered with forests in France was considerable (Morin 6). Then, from 1450 to 1827, as the population tripled, the surface of land reserved for agriculture doubled. France, who could boast 22 million hectares of forests in 1450, had only 7 to 8 million hectares left in 1827, year when policies were again imposed as they had been imposed during aristocratic times.

As said before, historians of ecology seem to reject "literary sources" focusing on nature on the basis that they are "by definition subjective" and "produced by elites", especially when the literary source is produced by a writer like Chateaubriand who was an aristocrat. However, it is important to repeat again that, although he had aristocratic origins, Chateaubriand's family was part of a relatively poor nobility and that at age 25 he had lost everything, except his talent to write. In the dilapidated castle set in the village of Combray where he lived as a young man it was understood that the forest was a place where free wood for heating or building purpose could be found along with free game. Chateaubriand hunted with his father during his youth and hang around with the youngsters of the area. As the town of Dinan used to be occupied by the ancient forest of Faigne, and as a lot of places names 'coët' or 'coat' indicated that they were initially forests, it was also common knowledge that with the population growth, the impoverishment of Brittany was partially due to forests being replaced by moorlands. This being said, Brittany being a humid province, it didn't face the problem a dry place such as the Cevennes region endured (Cornu 2003). That is why the comment mentioned above made on the Cevennes by Chateaubriand is particularly interesting: It reflects a perfect understanding of what constitutes the common good and the individual interest, this not only in Brittany but also in the other regions of France or the world.

The absence of legislation in the Cevennes and the desire from local authorities to cajole the local population accounted for the "fraud" and "abuse" of the land (Morin 11). As soon as the industrial era started, the population who hadn't left the countryside to go to cities resented the control on forests which decreased their free food-producing subsidies. They ended up occupying more remote places with their cows and goats, destroying more land and forests. In the Cevennes, it is true therefore that "condemning the deforestation, meant condemning the small owners" (Morin 15). However, as Chateaubriand understood very early in his life, ecology defends long-term common good and condemns short-term personal interests. In this regard, Chateaubriand's trip to Greece, Jerusalem, and Egypt confirmed his believes regarding the environment: There he could see the effect of "the teeth of sheeps and goats" on the trees which once covered some countries he visited.

Similarly, he deplored their effect on the beech trees and chestnut trees which once covered the Cevennes in France (Morin 18).

The complex of inferiority toward the idol "science" felt by literature programs mentioned by Marc Fumaroli has therefore no reason to be. And all the more so since a lot of scientists don't even recognize the scientific idol "as theirs". Moreover, as Fumaroli pointed and as we have tried to demonstrate, this complex is based on an "epistemological confusion" (Fumaroli 2019, 644): A confusion between *sciendi* and knowledge, the French *savoir* and *connaissance*, the Latin *logos* and *mythos*, and the Greek *episteme* and *gnosis*. The *episteme*, *gnosis* and *doxa* in the case of syphilis coincided for doctors and writers for centuries until a remedy was found. Perhaps, the fact that syphilis is coming back confirms that the scientific *episteme* is in a state of constant recreation like literature.

Regarding the suspicion toward literature, we saw how, as soon as he became politician and could take part of major political decisions, Chateaubriand immediately tried to implement the preservation of forests. His input led to the introduction of an "environmental dimension" (Devèze, 248) to forests on the basis that they protected and fed the rivers and springs, they contained and solidified the mountain ground, and they were beneficial to the atmosphere. Chateaubriand's efforts led to drastic measures taken in 1827 and again in 1861 in favor of reforestation, and to the understanding that the protection of forests guarantee the wellbeing of any nation in the long run. With his attitude toward the forest environment, Chateaubriand definitely contributed to the systematic and methodical reforestation that occurred in France during the second part of the 19th century and explains why now France can boast a 20% wood surface.

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Listen to the Voices: Immigrant Fiction Re-Considered

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Abstract:

This essay invites a broad overview of immigrant fiction in an era that mocks the social mobility and easy assimilation promised by the American Dream. Attentive reading of immigrant fiction enables us to understand challenges and barriers – topics that recur in immigrant fiction across ethnicity/country of origin. I argue for revision of the traditional paradigm that in the immigrant novel a "hero"/protagonist arrives, after some bumps in the road and modification of expectations, at the desired destination. Today, immigrants face formidable barriers: entry may be denied, the immigrant may be expelled; even if the immigrant can stay, assimilation may be unhappy due to economic stress, social isolation, un(or under)employment, discrimination, or emotional suffering. Immigrant stories reflect lived experience: difficulties with language acquisition and acculturation; inter-generational tension; patriarchal domination often associated with domestic violence; difficulties in assimilation.

Keywords: immigration, fiction, domestic abuse, assimilation, inter-generational, hybridity.

This essay invites reconsideration of the genre of contemporary immigrant fiction. I argue that the paradigm that an immigrant is a "hero" who survives "trials" and arrives at assimilation as a goal are outdated in view of institutional and socioeconomic barriers. While immigrants have always faced acculturation challenges, for many immigrants there is a new defensiveness and insecurity related to the current Administration's antipathy to immigrants. Arab Americans and immigrants from Mexico and the Northern Triangle may feel vulnerable or "targeted." Moreover, assimilation is not necessarily the end game, the goal that motivates, or should motivate, immigrants. There has been considerable scholarship on ethnic literature, of which immigrant literature is a sub-set, analyzing fiction and film by specific nationality. This essay proposes a broader view based on the observation that similar themes arise across cultures and countries of origin.

I begin with a review of the major interpretive theories about the genre; in the second part of the essay, I then use short fiction to revise the usual "paradigm" and illustrate current preoccupations that supplement and largely contradict the "American Dream" narrative.[1] This is not a mere scholarly exercise: The concerns repeatedly expressed in contemporary immigrant fiction communicate the challenges that immigrants on entry and in integration.

As a threshold matter, we might consider why it matter to read and reflect on immigrant fiction: what does it contribute that is not available from statistics or true accounts?

Fiction offers a vicarious experience to help the reader live the life of someone else, who may belong to a different ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, age, or body status. "Outsider" narratives bring to the attention of middle class readers the effect of policies that hinder the emotional or economic aspirations of minorities and "Others." Immigrants by definition are the ultimate outsiders. Often immigrants are outsiders through multiple intersections – they may be nonwhite, poor, gay or transgender. Fiction invites us to understand and even embrace individuals who are different from ourselves, and include them in our social and political lives.

Reflections on the Genre

Immigrant fiction at a minimum involves an act of relocation, departure from one's home to arrival, directly or indirectly, in a new country. The immigrant narrative has a multi-generational reach and is, therefore, a subset of ethnic literature.

William Boelhower's landmark essay offered some characteristics of the genre: An immigrant protagonist "comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status" (1981, 6). The trajectory of the American novel involves identification of a hero, his or her journey, and a series of trials. "Hero" is in effect a defined term; he or she are uprooted foreigners, naïve, ignorant of American life, and lacking in English and cultural competence The journey is not only geographic, but a Bildugnsroman in which the immigrant becomes educated so that (s)he will eventually assimilate successfully into American society. The trials require the immigrants not only to master cultural differences to be integrated in the new country but also to distance themselves from their home.

Madelaine Hron has critiqued this model as a "blame the immigrant mentality" (2014, 17). Boelhower's paradigm suggests that the challenges faced by the immigrant

> may be attributed to their deficient social status, their linguistic or social inadequacies, and their cultural differences or the characteristics of their ethic group, rather than being viewed as problems caused by external socioeconomic or political conditions, or alternately, by the hostile environment of their host nations. (2017, 17)

Hron observes that it is "much easier to dismiss the suffering of immigration as a universal or relative phenomenon, rather than to contend with alleviating specific difficulties that immigrants may face" (2017, 18). Further, Boelhower's model has a teleological push that assumes successful arrival or assimilation but there are many narratives that do not confirm to the "myth of success" (2017, 20).

David Cowart identifies recurring themes in immigrant fiction: difficulties in school, especially in learning English; psychological and cultural "doubleness"; exploitation; prejudice; homesickness; eating disorders; inter-generational conflicts; and gradual development of an American identity (2006, 7-8). However, for many immigrants, the United States is relatively

speaking "a promised land," because they have experienced "social, political, and historical horrors" in their country of origin and are grateful for a haven (2006, 207).

Is America really a "promised land" for today's immigrants? Jesse Alemán argues that in a post 9/11 world, immigrants and ethnic others – no matter the status of their green cards or birth certificates – are stigmatized as "barbarians" who "pose a threat to the nation's real citizenry" (2008, 399). Kairos Llobera focuses on fiction about undocumented aliens. "Illegal status adds yet another barrier to the possibility of "attaining the American dream" (2013, 59). To build on Llobera's argument: Undocumented individuals face risk at several stages: in crossing the border; in "passing" as legal to avoid expulsion; in securing employment "under the radar"; in dealing with the threat or reality of deportation. While most immigrants experience nostalgia for their country of origin, over time they or at least their children will "feel American" after a certain period of residence in the U.S. It is more problematic that an undocumented individual will feel socially included in a country from which he has been legally excluded.

Ruth Hsu explores the idea of the American Dream, "a trope that signifies this nation as one that offers limitless opportunity" (1996, 38):

> [T]his is the Promised Land in which anyone who is willing to work hard can see his dreams come true.... "America" is open to all, because it is an inclusive and generous country founded upon the principles of equality, democracy and freedom. What matters in this land are hard work and belief in the fundamental principles that make this country unique in the world. (1996, 38)

Far from being a haven of social mobility and equality, America is a nation of income inequality. On the GINI Index which measures the extent of income inequality, the United States ranks 59th among countries (World Bank 2016).

A second aspect of the American Dream is equally illusory. As Hsu describes the myth:

> In a sense, then, anyone can become an American. The past does not matter; identity is a fluid invention, and America is the place of rebirth, a land in which one may shed old allegiances and Old World notions, or replace one's name and identity with new ones. (1996, 38)

Here again I argue that the current reality refutes this ideal vision. Where one comes from indeed matters greatly. To take three prominent examples: it is virtually impossible to enter the country as a refugee from Syria however one has been vetted; asylum applicants from the Northern Triangle are rebuffed at the southern border; and per country limits indefinitely delay entry for individuals from Mexico, the Philippines, and India who otherwise qualify for visas (Migration Policy Institute, State Department).

We need to remove the rose-colored glasses and examine the obstacles confronted by today's immigrants – obstacles experienced across immigrant groups in the stories discussed below.

Immigrant Fiction: Multiple Challenges; Formidable Barriers

Contemporary immigrant fiction reflects the obstacles that immigrants face. These include, but by no means are limited to: the impact of family separation at the border; pressures to suppress native language and culture; role of patriarchy; domestic violence; inter-generational tension; feelings of hybridity or doubled identity; stereotyping and ethnic bias; resistance to or success in achieving assimilation.

Separation at the Border. It is estimated that over 2800 children have been separated at the border in implementation of the Administration's policy of "zero tolerance" intended to deter illegal immigration (Migration Policy Institute 2018, 2).

Christina Henríquez's "Everything is Far from Here" recounts a woman's vain search for her son who was separated from her during the woman's flight across the southern U.S. border. The "coyote" who led them out separated the men and children from the women. The coyote has taken the narrator to a warehouse, a virtual prison, with no means of locating her child or finding what has become of him. She later meets with a lawyer who reviews whether she meets the "well-founded fear" criterion for asylum. When she tells him she has been raped, he responds in cavalier fashion that "after all, she is pretty" and "boys will be boys" (2017, 54). The woman finds no one to help her locate her son. When she screams in despair, authorities put her solitary confinement, a spider-filled detention box. The woman is punished for no offense; she is a victim, not a criminal. Her neighbor in the adjacent box is a woman who has similarly been confined for no good reason; her only crime was that she threw up. One day the narrator spots a small boy of similar appearance. She grabs the child thinking that it is Gabriel, but instead it is another woman's son. The cruelty of the narrator's predicament is underscored by a lack of sympathy from Americans who picket outside the facility with posters saying, "illegal is a crime" and "send them back with birth control."

This powerful story is focalized on the mother's suffering; the child is the absent center. The mother is anonymous and even her country of origin is unidentified. Following a court ruling, many children have been reunited with their parents (Jordan 2019). Although the separations were traumatic, we can rationalize that in time the families may be able to relive their lives. Henríquez does not palliate the ending; at the end of the story there is no hope of reunification.

*Learning English and Forgetting Native Culture***.** For many immigrants language acquisition is a significant challenge. 57% of lawful immigrant adults are proficient in English, while only 34% of unauthorized immigrants are proficient. (Pew "U.S. Unauthorized Immigrants" 2019).

Despite high levels of education, 61% of Chinese immigrants in the U.S. ages five and over report limited English proficiency, compared to 49% of the total foreign born population (Pew 2017). Ken Liu's science fiction story, "Paper Menagerie," illustrates the inter-generational strains between a Chinese immigrant mother and her American-born son.[2] A young boy enjoys playing with origami animals that his mother creates for him. The story is embellished by magical realism: it is the mother's love that transforms animals made from wrapping paper into wonderful animated creatures. When the bonds of love are severed, the animals are degraded to garbage.

As a boy of ten, Jack overhears some neighbors commenting critically on his "Chinesey appearance," eyes and face that don't seem "right" (2011, 67). A classmate makes fun of the paper tigers and calls them "trash" (2011, 68). Jack is bothered by difference, and wants to associate with his American father; he insists on speaking only English at home, and eating American food. He rejects the paper menagerie in favor of Star Wars toys. His mother's English is so limited and embarrassing that she turns to mime; communication with Jack comes to a halt. Jack is ashamed that his father purchased his mother from the pages of a catalog. Jack blames his mother, not the situation in China: "What kind of woman puts herself into a catalog so that she can be bought?" (2011, 65). Jack's mother then dies suddenly and unexpectedly from a cancer that was too advanced to treat.

As an adult, two years after his mother's death, Jack comes across an old shoebox containing the paper menagerie. Only then does he come to appreciate the love and caring that went into his nurture and specifically into the animals that she created. He also finds a moving letter in which his mother describes her love for him and why she left China. During the Cultural Revolution she found herself friendless and abused:

> Son, I know that you do not like your Chinese eyes, which are my eyes. I know that you do not like your Chinese hair, which is my hair. But can you understand how much joy your very existence brought to me? And can you understand how it felt when you stopped talking to me and won't let me talk to you in Chinese? I felt I was losing everything all over again. Why won't you talk to me, son? The pain makes it hard to write. (2011, 76)

Too late the son appreciates the circumstances that led her to immigrate and regrets his failure even to talk to his mother, much less to thank her.

In Lan Samantha Chang's "Unforgetting" (1998), a couple's determination to abandon Mandarin and suppress their Chinese roots is all too successful. The parents immigrate at great cost: the father who wanted to be a scientist becomes a repairman for Xerox copiers. Ming's occupation is fitting, in effect he seeks to fashion his son into an imaginary replica of an ideal American. When a teacher tells the parents that their young son's English is substandard they resolve to stop speaking Chinese at home. As a teen-ager Charles thrives in school. But in a significant moment he closes the door on his father, a physical separation that reflects emotional estrangement. The boy is frustrated by his parents' inability to tell him anything about his Chinese culture; in an effort to Americanize their child they have deprived him of the roots and history that he craves. Ming has forgotten so much about China that he can't remember when Charles asks him about the economic circumstances that led a prior generation to come to America and work on railroads. Ming's wife is equally unhappy: tired of cooking Betty Crocker recipes, she yearns for Chinese food and relives meals that she and Ming prepared in China. The couple switches from English back to Mandarin as they debate the decisions that led them to lose the affection of their son. The son is accepted at Harvard but because he has become a stranger alienated from his own family, the parents experience

no joy from the success that had initially been their goal. The cost of acculturation has been too high; what appears a successful assimilation is a failure.

Patriarchal Control. The problem of patriarchy has been tacked in many immigration stories, across ethnicities. Gloria Anzaldúa has written about the double bind that confronts Mexican-American (c*hicana*) women in the United States:

> We shudder in separate cells in enclosed cities, shoulders hunched ... daily drinking shock along with our morning coffee...Shutting down. Woman does not feel safe when her own culture, and white culture, are critical of her; when the males of all races hunt her as prey. (1987, 42)

In Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, many women are confined as *ventaneras*, those who sit by the window all day because their fathers or husbands don't allow them to leave. An example is Rafaela, whose husband locks her in their apartment while he goes out to poker games; she is too beautiful to be allowed on the streets. Another *ventanera i*s Sally, who married in the eighth grade to escape her father's tyrannical restrictions, but her new husband is even worse. Sally is not allowed to use the telephone or even to look out of the window. All she can do is to look at the towels, toasters, alarm clock, drapes and the linoleum roses on the floor. These vignettes are narrated by a young girl full of hope, fittingly named Esperanza, who longs to escape the confines of Mango Street. Two women encourage her to continue her writing and win her freedom: Minerva, who writes poems although trapped in an abusive marriage, and her Aunt Lupe, an older woman who is dying. Esperanza will eventually "say goodbye to Mango," without forgetting "the ones I left behind," the women who cannot leave (1991, 110).

The Nigerian-American writer Chinamanga Adichie describes a very different but equally pernicious form of patriarchal control. Women in Nigeria are socioeconomically politically disempowered, and culturally assigned to subordinate roles (Kalunta-Crumpton 2013, 224-25). These hierarchies carry over after immigration and define their marital relations and intimate partner conflicts in the U.S.

In "New Husband," Chinaza's uncle arranges for her to emigrate to the U.S. and marry a fellow countryman who is purportedly a doctor, but in fact a poorly-paid intern. The new husband has changed his name from Odofile to Dave. Everything about him is false. "Dave" forces Chinaza to change every aspect of her identity. Not only does he compel Chinaza to call herself Agatha but he requires only American cooking, American slang, and American habits. He lectures Chinaza on how to succeed in America, notwithstanding his own financial difficulties. Chinaza's friend and neighbor reveals that she had previously had a brief fling with her new husband. It turns out that "Dave" is concealing an even greater falsehood: he is not yet divorced; thus her marriage is illegal. But Chinaza is trapped; her aunt and uncle don't want her back and unemployment is rife in Nigeria. Chinaza's inability to exit her spurious marriage reflects her precarious immigration status. Lacking an independent basis for a green card, she is going to have to abide a distasteful marriage and suppress her husband's bigamy.

Domestic Violence. Domestic violence is a recurrent theme in immigrant literature, as reflected in stories involving the Latino, Nigerian, and Arab-American communities.[3]

Undocumented Latina immigrants represent a subgroup that is more vulnerable to domestic violence. A survey of Latina immigrants in the D.C. area found that 49.3% reported physical abuse by an intimate partner during their lifetimes, 11.4% reported sexual abuse (Hass *et al.* 2000, 106-09). Unlawful status is a major obstacle when attempting to escape domestic violence. 72.3% of abusive citizen or resident spouses have never filed immigration documentation to legalize the status of their abused spouses (Espino-Piepp, 2018, 352). U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident spouses threaten to deport undocumented wives and children. Escape is also deterred by cultural barriers, "expectations by other members in their community to keep the family together and protect it from shame" (2018, 352).

In Cisneros's "Women Hollering Creek," a young Mexican woman grows up in Mexico under the protection of a loving father. However, Cleófilas, romantic and starry-eyed, marries a young man who takes her across the border to Según, Texas. The marriage proves disastrous; her husband beats her until she spits blood. At first Cléofilas resolves to hide her bruises and pretend she was injured in a fall. Typically the women in the community passively accept their fate. For example, two of her neighbors, Soledad and Dolores, are, as their names suggest, solitary and mournful women. They spend their time grieving for husbands who have left them, never to return. After discovering evidence that her husband is unfaithful, Cleófilas finds comfort in visiting a creek near her home, known as *La Gritona*, "Woman Hollering Creek." The name of the creek evokes the legend of *La Llorona*, a mother who weeps for the children she has drowned in response to her husband's infidelities (Almería 2010, 67). On the banks of the creek, Cleófilas awakes to the extent of her danger and decides to save herself and her child. She bonds with a bold and unusual woman, Felice (husband), a woman so extraordinary that she lives without a man and drives her own pick-up truck. With Felice's help, Cleófilas escapes with her child back across the border. She is transformed from a "wailing woman" to a "hollering woman." When Cleófilas crosses the creek to return to her home in Mexico, Felice hollers out a loud yell. For Cleófilas, this yell represents a woman shouting her joy, a new-found self-assertion. The story celebrates successful resistance, an escape achieved by female solidarity as well as Cleófilas's own courage.

Muslim-American communities also face a heightened risk of domestic abuse. Surveys suggest that ten to twenty percent of Muslim women are victims of physical violence each year, as against seven percent of the general population of American women (Finigan 2010, 144).

> Muslim-American women face numerous cultural pressures that discourage reporting of domestic abuse... Some of these pressures – language barriers preventing effective communication with law enforcement – are shared with many immigrant communities. However, other pressures – such as religious texts that cast doubt on domestic violence even being a crime, cultural pressure to be loyal to one's husband, and reluctance to exacerbate existing stereotypes about Muslim-American men – are especially prevalent in Muslim-American communities. (2010, 144)

In "Sand and Fire" by Lila Halaby, a young teen-ager, born in California, is divided between her American identity and her Palestinian origin. One of Khadija's problems is her name: "In America my name sounds like someone throwing up or falling off a bicycle. If they can get the first part of it right, the "Kha" part, it comes out like clearing your throat after eating ice cream" (2003, 36). A more serious problem relates to excessive parental control. She insists that she an American, not a Palestinian, which outrages her mother. Her mother lectures her daughters about the importance of virginity; to lose it is shameful and would make her unmarriageable. However, Khadija's major problem is with her father.

> Sometimes my father loves my mother – and the rest of us – so much that he becomes a kissing and hugging machine. Sometimes, though, he is an angry machine that sees suspicious moves in every breath. But most of the time he is sad, his thoughts somewhere I cannot visit. (2003, 37)

Khadija's mother shares many of her husband's views and is generally compliant and subservient, but that does not prevent her from being beaten. Her father's alcoholism precipitates a crisis: he pours alcohol down his daughter's gullet and then accuses Khadija of drinking.

> I remained where I was, but the fire went from my belly to his eyes and he pulled me by the arm and then by the ear and dragged me into the kitchen where my mother was cutting vegetables.
> "Oh Mother of Shit," he called to her. "Your little dog of a daughter has been drinking. Smell her mouth." (...)
> I screamed and screamed and finally got free and ran to my room. I opened the closet and closed the door behind me and prayed to God the fire would burn somewhere else. (2003, 38-39)

The father is not very specific about his complaints against the United States, although he is disappointed in his job as a mechanic at a service station.

The father blames his violence on his immigration experience:

> My father has many dreams that have been filled with sand. That's what he tells me: "This country has taken my dreams that used to float like those giant balloons, and filled them with sand. Now they don't float, and you can't even see what they are anymore"... "My ache comes from losing my home." (2003, 37, 39)

There is no excuse for her father's egregious behavior and no escape for his wife or daughter.

Sex and Gender. In many immigrant stories, inter-generational tension arises from dating preference and sexual activity. For example, in Halaby's "Sand and Fire," the parents are concerned, or more accurately obsessed, over their daughter's dating habits in an effort to preserve her virginity. She is in fact falsely accused of promiscuity when it is Khadija's friend who has been sexually active.

In Achy Obejas's "We Came All the Way from Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?" (1994), the immigration officer asks the narrator's parents why they left Cuba. The father replies: "We came

for her, so she could have a future" (1994, 113-14). The narrator's mother hopes that her daughter will become "the wife of a boyishly handsome North American man who drinks Pepsi for breakfast" (1994, 117). Although the father wishes for his daughter privileges which would likely be reserved for a son in a patriarchal system (Cooper 2003, 79), his gender views are unyielding and he is appalled by his daughter's lesbian style of dress.

> In 1971 I'll come home for Thanksgiving from Indiana University where I have a scholarship to study optometry. It'll be the first time in months I'll be without an antiwar demonstration to go to, a consciousness-raising group to attend, or a Gay Liberation meeting to lead. (...)
> We left Cuba so you could dress like this? My father will ask over my mother's shoulder.
> And for the first and only time in my life, I'll say, Look, you didn't come for me, you came for you; you came because all your rich clients were leaving, and you were going to wind up a cashier in your father's hardware store if you didn't leave, okay? (1994, 121)

The narrator's mother will rebuke her daughter for rudely responding to her father.

> And I'll say, It's a free country, I can do anything I want, remember? ...And then my father will reach over my mother's thin shoulders, grab me by the red bandanna around my neck, and throw me to the floor, where he'll kick me over and over until all I remember is my mother's voice pleading, Please stop, please, please, please stop. (1994, 121)

Obejas's story is another indication of the thin line between apparently civilized patriarchal control and domestic violence; the father is on edge because he has not only lost control of his daughter as she enters adulthood but finds his heteronormative expectations shattered.

Immigrants' own racism. While it comes as no surprise that immigrants are the victims of racism, recent fiction by Gish Jen illustrates that immigrants often are themselves perpetrators of prejudice based on stereotyping.

In "No More Maybe," a daughter-in-law of Chinese heritage presents her husband's parents in sympathetic terms; it is her duty to protect them. It is as if her mother-in-law "was born inside a box" and "can never really stand up straight" (2018, 78). She is crippled by a disadvantage, through no fault of her own, that prevents her from reaching her full potential. The narrator's father-in-law was a beloved professor and an outstanding scholar when he was young, but now is diminished. He has grown "crazy wild" (2018, 77). When her mother-in law voices a desire to attend free English classes, her father-in-law expresses an irrational fear that "maybe it is a trap," and that the "government here spies on people" to catch illegal immigrants (2018, 77). His fears infect his family: they carry their "visas everywhere" as they keep "a list of places" they should not go to and avoid talking "too much to outside people" (2018, 78).

After her father-in-law accidentally washes their neighbor's car, their neighbor, an African-American, comes over with a cake as a thank you. However, her father-in-law exhibits hostility, and

asks the neighbor Jeff whether the car is really his. Jeff interprets this as a slight, as an implication that he has stolen the car. Inevitably, Jeff pushes back with his own vulgarity by writing "Fucking As" on top of the cake (2018, 83). The family attributes the incident to race hatred: "blacks do not like us" and "they are afraid China is going to surpass America" (2018, 83).

What has gone wrong here? Among other problems, the narrator's family is too insular; they have not sufficient experience with other ethnicities and races. The father-in-law has been venerated – in effect his authority has gone unchecked and his misguided judgments have infected the family.

Among other problems (such as conflating and generalizing among all Asian ethnicities), the "model minority myth" exemplifies a new kind of discrimination: Asian-Americans once were marginalized because of their ethnicity. Now they may be re-marginalized because of their cultural differences including their success (Chou 2008, 222). Asian-American immigrants who occupy an intermediate and insecure status may perceive themselves as superior to other groups. Elaine Kim has cautioned against the kind of racial competitiveness that leads Asian-Americans to be "positioned in a racial hierarchy meant to perpetuate white privilege at the expense of both Asian- and African-Americans" (1998, 4).

Perspectives on Assimilation. Werner Sollors identifies the conflict between consent and descent as the central drama of American culture: "descent" describes an individual's or character's heritage; and "consent" what the individual does as a matter of free choice (1986, 5). There is a conflict between the ancestral legacy and the adoption of new country values. Boelhower describes a tension between "old world pragmatics" – a "culture of the past, tradition, organicism, collectivism, class theory of society, etc." versus "new world pragmatics" – a "culture of the present and the future, myth, mechanism and industrialism, social mobility, radical individualism" (1982, 47-48).

Some immigrants fail to assimilate because their nostalgia for their home country is too great, and they lack the skills to integrate into their new country. In Jumpha Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's," an Indian woman trails her spouse to Boston. She takes care of a young American boy whose mother is casual and neglectful. Mrs. Sen feeds Eliot snacks, and love: "As they walked back from the bus stop she produced a sandwich bag from her pocket, and offered Eliot the peeled wedges of an orange, or lightly salted peanuts, which she had already shelled" (1999, 119). In contrast, Eliot's mother phones for pizza every night; she sits "at the table as he ate, drinking more wine and asking how his day was, but eventually she went to the deck to smoke a cigarette, leaving Eliot to wrap up the leftovers" (1990, 118). This is a story of reciprocal caregiving: Mrs. Sens nourishes the boy with food and attention; in return, he provides the lonely Indian lady with companionship. For Mrs. Sen, cooking a meal is an art, a source of pride, a time of absorption and care. As she chops the vegetables, Mrs. Sens recalls her life in India with regret: "all the neighborhood women...bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle of the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night" (1999,115). In Boston she has nothing and no one; "everything is there" (in Calcutta) (1999, 113).

Mrs. Sen's husband presses her to drive a car so she can go to the fish market, a most important destination to a woman whose life has centered on cooking. With extreme and almost unimaginable naiveté, Mrs. Sen asks "could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot? Ten thousand miles, at fifty miles per hour?" (1999, 119). The automobile is the symbol of American mobility; her failure to learn to drive marks a failure to assimilate. Ill-advisedly Mrs. Sen sets off in the car to drive her to the fish market and has an accident. Fortunately they are unhurt physically but Elliot's mother decides to remove her son from Mrs. Sen's care: each of them will return to isolation.

Failure also can occur when an immigrant assimilates all too well, when the pressures to succeed are too great. An example is Sarah, the Palestinian-American figure skater in Alia Yunis's "Girls on Ice." Sarah, the story's absent center is so skilled that she can land the triple axel, and the championship. Beautiful as well as talented, she is the envy of the narrator, her overweight cousin. Her family receives a sudden unexpected shock: the girl with everything has committed suicide: "Yesterday, she became the first Muslim-Palestinian-Arab-Southern California-vegan-left-handed champion skater to kill herself" (2011, no page). No one knows why. Somehow Palestine comes into the conversation: one woman complains that "Instead of killing herself for nothing, she should have gone to Palestine and killed herself for something." The reader surmises that the pressure of needing to win, to be the perfect combination of all-American girl, beautiful and nice, yet loyal to her Palestinian roots was all too much.[4]

Joseph Geha, a Lebanese-American author, addresses the topic of assimilation post 9/11 in "Alone and All Together" (2002, 53). In this story, two sisters confidently identify as American; they were born in Chicago and so were their parents. Yet after the World Trade Center is attacked, they face the stigma of identification as Arab. Libby with blue eyes and light hair "looks American"; her sister Sally who has black, curly hair is yet more insistent on American identity. Libby sees herself as "half in and half out" with a hybrid identity (2002, 51). When the World Trade Center bombings are shown on television, she comments, "I just wish they wouldn't say it's us until, their like, sure" (2002, 53). Libby can "pass" as American; she is grateful for her light complexion when she hears the insults levied at other Arabs. Libby wishes that her friend Jamila would remove her conspicuous hijab, which draws attention and marks her as Muslim. Libby's life of submerging Arab identity changes when she sees bullies attack Jamila's brother and call him a "Raghead" (2002, 50). As she intervenes in his defense, she claims an Arab identity. Sally, meanwhile, has her own transformative experience in New York City. She participates in a candlelight vigil with other women of all nationalities: "We walked to the Promenade. People were praying. They held candles and pictures. Then everyone went quiet… Every one of us… I was alone, and we were all together" (2002, 63).

The title "Alone and All Together" has a double meaning: the two young women understand that they cannot escape the identity that they as Arab-Americans share with Muslims, a shared vulnerability in light of post 9/11 paranoia over terrorism. Perhaps, however, Geha calls for a broader identification among Americans, such as in the New York City vigil, recognizing that although

native-born and immigrant Americans in some sense stand apart, nevertheless they can find themselves standing together.

Conclusion

American opinion is polarized about the desirability of a border wall and the contribution of immigrants. According to a recent poll by the Pew Research Group, 62% of Americans believe that the country's "openness to people from all over America is essential to who we are as a nation but only 37% of Republicans hold that view (Pew "Growing Share of Republicans" 2019).

There are some parallels between narratives written by persons with disabilities and by immigrants. Both disability and immigrant narratives seek to convey the challenge of overcoming institutional barriers. Individuals with medical conditions or disabilities often describe their pain; social and economic challenges; and their sources of emotional support. The act of writing may be therapeutic and/or altruistic in that the authors share their experiences with the general public. Their narratives often point the way to legal and other institutional barriers that need to be removed.

Similarly, immigrant narratives explain the reasons for migration, translate suffering, and communicate the barriers that the immigrant has faced. These barriers may relate to legal status, schooling, language acquisition, job search, financial hardship, discrimination, and cultural unfamiliarity. Immigrants' trauma can arise at multiple points in their journeys: at point of origin; in intermediate location(s) where they seek refuge; in transit; at the border; at locations within the United States where they settle temporarily or permanently. Immigrant stories typical recount interactions within the family or community – whether these are positive or negative affects the individual's potential for self-actualization.

In offering this comparison I am not "invalid-izing" individuals with disability or predicting a negative outcome for immigrants. On the contrary, immigrants along with individuals with disabilities do in fact routinely thrive once social and legal impediments are overcome. However, discussions of genre that deprecate the seriousness of legal, social, political and economic obstacles are incomplete and misleading.

Attentive reading of immigration fiction enables us to consider the obstacles to a positive outcome. Family separation, which can occur at the border or through deportation, leaves lasting trauma. Immigrant adults will make choices that will affect the likelihood of success for themselves and their children. Immigrants are called upon to navigate the challenges of language acquisition and cultural doubleness: the necessity of learning English while retaining the memory and practice of one's own culture, language, food preferences, and history. Children will resist the efforts of parents to control their choice of language, food, friends, sex life, and romantic partners. Marriages will also be tested by patriarchal domination: some women will remain subordinate while others assert their agency. Disappointment and trauma can lead to abuse, aggravated when men succumb to alcohol or drug addiction. Immigrants who encounter discrimination may be tempted to distinguish themselves from other ethnicities in some cases showing their own stereotyping or bigoted views.

Assimilation can be welcomed or resisted. A refusal to accommodate to new language and practices, or to acquire new job skills, foretells a negative outcome. However, there is also risk when the heritage of one's own country is denied and submerged. Immigrant fiction shows how each individual needs to find his or her own expression of hybrid identity; each immigrant must self-fashion and find a viable path through very difficult terrain.

Endnotes:

1. I focus here on short fiction because it provides an efficient illustrative vehicle, but the comments offered here would apply to poetry, novels, and personal narratives.
2. "Paper Menagerie" won the Hugo, the Nebula, and the World Fantasy awards – the first time that trifecta has been achieved.
3. No community native or immigrant is immune from domestic violence. See, e.g., Chung *et al*. (Asian); Lown *et al*. (Latino); Abuelezam *et al*., Finigan (Muslim and Arab American), Kalunta-Crumpton, West (African).
4. Recent studies among Arab American adolescents estimate that 14% of Arab Americans living in the Dearborn ethnic enclave were diagnosed with depression (Jaber 2015), while another study found that 50% of Arab-American respondents met criteria for depression (Amer *et al* 2012).

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Absurd Things and People as Objects in Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt's *When I Was a Work of Art*

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Abstract:

More frequently than one thinks consumerism comes up repeatedly as the main thesis in postmodern literature. *When I Was a Work of Art* is a 2002 French novel that explores the loss of humanist values in a contemporary dysfunctional society. In this generic world every physical presence, including the human body, has been appropriated by the consumerism and transformed into merchandise. Famous for his witty characters and engaging plots, Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt focuses on deep sociological reflections and introspective analysis of the everyday modern man.

This short novel is also a poetical art because it questions the ultimate work of art imagined by a sculptor and its consequences, thus catching the attention through its Faustian theme and auto fictional writing. Zeus Lama wants to sculpt a human body and to create a work of art alive. He finds an easy prey in Adam, on the verge of committing suicide. The notoriously eccentric artist is determined to exceed his own fame and to create something unheard of. Consequently É.-E. Schmitt's creative reality is continuously split between the two characters in the novel: the sculptor, looking for an outstanding creative experience, and Adam, who struggles to regain his civil rights and his identity.

Keywords: Art market, Consumer society, French literature, French tought, Poetical arts.

More frequently than one thinks the absurd of language and situation comes up repeatedly in postmodern literature. *When I Was a Work of Art* is a 2002 French novel that, that in spite of its humor, explores the loss of meaning and values in the contemporary realities of art production and art market. Within a generic dysfunctional society, life is desacralized, automatized, objectified, and mechanized for people and objects. It answers more to norms and forms than to common sense. In this unnamed world every physical presence, including the human body, has been appropriated by consumerism and transformed into merchandise. Famous for his witty characters and engaging plots, É.-E. Schmitt builds a text allusive of deep sociological reflections with a nonsense-mechanized language reminding of Jean Giraudoux, Samuel Beckett, or Eugene Ionesco's theatrical vibes.

This short novel is also a poetical art because it questions the work of an eccentric sculptor on a human body, thus catching the attention through its Faustian theme. Zeus Lama, a famous celebrity artist, wants to sculpt a human body and to create a work of art alive. He finds an easy prey

in Adam, a young man on the verge of committing suicide. The artist is determined to exceed his own fame and to create a famous work of art. The issue is in the immergence of moral law on exploiting a human body to better market experimental art. Consequently, Schmitt's creative reality is continuously split between the noble idea of experimenting with art and the continuous fight with the schizophrenic reality of inhuman experimentation.

The question of artistic value and art market value is not new in the recent philosophical reflection as it has been lately the center of attention in *La société de consummation* by Jean Baudrillard and in *L'art et l'argent* by Jean Joseph Goux, for example. Moreover, our understanding of human / nonhuman subjects changed dramatically in a culture of accumulation of objects and commodification of humans, as objects of fame. Hence the proliferation of hybrid identities and lack of critical perspectives denounced by the recent philosophies of Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* or Walter Benjamin's reflections on art and technology in *The Work of Art in the Age on Its Technological Reproducibility*.

In another novel by the same author *The Part of the Other*, Bernstain, a Jew, is a young soldier on the frontline of World War I. He confides in his best friends and fellow artists named Adolf Hitler and Newman. The horrible war scene that Bernstain recounts specifically presents the physical destruction of human bodies to uncover the little value that human life contains when confronted with huge war machines and metal tanks.

Fitting the genre of auto fiction[1], É.-E. Schmitt instills his beliefs on life and artistic creation into his characters. His style is reflective of contemporary fictional trends, mixing the stage and the big screen's strategies with the more traditional literary composition.

In *When I Was a Work of Art*, Adam's story is poignant, constantly sustained with vivid dialogue and powerful visual effects. The dialogue between Adam and Durand-Durand, is an apotheosis of mechanical thinking, enhanced by characters' theatricality. Hilarious but tragic in its essence, this dialogue is relevant for the absurd of the situation and language, so familiar to the modern theater of Giraudoux[2] and Ionesco.[3] Schmitt's long experience with the stage shows in this violent exchange between adversaries:

> Pensez ce que vous voulez, monsieur Durand-Durand. Je ne m'exhiberai plus. -Je vais vous dénoncer. -Et puis? -Vous faire arrêter. -Et puis? -Vous boucler en prison.-Bravo, n'hésitez plus, foncez, c'est le dessein que je forme. Si vous m'accusez, c'est que je suis un homme. Si on me flanque en prison, c'est que je suis un homme. Si je deviens coupable, c'est que je suis un homme. Allez-y. Portez plainte. Dénoncez-moi.
>
> [-Do what you want Durand-Durand. I will no longer exhibit myself. -Then I will denounce you. -So what? -I will arrest you. -So what? -I will put you in prison.
>
> -Good for you; go ahead, it is exactly what I want. If you accuse me of anything it will prove that I am an individual. If you send me to jail, it will prove that I am an individual. If they find me guilty, it will prove that I am an individual. Go ahead. Make the complaint. Denounce me.] (Schmitt 2002, 204).

Life and people became ridiculously standardized in speech, acts, and emotions as a reflection of their lack of spirituality. Even the names are reflective of this generalized neurosis, continuously repressing the desire for happiness, love, or creativity[4]. Durand-Durand, as his French name suggests, is a tough museum curator who follows the rules literally, and thrives on repeating and checking the rules obsessively. He is nothing more than a responsible employee, who doesn't have the capacity, nor want to experience artistic emotions. Once Adam understands Durand-Durand's modus operandi, he can level with the curator's mechanical thinking. Life is thus automatized, objectified, and mechanized for people and objects. It answers more to norms and forms than to common sense. This is also reflective of a major change in the way the modern public consumes literature and cinema by identifying with typical characters. In the end Adam gets his freedom back but not for the right reasons. He simply proposes to Durand-Durand a truce by declaring himself a damaged work of art. A note of *restoration in progress* is enough to ease Durand-Durand's mind.[5]

Ultimately, the Cartesian theme of human consciousness sustains the debate on the favor of human intelligence versus artificial intelligence. At this point M. Calvino, Adam's lawyer, raises the argument of Adam being human, with a conscious life. He builds the defense arguing that, unlike a machine or any other biotechnological entity, speaking emerges from a consciousness with words coming directly from the soul. This argument appeals to the truthiness of Adam's subjective reality. In addition, the love story with Fiona triggers the human part in Adam and a sense of responsibility for their baby. In spite of all this evidence, Adam remains a point of high interest for the state. The museum owns him because of his body, already transformed into merchandise. Moreover, Adam is literally sold twice as the ultimate sculpture *Adam-bis*.

Caught in this infernal Kafkaesque social and legal system, human relationships are irremediably alienated. The powerful lesson to be learned suggestively unravels in a violent language. Schmitt's movie writing skills of fast narration and detail to the dialogue effects combines with theatrical potential to identify simultaneously the abstract and the real: "En un mot le thèâtre doit devenir une sorte de demonstration expérimentale de l'identité profonde du concret et de l'abstrait" [In another way of speaking, theater needs to be a sort of experimental demonstration in order to profoundly define the concrete and the abstract] (Artaud 1964, 168).[6]

In a similar work of the author Schmitt, *Monsieur Ibrahim and the flowers of Coran,* the alienation of human rapports, between son and father and towards the end between son and mother, are described as an abstract vision of the world and life. It is not a coincidence that little Momo sees his father estranged because of a supposed existence of an older son, perfect in every single detail. The imagined existence of this older brother, Popol, is ultimately confirmed by the mother, but it does reflect the schizophrenic desire of the father for a perfect son and symbolically for a perfect existence, a desire that not only destroys the father's relationship with Momo but will also lead the father to suicide when confronted with the reality of a life imperfect in reality.

However compelling, none of these reasons (the autofictional writing or the author's familiarity with film and theater narratives) is more representative for the Schmitt's style than the

talent to build genuine characters. What Adam, Zeus, or Fiona lack in psychological complexness they gain by the truthiness of their agenda. These are the stories of modern men, thirsty for a meaningful life, often caught in the emptiness of their fate, faith, and pursuit of happiness.
Zeus himself exposes some of the author's beliefs on the human condition:

> Mon jeune ami, chacun de nous a trois existences. Une existence de chose: nous sommes un corps. Une existence d'esprit: nous sommes une conscience. Et une existence de discours: nous sommes ce dont les autres parlent.
> [My young friend, everybody has three existences. One existence is material: we have a body. Another existence is spiritual: we have a consciousness. And the third one is discursive: we are what the others say we are.] (Schmitt, 2002, 103).

If the first two dimensions of existence are out of our control, the third one may offer the possibility of free will: Seule la troisième existence nous permet d'intervenir dans notre destin, elle nous offre un theater, une scène, un public; nous provoquons, démentons, créons, manipulons les perceptions des autres. [Only the third one lets us change our destiny, it gives us the stage, the audience; we provoke, dismantle, create, and manipulate the perception of us). (Schmitt 2002, 104).

The initial episode of the suicide attempt enabled a future deal between the famous sculptor, symbolically named Zeus-Peter Lama, and the inexperienced Tazio Firelli who is to become Adam. According to the deal, Tazio would suffer a radical change in his physical appearance and civil identity in order to accomplish the most daring work of sculptor under the name of Adam-bis. His consent comes from a true desire to sacrifice his old self for a higher purpose. Revealed in a public ceremony, this transformation literary follows the requirements of old sacrificial rituals of one individual for the better good of the community. From Freud's *Totem and Taboo* we know that sacrifices imply a religious duty executed as a social obligation:

> Sacrifice and festival go together among all races, each sacrifice entails a holiday and no holiday can be celebrated without sacrifice. The sacrificial festival was an occasion for joyously transcending one's own interests and emphasizing social community and community with god (Freud 1998, 115-116).

Later, when Tazio reclaimed his rights and refused the sacrifice, he found himself not only against Lama but also against an entire platform worshiping Lama's pretended genius. Like young Momo from *Monsieur Ibrahim and the flowers of Coran*, Adam too departs for the adventure of his life, a spiritual travel meant to give him the power to be his own master and to free himself from any debilitating authority. While Momo is lucky and finds from the start the right mentor in the wise Monsieur Ibrahim, Adam has to experience first the schizophrenic and egocentric power of Zeus before meeting the more ethical Carlos.

Fame, as portrayed by Zeus, becomes a direct result of a very superficial judgment process where the judges are inexperienced, untrained, and generally ignorant of any real aesthetic or moral

criteria. The notion of universal value, as in Nietzsche's understanding, helps with measuring the morality as well as the aesthetics of all humanity.[7] In addition, the financial gain plays a small part in the story although the price of the sculpture *Adam-bis* is only a tool to measure his fame and not a financial end in itself.

The narrative nicely blends these opposite personalities around Adam, the final art product, burning with anxiety, physical pain from his breaking body parts, and his human part, covered in humiliation from losing his freedom. Thinking that he can avoid responsibilities, he initially wants to transition from being an irrelevant man to a valued object of art. This decision makes him less likable to the readers, as opposed to the feminine character of Fiona, who makes the right moral choices from the start. She relentlessness fights for freedom and happiness, reminding of Camus's *Stranger*.

Schmitt's people are complex. Made of ideas and not of flesh and blood, they seek the right and the responsibility of individual liberty, the human responsibility towards the others, or the divine intervention. Most of these figures share the activism of Sartre's engaging characters when raising philosophical issues and dealing with identity crisis.

Among these people, *les jeunes filles* are less significant. They make their entry in the novel as young caryatides, destined to pose for their statuesque beauty and lack of feminine pride. These women live and breathe only for Lama's pleasure and ultimately become live art, following the commercial success of Adam-bis.

By comparison, the characters follow a right or wrong moral path based on their physicality too. Nano-biological artifacts as Boris Vian's *pianoctec* that makes a cocktail based on the musician's state of mind, the human battery in Matrix, or the famous Borg technology implanted in human bodies in the TV series *Star Trek*, have always caught public attention and significantly changed the definition of human in postmodern era.

In Adam's case, the *sonomegaphore* is a curious invention: a metallic penis perfected to mechanize sexual intercourse and to illustrate the force that has been given to the statue by the artist.

Adam is a sculpture with empowering devices that only function as long as exposed to the public, while his person is dehumanized and emptied of feelings. The same nostalgia of a powerless author hunted Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu* or Cocteau in the movie *Le sang d'un poète*. Both complained about the lack of control an author has over his work of art once it is finished and released to the public.

In these body reconstructions, a symbol for an over mechanized world, Dr. Fichet plays a significant part as accomplice of Zeus. He proceeds to extreme plastic surgeries and even murder in order to cover his continuous gambling debt. His professional ethics are compromised as well as his consciousness. For Fichet, the evolution of medical science has no regard to human values and shows a clear regression to ignorance and mystification. From the metaphysical reason of the eighteenth century to classicism and later, modern critical thinking - as observed by Jean-François Lyotard - humanity pursued a long battle to reach rationality as the primary support for everyone's well-being.

Rational thinking evolved based on the social, economic, and political market demands for technology. If science presumably offers today "plus de justice, plus de bien-être, plus de liberté" (Lyotard 1988, 89-91), Lama and doctor Fichet believe themselves to be the promoters of a new art and a new man through science. In fact, the doctor is far from being a pioneer while he is object to the same dehumanizing process as much as Adam is objectified in the same process.

The birth of Adam-bis is not only the inauguration of a new era in sculpture, but also the first step into a non-humanistic world with wildly unstable dynamics of power. Becoming a sculpture is an adventure and a new identity, but also a regression. Because Zeus's plan promises an immediate validation of Adam's existence, Adam would not have to bother himself with the tedious process of thinking and being accountable for his acts. As with so many of Schmitt's protagonists, Adam goes through a transformative experience physical and spiritual. His character is initially likable because the vivid awareness of his meaningless life appeals to our humanism. Postmodern literary works particularly encourage this resonance with the public and its social habits. Such literature is more just a means to build an interesting story but an explorative tool, full of mechanical inventions and infinite plot possibilities. The invasive treatment of Adam's body is not fully described in medical terms because the focus switches towards human consciousness.

By questioning the artist and his creation, the novel unfolds some of Schmitt's own questioning of who we are and what we believe in. If what we knew as good and right changed dramatically over the last century, it is an evidence of loosing sight of human values and moral compass.

Endnotes:

1. In 1985 Serge Doubrovsky' book *Le livre brisé* staged the scene for the auto fiction as a genre: a story truthful to somebody's heart, without being an autobiography. This is possible because the nature of the fiction builds on the subconscious traces, the only part of our psychological life that we cannot fake or change.
2. In Giraudoux's *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* a demystified rewriting of history pinpoints to the absurd of the war (Giraudoux 1935, 172).
3. In Ionesco's *La leçon* the absurd of the situation resurfaces when the teacher continues a tedious lecturing while advising the student to listen quietly in spite of a serious toothache (Ionesco 1954, 127).
4. Repression as defined in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus.*
5. Schmitt's elliptic style is full of suggestions and metaphors. Thus, the unsaid truth is even more striking in the way art is produced and popularized by people like Lama, Durand-Durand, and authorities, although there is no reference to a specific nation or country.
6. Theater in itself is a genre inclined towards experimenting because of its live performance, playing with the real and the abstract orders, as defined by Antonin Artaud in *Le thèâtre et son double*.
7. As exposed in Jean Joseph Goux's assertion on modern art and money:
   —C'est à Nietzsche, on le sait, que l'on doit la notion de valeur dans le sens actuel du mot. C'est lui qui en fait virer le sens, vers une acception qui est maintenant commune. Non pas seulement la valeur d'une personne (digne d'estime par ses qualités - et primitivement son courage) ou celle d'un bien, mais la valeur ou les valeurs, comme système plus ou moins implicite des jugements à partir desquels un individu ou une société mesurent ce qui est bien, ce qui est mal - et aussi ce qui est beau et ce qui est laid. [We own it to Nietzsche the notion of value as we have it today. It is his understanding of value that became the norm. Not only the value of a man (respected for his qualities and the old courage) or that of

> a thing, but the value or the values as a system of judgment more or less implicit based on which a person or the society measures what is good, what is bad- what is beautiful and what is ugly] — (Goux 2011, 48).

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Prior's Blindness: Magical Realism in Kushner's *Angels in America*

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Abstract:

This paper is primarily concerned with examining Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* through the lens of "magical realism": the literary synthesis/coexistence of realism with elements of fantasy or the unknown. Because the play is saturated with moments that confuse normative reality with the "supernatural" world of angels and ghosts, I argue that the genre of magical realism can offer rich perspectives on how marginalized ideologies challenge dominant ideologies presented throughout *Angels*. *Angels* is set in the 1980s – a time of great redefinition for homosexuals and of AIDS as a disease – and consequently addresses related cultural situations and challenges. I focus on the character of Prior Walter, a homosexual, AIDS-infected "prophet" who becomes a provocative locus for simultaneously "imagined" and "real" spiritual activity in *Angels*. Through Prior's progressive spiritual encounters throughout *Millennium Approaches* and *Perestroika*, I argue that Kushner uses Prior to model a discursive, metaphorical, and literal movement away from narrow, exclusive perspectives of the unknown (what I call the "marginalized spiritual") and toward an acceptance of that unknown. Many of the critically-noted binaries in the play can be explained in this light, and although I remain focused on the issues related to Prior (i.e. spirituality and religion), I finally suggest that the complex reception of *Angels* can be more effectively reconciled through a magical realist approach.

Keywords: magical realism, alternative spaces, dialectical struggle, marginalized spiritual, drama studies, Tony Kushner, Lois Zamora, Wendy Faris.

Even though the comingling of the real and the fantastic has been frequently noticed, few have considered Tony Kushner's acclaimed *Angels in America* as a work of magical realism.[1] Given the ambiguity of the play, this may not be surprising. Kushner labels it as "essentially a comedy," though only because of the incredible dramatic seriousness within it (2003, 142). *Angels* blew conventional theatre apart both in presentation and form when it debuted, and so the play sits in an amorphous position, aside from its acceptance as a play at all (Pearl 764). Critics like David Savran have called it "promiscuously complicated," and filled with diametric oppositions: "the opposite of nearly everything you say about *Angels in America* will also hold true," due to Kushner's "refusal to adhere to any theatrical or political theory" (1995, 208-209). Yet perhaps all the disagreement over definitions of the play can be addressed without disqualifying any of those opinions. Perhaps these disparities contain what magical realists call "all-at-onceness," and represent a play whose boundaries

are "erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned" (Faris and Zamora 1995, 6). If anything can be said of *Angels*, it is that it lives between spaces and labels: between sobering realism and fantastic comedy. The complications offer rich grounds for analysis.

It is because of this dichotomous nature that I wish to consider *Angels* as a work of magical realism. The play has rarely been considered from a magical realist perspective, and only then in passing, but Monica Pearl claims that "*Angels in America* was exceptional in its presentation – given to magical realism when realism was the modus operandi of the American stage; it challenged suspensions of disbelief, willing and unwilling" (763). My hope here is less to suggest that *Angels in America* is – all other genres considered – best read as a work of magical realism. It is not, and scholars of magical realism rightfully suggest that wholesale categorization is dangerous.[2] Yet given the spaces evident in criticism and the contradictory, often-incredible moments that pervade the play, magical realism finds an ideal application within *Angels*, particularly in the character of Prior Walter. Although nearly every character in *Angels* experiences "magic" at some point, Prior is a hub of spiritual activity. He is a homosexual who injures an angel and gets a book embedded in his chest. He swears, he lies, he rages, and he is not anything like a conventional prophet. Prior exhibits a profound struggle to reconcile what he experiences with what he knows. He feels "Wonderful and horrible all at once, like… like there's a war inside… I'm scared. And also full of, I don't know, Joy or something. Hope" (Kushner 2003, 154). He never fully accepts his spiritual experiences as spiritual experiences, but his character still makes distinct progress toward reconciliation with the fantastic world penetrating his own. Perspectival change is not portrayed as an easy or quick fix, and Prior remains infected with AIDS and is blind by the end of the story. Yet Prior is still able to *change*, and it is here that magical realism becomes an accurate lens for this play.

Angels turns into a critique of the perception of the alien or "un-conventional" in American culture in both Prior and the reader. His steady encounters with the Angel of America, the prior Priors, and his encounter with the character of Hannah Pitt move him from a narrow perspective about the spiritual to a broadened, more harmonized, lexically corrected view of that same spirituality. Prior's struggle to reconcile the spiritual to the "real" is a powerful, hypothetical example of perspectival change wrought through linguistic conflict with the "marginalized" spiritual. Through Prior, the Christian definition of a prophet is challenged, and angels are tied to a radio in heaven, both mutable and non-omniscient. Readers are similarly placed in a world where we are forced to question what we know – a world where "both real and logically impossible events [are] considered to be on the same level of reality" (Chanady 1985, 23).

Magical realism is neither a "genre" nor a "mode." It is a broadly typified collection of traits, and not a historically established genre like realism or symbolism. A magical realist text typically contains the juxtaposition and combination of two different worldviews.[3] Amaryll Chanady calls this a "'synthetic, totalizing activity…' which offers the reader two completely different perceptions of reality – the magical and the rational" (1985, 19). Magical realism challenges a reader's unique, normalized view of reality, suggesting that the "rational" may not be as rational as it seems, and

generally employs the supernatural or the fantastic as a foil against a materialistic, post-enlightenment view of the world (Faris and Zamora 1995, 6-7). In contrast to what might otherwise be "science fiction" or "fantasy," magical realism contains an unproblematic sense of the "unknown": the non-disruptive occurrence of anything that contradicts our adopted view of reality without denying our adopted view (Chanady 1985, 21-22). Here, there is no narrative issue with the concurrence of the real and unreal. The fantastic is amalgamated with the real and "integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world" (1985, 23). Within magical realism, then, "Mind and body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female... are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned" (Faris and Zamora 1995, 7).

The hybridization of real/unreal is ideal for a confrontation with the marginal – the "magical," as it were. As she defines magical realism, Chanady explains that "The term 'magic' refers to the fact that the perspective presented by the text in an explicit manner is not accepted according to the implicit world view of the educated implied author" (1985, 22). Unification allows and encourages a reconciliation between two disparate worldviews, whatever those views might be. As such, socially marginalized people – of different ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation – can exist on a dramatically equalized plane. The fictional combination of worldviews essentially forces a reader to accept the coexistence of multiple realities, since "Although the educated reader considers the rational and the irrational as conflicting world views, he does not react to the supernatural in the text as if it were antimonious with respect to our conventional view of reality, since it is integrated within the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictitious world" (Chanady 1985, 23). Fiction becomes a powerful tool here, since reading demands a suspension of belief, and so a reader's normative guard is lowered.

With this in mind, Kushner's play clearly works as a piece of magical realism, and not only contains a superabundance of magic but also revolves around the theme of cultural marginalization. *Angels in America* was among the many artistic responses to the AIDS epidemic and other cultural issues within the 1980s, and was written with concern over the status of homosexuals.[4] Fiona Ramsby usefully details the social environment at the time Kushner wrote his play and describes it in terms of marginalized "homosexual bodies and AIDS sufferers." She explains,

> [During the 1980s,] the Reagan administration compounded fear of the virus by its "'abdication of leadership in the fight against AIDS," which exacerbated the homophobic attitudes of the conservative right (white). Right-wing ideologues coopted discourses that marginalized those who contradicted their beliefs – homosexuals and AIDS sufferers. . . not only were bodies with AIDS "attacked" physically, but this physical "assault" was exacerbated by the sleuth-like dissemination of language about those bodies. (2014, 418, 408)

The AIDS epidemic spawned disjointed, postmodern plays to confront an unfathomable disease. This is not to suggest that AIDS is a "magical" force (though some have argued this),[5] but

rather that Kushner's play was born of intensely social issues. As Pearl explains, "The common conception of the immune system as producing a cohort of warriors to fight off invaders, became itself a useless paradigm of explanation. The immune system, under this metaphor, could produce only double agents, and erode the boundaries of what was understood as self and not-self" (762-764). Because of this, she continues, AIDS "changed the rules and boundaries of the genres that were engaged to represent it" (763). A deconstruction needed to occur, and one that was naturally concerned both with current social issues and with the unfamiliar and unknown. *Angels* was no exception and achieves cohesion through Kushner's abundant dichotomies. Indeed, many dualities in the play exist as units of disarming social critique because, as critic Claudia Barnett notes, "Kushner demonstrates not only what is but what could be. . . by combining politics and the supernatural, pushing ideas beyond their logical limits to make them appear both implausible and achievable" (2010, 491).

Social concerns aside, *Angels* is also notoriously full of "magical" moments, and nearly all of them have plausible counterclaims within the play. In his playwright's notes, Kushner explains that "The moments of magic – the appearance and disappearance of Mr. Lies and the ghosts, the Book hallucination, and the ending – are to be fully realized, as bits of wonderful theatrical illusion – which means it's OK if the wires show, and maybe it's good that they do, but the magic should at the same time be thoroughly amazing" (Kushner 2003, 11). Despite the gritty realist backdrop, angels burst through ceilings and ghosts harass AIDS victims.[6] Characters blend together in parallel conversations or gain insight through conversation *in dream* with other characters. Roy Cohn talks to the ghost of Ethel multiple times in the play, for example, even while other characters (like Belize) don't see her (Kushner 2003, 188). During a shared dream, Harper Pitt believes Prior when he claims that an angel broke through his ceiling, even acknowledging that "That sort of thing always happens to me" (Kushner 2003, 194). Yet while Roy and Harper react to the imposition of dreams, ghosts, and angels as if they were real, they also realize that they are either terribly sick, on drugs, or both (Kushner 2003, 104, 53, 95, 188-189, 37). The play itself offers no indication of whether one reality is realer than the other. Savran usefully simplifies this abundance of dichotomies and problematic relationships as one meaningful, singular "oxymoron, a figure of undecidability whose contradictory being becomes. . . the privileged figure by which the unimaginable allows itself to be imagined" (1995, 212, 215).[7] The play occupies an in-between space, and that balance cannot be disrupted. Indeed, as Barnett writes, "To inhabit the world of *Angels in America* fully, one must accept the terrifying and magnificent possibility that angels and ghosts exist" (2010, 472). As an inhabitant of this world, Prior is predictably faced with the same dilemma.

Prior is stuck between the real and the unreal. Despite his self-acknowledged marginalization as a homosexual man and his marginalizing view of Mormonism (as seen in his first mutual dream with Harper in act one, scene seven of *Millennium Approaches*) and his discussion of homosexuality with Hannah (act four, scene four of *Millennium Approaches*), Prior's struggle in *Angels* is more *hypothetical*: he cannot understand the "marginalized" spiritual. That said, it is important to note that Prior only interacts with the spiritual beings of *Angels* (i.e. angels and ghosts) *as if* they were a

marginalized group. Slemon offers some clarity here. After describing what Mikhail Bakhtin called a battle "among discourses to 'become a language of truth,'" Slemon notes, "In magic realism this battle is represented in the language of narration by the foregrounding of two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other" (1995, 12). As such, Prior's "marginalization" is a linguistic one, and not necessarily literal; he is not prejudiced against angels, and the play would be significantly less effective if this were true. Thus, Prior's conflict with the supernatural can be described as a "discursive" or dialogic one.

In fact, Prior is utterly unfamiliar with the spiritual world and seems to have few religious beliefs. If his later talks with Hannah are any indication, Prior may be more than ambivalent about spirituality and religion, but his belief is otherwise ambiguous (Kushner 2003, 234-235). Once Prior is diagnosed with AIDS, he confronts his mortality with a vague, directionless sense of purpose. He tells a troubled Louis that "I can't find a way to spare you baby. No wall like the wall of hard scientific fact" (Kushner 2003, 26). In act one, scene seven of *Millennium Approaches*, Prior also pessimistically reflects, "One wants to move through life with elegance and grace… One wants…. But one so seldom gets what one wants, does one? No. One does not. One gets fucked. Over. One… dies at thirty, robbed of… decades of majesty" (Kushner 2003, 36-37). In addition, he does not seem to believe that truth exists, as his conversation with Harper demonstrates, "I usually say, 'Fuck the truth,' but mostly, the truth fucks you" (Kushner 2003, 45, 40).[8] And as his death approaches, as he explains to Louis, he has become drawn toward "anything that's suspended, that lacks an ending… it seems to me that it lets you off scot-free… No judgement, no guilt or responsibility" (Kushner 2003, 48).

Unsurprisingly, Prior's terrifying brushes with the angel and with the ghosts of Prior 1 and Prior 2 are highly "separated"; he is unable to reconcile their existence with the world he currently occupies and tries to rationally explain them away. Upon hearing the angel for the first time (while dreaming), he is at a loss:

> PRIOR: Hello?
> A VOICE: Look up!
> PRIOR: Who is that?
> A VOICE: Prepare the way!
> PRIOR: I don't see any… (Kushner 2003, 41)

In an ambiguous pun (does he not see any *way* or any*one*?) he is immediately afraid and disoriented by the event. Prior is also terrified by his encounters with the prior Priors, and (as with the angel) entranced enough by their presence to ask questions (Kushner 2003, 91-93, 119). The disorienting banter of Prior 1 and Prior 2 flies over Prior's head, who merely communicates that he is "afraid" (Kushner 2003, 95) and disconnects from the conversation quickly. Although he carries himself with the same, casual passivity of before (he jokes about "a convention"), he is primarily fixated on his death (Kushner 2003, 92-93). In fact, until the aftermath of the Messenger's arrival, Prior constantly assumes that his otherworldly visitations are omens of death, even though the angel

and the prior Priors indicate otherwise (Kushner 2003, 68, 92-93). Given his fatal, incurable disease, his hopelessness and fear are natural responses, though misperceived. Aside from the fact that he knows the Messenger is going to return, he cannot comprehend the significance of spiritual events.

Prior is also linguistically unable to address the imposition of the incredible, which evinces his problematic relationship with the unreal. Ramsby offers a helpful perspective in his article, "The Drama as Rhetorical Critique: Language, Bodies, and Power in *Angels in America*." Although he specifically discusses performance through sociopolitical metaphor, his distinction between "dominant and marginalizing metaphors" is useful, particularly in describing "marginalized bodies and how they function within social norms" (2014, 405).[9] Language itself, he explains, is a relational entity wherein (to put it simply) social forces can collide and challenge each other – much like Slemon's "dialectical struggle" (1995, 12). Quoting Norman Fairclough, Ramsby explains that "discursive relationships 'constitute social life: meaning and meaning making'" and that "*Angels* enacts the discursive relationships between social groups, and the conditions of those relations at a very specific point in recent political history," thereby allowing marginalizing language to be "mapped onto the bodies it performs" (2014, 406). Thus, titles and ideas can become inscribed onto people or (in this case) spiritual beings, and so Prior's language demonstrates a broken relationship which distorts his understanding of the angel. In a way, Prior is hemmed into his previously established (and not very extensive) relationship with the supernatural. Ironically, Prior is blinded.

He cannot accurately describe what is happening to him. As he tells Emily in act three, scene two, "I feel like something terrifying is on its way, you know, like a missile from outer space, and it's plummeting down towards the earth, and I'm ground zero" (Kushner 2003, 104). He doesn't describe his dread as a byproduct of an angelic encounter, or even as an imposition of God's will. Instead, he describes a *missile*. He responds similarly to the prior Priors' maddening, half-spoken-Hebrew lists: "Garlic. A mirror. Holy water. A crucifix. FUCK OFF! Get the fuck out of my room! GO!" (Kushner 2003, 119) and first assumes they – and Louis, who appears briefly (Kushner 2003, 120) – are "ghosts," rather than "ancestors" or "heralds" (Kushner 2003, 171). He does not call the angel an "angel" until the end of his second physical encounter with the Messenger (Kushner 2003, 179). When he hears the angel's voice in act two, scene five he asks, "Are you one of those 'Follow me to the other side' voices?" (Kushner 2003, 170) and, later calls the angel a "thing" (Kushner 2003, 68). Humorously, he can even only describe the incredible entrance of the Angel as "very Steven Spielberg" (Kushner 2003, 124). Indeed, as Savran aptly points out, even though the angel seems atemporal and inhuman, it "comes socially mediated . . . [and] betrays the fact that this miraculous apparition is in part the product of a culture industry and that any reading of her/him will be mediated by the success of Steven Spielberg and his ilk . . . [and] producing a particular vision of the miraculous" (1995, 212-213).[10] How else could Prior understand the unbelievable? Indeed, this interaction demonstrates how out of touch Prior is with the being that has entered his room – how he has marginalized it. There are more examples, but suffice it to say that Prior's relationship with the spiritual is at odds with his mind. He lacks clear psychological and emotional understanding of this supernatural "Other."

Yet Prior is able to grow precisely because he struggles to cope with the spiritual. His most formative moments occur when he is simultaneously torn between repulsion and enticement. His crisis escalates moments before the Messenger arrives in act three, scene five. As the Angel approaches, Prior holds onto rationality (asserting the facts he knows about himself),[11] though even that doesn't assuage his confusion: "No. My name is Prior Walter, I am... the scion of an ancient line, I am...abandoned I...no, my name is...is... Prior and I live... *here and now*, and... in the dark, in the dark, the Recording Angel opens its hundred eyes and snaps the spine of the Book of Life and... hush! Hush! / I'm talking nonsense, I... / No more mad scene, hush, hush..." (Kushner 2003, 121). Despite his fear, he listens when Prior 2 asks him to close his eyes, and despite his abject terror toward the angel, Prior is nonetheless *drawn* toward the "beautiful," "truth-filled" sound of the angel's voice (Kushner 2003, 68). He claims, in all apparent seriousness, that he *desires* her voice, despite his bleak mantra ("Fuck the truth"). Indeed, he believes that the voice is the only thing keeping him alive (Kushner 2003, 66). Nonetheless, when the Messenger finally arrives, he is filled with terror and turns again to the rational: "*This*, this is a dream, obviously, I'm sick and so I.... Well OK it's a pretty spectacular dream but still it's just some..." (Kushner 2003, 171). He is also conflicted by the idea of being the prophet, although he ironically evinces a marginal understanding: "Please. Please. Whatever you are, I don't understand this visitation, I'm not a prophet, I'm a sick, lonely man, I don't understand what you want from me" (Kushner 2003, 179). His reality has become destabilized. Steven Kruger argues that community is a deliberate, "conscientious" theme in *Angels*, noting that "one is not oneself in isolation but only in contrast to, in solidarity and negotiation with a variety of other selves. . . Even a character's fantasies and imaginations are conceived of as not solely his or hers. These gather their full meaning only in relation to, even interpenetration with, one another" (qtd. in Omer-Sherman 2007, 96-97).[12] In this case, Prior is surrounded by spiritual, unreal, and literally "other" selves, which challenge his self-definition. He is being changed both in behavior and word, and instructed by the presence of the magical.

The arrival of the Messenger marks a significant change in Prior: he finally becomes conversant with the fantastic and adopts a more refined language. His increased ability to relate, again recalling Rambsy, "demonstrates how marginalized bodies might be resignified" (2014, 406). In other words, Prior demonstrates how "things" and "ghosts" can be resignified as "angels" and "ancients." They are resignified in the same way that, as Ramsby explains, Prior claims that AIDS has transformed him into a non-human, only to be corrected by Hannah who says that there is "nothing *more* human" (2014, 406, emphasis added). After three weeks separate Prior from the Messenger, Prior also self-consciously embraces the title of "prophet," and begins to go blind, "I've been given a prophecy. A book. Not a *physical* book, or there was one but they took it back, but somehow there's still this book. In me. A prophecy. It... really happened, I'm...almost completely sure of it" (Kushner 2003, 169). His vision – his view of the world – has literally shifted and he now understands the prophetic role of the Book, though (of course) not entirely.[13] He argues (in direct contrast to before) to Belize that his encounter with the angel "wasn't a dream... I'm a prophet" (Kushner 2003, 169) and later says, "I believe I've

seen the end of things. And having seen, I'm going blind, as prophets do. It makes a certain sense to me" (Kushner 2003, 182). Ela Nutu, in comparing Prior the Prophet to the Biblical prophet Elijah ("The biblical prophet who also regains strength as a result of an angelic encounter") describes Prior's encounters as a "strengthening" and an "enabling" "through the medium of angels": "Both Prior and Elijah experience something that makes them want to live and, ironically for Prior, to move, to activate change and progress" (2006, 177- 178). Prior has been given a mission that defeats his hopelessness as it revitalizes his view of the world. He is no longer paralyzed by the unknown, and now understands both the role of the Book (in a general sense) and that the Angels and ghosts were sent to aid him, not to murder him.[14]

Significantly, Prior begins to equate the real and the fantastic in a broader sense. After Belize calls Prior crazy, he responds "Then I'm crazy. The whole world is, why not me? It's 1986 and there's a *plague*, half my friends are dead and I'm only thirty-one, and every goddamn morning I wake up and I think Louis is next to me in the bed and it takes me long minutes to remember...that this is *real*, it isn't just an impossible, terrible dream" (Kushner 2003, 181). Prior – the man who once blamed pills for the "voices" he heard, and who was outright labeled crazy by Emily and Belize – calls the *world* "crazy." Anthony Lioi speaks effectively to this, acknowledging that he also considers Harper as a "seer" in *Angels* (a claim too large to consider here): "Prior and Harper should not be taken as absolute authorities; rather, they are frightened, struggling mortals who occasionally snatch traces of the Real from the haze of their afflictions. This renders their prophecy more believable and more poignant – funny, even" (2004, 101). Indeed, Prior is a flawed, living contradiction, and yet his message becomes more penetrating because of it. Note also that Prior calls AIDS a "plague," harkening back to his second encounter with the prior Priors ("The spotty monster") (Kushner 2003, 93). AIDS is not "just an impossible, terrible dream," but is instead a reality that America cannot face.[15] Like the often-terrifying impossibility of his spiritual visions, there is an equivocation of dream and non-dream here, or (in magical realist terms) an "all-at-onceness" (Faris and Zamora 1995, 6). As such, because Prior has been able to experience the reality of the angels, he is now more fully equipped to experience the "normal" world.

Prior's slow acquaintance with the spiritual allows for several final, key contrasts within the story: his interactions with Hannah and with the council of the Angels. Given his evolving worldview, Prior's encounter with Hannah may seem like a step backwards for him as a character. After she stands to leave, he says, unprompted,

> PRIOR: I'm not insane...
> HANNAH: I didn't say you...
> PRIOR: I saw an angel. That's insane...
> HANNAH: Well, it's...
> PRIOR: Insane. But I'm not insane. But then why did I do this to myself? (Kushner 2003, 234)

He goes on to explain a constant, razor-sharp desire to run ever since the Angel appeared: "She seemed so real. What's happened to me?" (Kushner 2003, 235). The situation is complicated, however,

when Hannah says that he had a "vision," at which point he mocks her and says that he won't be "assuaged by pity and lies" (Kushner 2003, 235). He calls Joseph Smith's visions "preposterous," and when Hannah says that Smith's prayer created an angel, Prior doesn't believe it: "it's repellent to me. So much of what you believe" (Kushner 2003, 235). The difference here is not so much his belief in the spiritual, however. Instead, he is reacting to a distinctly *Mormon* definition of the spiritual.[16] His sudden fear over the Messenger's return a few scenes later strongly suggests that he has not *truly* dismissed his spiritual experiences throughout the play, or not for long. Instead, Prior is likely reacting to Hannah's religious interpretation – her religious definition – of his experience. They continue:

> HANNAH: What do I believe?
> PRIOR: I'm a homosexual. With AIDS. I can just imagine what you...
> HANNAH: No you can't. Imagine. The things in my head. You don't make assumptions about me mister; I won't make them about you. (Kushner 2003, 235)

Significantly, Prior is again confronted with inadequate terms of description. He describes their interaction in terms of labels and is not considering their larger similarities. Prior is perturbed by the fact that he is a "homosexual" in her eyes. In the words of Ramzi Fawaz, he is a "man whose HIV status renders him already 'dead' in the eyes of the general public" (2015, 136). Notice also that he calls his illness AIDS and not a "plague." This is a significant contrast, since even though Prior has become distinctly more convinced of the spiritual world, the beings within that world, and his role within that world, he can reject a form of spirituality that wears a different shape than the one he has experienced.

As always, the inverse is revealed through this interaction, as Hannah's belief completely breaks down when an actual angel enters the room, and suddenly Prior looks like the more spiritual person of the two. Not a few lines after she affirms that prayer can create angels, she outright *dismisses* Prior's warning about the angel for spring rain, and when the terrifying angel enters the room, she is the first to scream and call it all a "fever dream," in contrast to Prior, who demands that the angel take his Book back without question (Kushner 2003, 250). Ironically, Hannah provided Prior with the information he needed to confront his own destiny, particularly by saying that "An angel is just a belief, with wings and arms that can carry you. It's naught to be afraid of. If it lets you down, reject it. Seek for something new" (Kushner 2003, 237). Here, Kushner both affirms and denies the usefulness of religion, as it turns out to be superficial in the religious character of Hannah, who (by calling an angel a "belief") is not representing Mormonism accurately.[17] As Nutu has observed about binaries in *Angels* (as a whole), "The binary terms continue to exist (gratis?), only they have changed sides in their hierarchical system" (2006, 183). Although she then launches a larger criticism at Kushner's work (which I cannot adequately address in this context), her assertion holds true here.[18] Indeed, Hannah's words do not seem spoken from experience. In a way, she occupies the same, unfamiliar space as Prior occupied earlier in the play, although we never see whether she progresses in the same way. Regardless, sets of biases are brilliantly presented through the contrast of a once-non-spiritual character becoming more spiritual than a religious character.

Fascinatingly, this leads him to reject the book offered him by the angel, which then leads him to wrestle and defeat the angel, leading finally to his refusal to do what the angels asked while still requesting his blessing (Kushner 2003, 234-236, 250, 265).

It is this contrast that primes Prior to make one of the most significant decisions within the entire story. Because he has gained an enhanced understanding of the angels and ghosts surrounding him, he is able to ultimately refuse his calling: "The Book, whatever you left in me, I won't be its repository, I reject it" (Kushner 2003, 250). After wrestling the angel, the angel concedes, "You have prevailed, Prophet. You… Choose" (Kushner 2003, 251). The angel no longer controls him. Prior is no longer a slave to the system which once dominated him; he has been freed. Recalling Prior's prior conflict in trying to reconcile to the spiritual, Deborah R. Geis effectively notes that to progress, he needs "to accept both the possibility of insanity/ prophecy (the world of the Imagination) and the right to do so on his own terms" (qtd. in Barnett 2010, 472). He rejects a power that is seemingly all-powerful, literally dragging it down to his level (Kushner 2003, 250). And when Prior finally arrives in heaven, the Angels are all listening to an old radio, trying to catch wind of what is happening on earth (Kushner 2003, 252). Nutu aptly describes this place as a "shaken heaven, disorganized, de-centered, de-deified" (2016, 181-182). We learn that this power was an illusion, and angels are brought down to man's level (even bowing to Prior in act five, scene four). They are shown to have what Omer-Sherman calls a "common plight," both in their weakness and in their shared existence in a universe with a runaway God (2007, 86). In this way, both Prior and the angels are equalized. Their interactions minimize their differences.

Prior's steady encounters with the spiritual, thus allow him to *undermine* the spiritual and break free of its conventional rules. Nutu notes that by "moving away from 'proper', prescribed identities to which the Symbolic Order summons us, *Angels* queers the hierarchical systems that exists not merely on earth – in which homosexuals 'have zero clout' – but also between heaven and earth – in which those above dictate the Law for those below" (2007, 182). Prior recognizes his biases because of his encounters with the alien, unknown world of the spiritual. In magical realist terms, his encounters are an admission of the "exceptional that subverts existing structures of power" (Faris and Zamora 1995, 6). He is a gay prophet, and so the idea of prophecy is challenged. Angels are weakened, and so their authority is challenged.

It is because of this, then, that Kushner's play works as an effective piece of magical realism and acts precisely within magical realist terms. Had Prior simply accepted the imposition of the fantastic as it was presented, or had he possessed a supernatural, dominating knowledge over every event in *Angels*, the play would be reduced to a simple fantasy and lose its thorough critique of society in the 1980s. Because both the magical and real are merged together, Prior is forced to work through the painful process of reconciliation. This is a terribly messy process and not a simple issue of turning one switch on or off; there are many, ingrained switches which can refuse to change, even after incredible experiences. In a way, Prior's largest enemies were complacency and contentment. Indeed, earlier in the play, he wants to escape his fate precisely because it is *uncomfortable*, as in act two, scene two: "*I. WANT.* You to go away. I'm tired to death of being done to, walked out on,

infected, fucked over and *now* tortured by some mixed-up, reactionary angel" (Kushner 2003, 179). Julie Sparks notices this as well, drawing a contrast between the characters in the play who are fearful and "resist change, settling for a stifling stagnation, while the braver characters accept the sometimes excruciating changes life forces on them, winning revelation and release through their struggle" (Kushner 2003, 194). It is this back and forth between apathetic acceptance and proactive action that marks the difference between Prior pre-angel and Prior post-angel.

Although Prior is finally able to take action and refuse his fate, he is still left wondering about which parts of his dream or reality are true, and though he has gone blind "as prophets do" (Kushner 2003, 182), he remains infected with AIDS at the close of *Angels* (Kushner 2003, 278). The angels did not bless him. In this way, Kushner refuses to apply new labels to the character of Prior. After all, Prior never *really* successfully makes a prophecy; he never really predicts the future or brings in some revelatory meaning to the world of *Angels*. Indeed, he is told to "prepare the way" (i.e. he is addressed as a prophet) before he even understands that the "voice" belongs to an angel (Kushner 2003, 42). It is only through the "magical" that Prior can change from a narrowed perspective to a broadened perspective, even as "magic" adopts many different names. Lioi says it effectively, explaining that Kushner's play "is sacramental, it enacts the secrets it narrates, and effects real change in the willing participant" (Kushner 2003, 112). Kushner does not paint the transition from "ignorance" to "knowledge" in shining colors at all, and instead, as Lioi notes, "takes his oracular brew with arsenic rather than sugar" (2004, 101). By affirming and denying the existence of spirituality, Kushner avoids making the very judgement calls that he is trying to highlight (Barnett 2010, 485). Prior models the way out of troublesome, conflicted worldviews. As Barnett has also noted, "Prior's message is his resistance to stasis, his survival, his fight – and by extension, his blessing. He is a role model of survival" (2010, 479). Indeed, it may not be coincidental that Prior, as Barnett notes, is the only character to break the fourth wall and address the audience (2010, 492). Indeed, Barnett argues that Kushner's play is designed primarily to change the audience.[19] Her quote from Frank Rich is particularly useful here: "[Kushner] sends his haunting messenger, a spindly, abandoned gay man with a heroic spirit and a ravaged body, deep into the audience's heart to ask just who we are and just what, as the plague continues and the millennium approaches, we intend this country to become" (qtd. in Barnett 2010, 487).

Though the idea is hardly satisfactory, could it be that the play attempts to decentralize itself? Perhaps by adopting many unusual, controversial, shocking, hilarious, and unbelievable forms, the play itself avoids becoming a new "category," and instead is made whole by its separateness. As Pearl acknowledges, despite its complication, *Angels* is "a good example of how form mimics and spells out the very experience it is representing" (763). While criticizing Kushner's treatment of Jewishness in *Angel*, Jonathan Freedman similarly notes that the play points "beyond itself" (1998, 100), that "Kushner desires a dramatic form and an understanding of transcendence that allow a space for queer citizenship in a culture obsessed with the mythography of rebirth and the inevitability of miracle" (1998, 91). Admittedly, Freedman demonstrates, as does Savran, that the play is not itself

wholly ambivalent, and several other critics have made compelling cases for a fairly upsetting agenda behind the play.[20] But consider, for a moment, that Kushner is Prior. Should we expect a prophet to be any different than human? Prior himself never escapes his human flaws, and though he makes tremendous progress, he is nonetheless never a perfect arbiter.

In this sense, Kushner's play is made effective simply because of the way magical realism disarms those who read or watch it. As Omer-Sherman explains, "in the return from spirit to the mundane world of politics, there is an implicit burden laid by Prior on the audience/reader, requiring that when a watcher emerges blinking into the sunlight, s/he accepts the burden of fully living in and engaging with the world" (2007, 26). While it is true that the final tone of the play is somewhat ambiguous – perhaps necessarily so – readers are privy to the entire *process* of the story, and are aware of what is at stake. Indeed, Louis flatly challenges the very content of the play in act three, scene two, arguing that "there are no gods here, no ghosts and spirits in America, there are no angels in America, no spiritual past, no racial past, there's only the political... the shifting downwards and outwards of political power to the power" (Kushner 2003, 98). Although juxtaposition of the real with the fantastic might seem to answer this question with an emphatic "maybe," perhaps Hannah's words near the end of the play speak to this: "You can't live in the world without an idea of the world, but it's living that makes the ideas. You can't wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory" (Kushner 2003, 278). As critics like Freedman and Savran have rightfully noted, there is a point where it is necessary to accept intrinsic flaws within our perspectives – it is unavoidable – but there is a difference between ambivalence and "prophecy," as it were. In this, Prior as "role model" becomes a beautifully nuanced notion: he is imperfect, he is frightened, he is ill, and he is often mistaken. Yet by slowly, imperfectly encountering the spiritual as he does, we see that he softens and reaches heaven by stumbling upward one step at a time. It is a masterful stroke on Kushner's part that Prior happens to be a homosexual man during a time of oppressive bigotry, and this is the intrinsic challenge issued toward the reader. If he or she can accept that angels could coexist in Kushner's stark, familiar New York – accepting absurdity as a normal part of their narrative experience – the message behind Prior's progression can be administered: perspectival change *is* possible. Without the inclusion of magic in *Angels*, the culturally revolutionary perspective therein would likely be easily passed over and obscured by our own undisturbed notions of the "normal" and the "abnormal." It is an irony that Barnett notes effectively, "[Prior] sees because he has AIDS; he survives because he sees; and, in the end, he shares his vision with humanity" (Barnett 2010, 472). Without the presence of magic realism in *Angels,* the power of Kushner's message would be negated. His highly challenging, provocative work asks us to reconsider our relationship to others (and to ourselves) by daring us to pause, reflect, and reconsider the words of a dying, confused, and inflammatory homosexual prophet; we are pushed straight to the edge of our normative boundaries, which is precisely what successful magical realism aims to do. In this way, Kushner's nearly-endlessly complicated work urges us both to acknowledge and to seek out the billions of human "worlds" that surround us. In seeking – in experiencing – perhaps we can better understand each other. Perhaps we can learn that it is

possible to find a common ground and a shared humanity despite shared differences. Perhaps we can see that weakness become strength and that, if one looks closely enough, one might even see angels in the tangled, shared reality resting madly and beautifully between the boundaries of the real and the incredible.

Endnotes:

1. See Savran 209, Barnett 471-473.
2. "It is not a monolithic mode of writing that pervades a text at the expense of other techniques and strategies" (Barker 1). See Barker 10.
3. Of course, it is more nuanced than this. See Barker 10-11, Zamora and Faris 5, Chanady 17, 19 and Slemon 10-11.
4. See also Ogden, "*Angels in America* uses the physical phenomenon of HIV, a virus that attacks the immune system, as a trope to investigate the degree to which homosexuals qualify as the Self or the Other in the United States" (2000, 249).
5. Barnett's article suggests that AIDS is a form of purgatory, which propels characters in *Angels* into a middle space.
6. See Fawaz for an interesting take on the coarser elements of *Angels*.
7. "'[T]o be a progressive is to seek out connection' among communities, activism, ideas, issues, and politics" (Kushner qtd. in Hogan 4).
8. See Ramsby 411.
9. "*Angels* enacts the discursive relationships between social groups, and the conditions of those relations, at a very specific point in recent political history, which allows for the mapping of marginalizing language use – specifically metaphoric language use – onto the bodies it performs" (Ramsby 2014, 405).
10. Nutu argues something similar: "What Kushner's *Angels* demonstrates successfully is that biblical texts have been, are and always will be culturally mediated" (2006, 185). See also Nutu 182.
11. Barnett 474.
12. "*Angels* presses toward its own agenda, in the form of a renewed unification of present-day humanity united by a common plight with the angels, dwelling in a cosmos that God has abandoned" (Omer-Sherman 86). See Kushner 73. See Pearl 768-771 for a discussion of dialectic in the context both of the lines of the play and in the visuals of the film adaptation.
13. See the rest of Lioi's fascinating work on the Jewish context of Kushner, particularly "Kabbalistic world-repair." See Freedman's article in its entirety.
14. Interestingly, the intentionality of the angel is not always seen as helpful, as Ramsby notes. See Fisher's article.
15. See Prior's conversation with Belize: "A great queen; big fucking deal. That ludicrous spectacle in there, just a parody of the funeral of someone who *really* counted. We don't; faggots; we're just a bad dream the real world is having, and the real world's waking up. And he's *dead*" (Kushner 2003, 168).
16. See Savran 216-221 for a discussion of Mormonism in *Angels*.
17. "It rings false that Hannah Pitt, the mother of Joe who has left Utah to come to New York to settle the chaos in her son's life says that 'angels are beliefs with wings,' for this claim belies the literal core of the Mormon faith, even while it affirms progressive Judaism's more relaxed relationship with metaphor" (Omer-Sherman 2007, 21).
18. See Nutu 183-186.
19. See Omer-Sherman's discussion of Sarah Ironson (2007 17-27).

20. See Savran 215-216 on the treatment of females in the play. See Pearl 182-183. Though arguing that Kushner's work is more conservatively minded, Omer-Sherman notes *Angel's* "unabashed liberal paean to multicultural tolerance and understanding" (2007, 79).

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Gordimer, Race, and the Impossibility of Communication Action in Apartheid South Africa

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Abstract:

Drawing from Bakhtin and Habermas, I will show how the different voices in Gordimer's novel seem to be enacting a democratic public sphere in which no voice is granted authority over others – a public sphere which carries the promise of countering the social and political hierarchies established by the racist South African regime. The promise, however, turns out to be an illusion. As I will demonstrate, the possibility of an Enlightenment bourgeois public sphere which the novel seems to be gesturing at is being irreparably undermined by racism. In a country where the Enlightenment aspiration to universalism and equality before the law are glaringly contravened by racism, Rosa Burger is painfully aware of her inability to fully access the predicament of the blacks. As such, Burger's daughter remains only Burger's daughter, and the children of Soweto the children of Soweto; at no point in the novel do they truly intermingle. Despite the fact that both are fighting racism – and the novel is devoted to the "coming-of-age" of both kinds of children – Rosa Burger remains only the daughter of a *Bürger* at the end of the novel, not the daughter of South Africa, much less to say the daughter of Black South Africa. She has finally "come into her own," but the "self" she manages to realize is at best that of a disillusioned bourgeois individual (that of a disillusioned *Bürger*, so to speak) – a "self" that recalls Hegel's "beautiful soul." To appropriate György Lukács's language, *Bürger's Daughter* could be described as "modern bourgeois literature bear[ing] witness against bourgeois society."

Keywords: Gordimer, Adorno, Bakhtin, Habermas, Lukács, Enlightenment, citizenship, human rights, citizen rights.

> 'All that is and has been written by South Africans is profoundly influenced, at the deepest and least controllable level of consciousness, by the politics of race. There is no country in the Western world where the creative imagination, whatever it seizes upon, finds the focus of even the most private events set in the overall social determination of racial laws.'
>
> *English-Language Literature and Politics in South Africa*,
> Nadine Gordimer

Burger, the last name of the heroine of Gordimer's novel, carries a double meaning: citizen and bourgeois. The entwinement of "citizen" with "bourgeois" recalls the revolutionary politics of the

middle class during the Enlightenment as well as its eventual failure.[1] Instead of examining the novel and the middle class in socio-economic terms,[2] my essay will discuss the novel against the backdrop of the visionary politics of the middle class during the Enlightenment, focusing specifically on their politics of human rights and citizen rights. This initial vision and its subsequent deformation constitute the core of the criticism launched by Lionel Burger against the bourgeois Afrikaners who have made citizenship and human rights the sole property of the white man. My task, however, begins where Lionel Burger's ends. By analyzing Rosa Burger's experience, I will identify certain blindspots in the universalism championed by the bourgeois revolution which renders its promise of "equality before the law" an empty and even false universalism. My critique of the bourgeois revolution gains further momentum in the second half of the paper, where the narrative design of *Burger's Daughter* is discussed in terms of a failed bourgeois public sphere. Drawing from Bakhtin and Habermas, I will show how Gordimer's novel seems to be enacting a democratic public sphere in which no voice is granted authority over others – a public sphere that carries the promise of countering the social and political hierarchies established by the racist South African regime. The promise, however, turns out to be an illusion. Just as Lionel Burger's revolution ends up as a failed bourgeois revolution, the public sphere which promises to be opened up by the novel also turns out to be a failed bourgeois public sphere. The Enlightenment bourgeois public sphere, in other words, can be irreparably undermined by racism. In a country where the Enlightenment aspiration to universalism and equality before the law are glaringly contravened by racism, Rosa Burger is painfully aware of her inability to fully access the predicament of the blacks. As such, Burger's daughter remains only Burger's daughter, and the children of Soweto the children of Soweto; at no point in the novel do they truly intermingle. Despite the fact that both are fighting racism – and the novel is devoted to the "coming-of-age" of both kinds of children – Rosa Burger remains only the daughter of a *Bürger* at the end of the novel, not the daughter of South Africa, much less to say the daughter of Black South Africa. She has finally "come into her own," but the "self" she manages to realize is at best that of a disillusioned bourgeois individual (that of a disillusioned *Bürger*, so to speak) – a "self" that recalls Hegel's "beautiful soul." To appropriate György Lukács's language, *Bürger's Daughter* could be described as "modern bourgeois literature bear[ing] witness against bourgeois society" (Lukács 1970, 145).

Rosa Burger is not just the daughter of Lionel Burger the Marxist revolutionary in South Africa. Like her father, she is also a descendent of the revolutionary *Bürger* who wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. This heritage passes on to the Burgers the legacy of human and citizen rights. That the Enlightenment legacy of rights is taken very seriously by Lionel Burger[3] can be illustrated by his defense speech at the treason trial, when he repeatedly invokes the language of rights:

> . . . what we as Communists black and white working in harmony with others who do not share our political philosophy have set our sights on is the national liberation of the African people, and thus the abolishment of discrimination and extension of political *rights* to all the peoples of this country. . . For

> nearly thirty years the Communist Party allied itself as a legal organization with the African struggle for black *rights* and the extension of the franchise to the black majority. . . . the great mass movement of the African National Congress, and other movements, were outlawed . . . What legitimate *rights* had been recognized, according to the "standards of Western civilization" our white governments have declared themselves dedicated to preserve and perpetuate . . . why is it no black man has ever had the *right* of answering, before a black prosecutor, a black judge, to laws in whose drafting and promulgation his own people, the blacks, have had a say? (Gordimer 1979, 26-27; my italics).[4]

In the spirit and the language of the Enlightenment discourse on rights, Lionel Burger appeals for justice for the black people. The Enlightenment principles of equality and universal rights of man and of the citizen on the one hand, and the dignity of individuals, on the other, had been egregiously violated by the white South African government prior to the time period when the story takes place.[5] Invoking Marx's emphasis on equality, itself an Enlightenment legacy of universalism, Lionel Burger charges the white capitalist South African government for making human and citizen rights into their private property by appropriating the rights of the blacks. Following Marx's "overcoming" of the bourgeois liberal tradition, Lionel's protest against the South African government focuses on resisting racial separation made possible by the law of private property and champions instead of universal humanity and universal reason. It is on the grounds of universalism that Lionel seeks to transcend racial barriers and side with the black Africans against the white government. The power of Lionel Burger's treason trial speech[6] stems precisely from his insistence on humanity and human rights as universal, and his conviction that the individual is intrinsically embedded in this universality and as such carries an inescapable responsibility toward universal humanity. It is on the grounds of the principle that any human being, qua human being, participates in humanity that he indicts the white government for "deny[ing] the humanity of the black people they live among" (Gordimer 1979, 25). It is also because of his belief that he himself as a human being, qua human being, has a responsibility toward humanity that he finds it impossible to continue tolerating the government's "subjection and humiliation of *human beings*" on a daily basis – "a subjection and humiliation of live *people* in which, by my silence and political activity *I myself took part*" (Gordimer 1979, 24; my italics). To stand by white injustice against the blacks would "mak[e] it impossible for me to see myself as *a man among men, with all that implies of consciousness and responsibility*" (Gordimer 1979, 25; my italics). Also in line with Enlightenment universalism and democracy is Lionel's association of legitimacy with universal reason. He challenges the legitimacy of the South African government for its inability to grant "*reasonable* recognition" to the "*reasonable* aspirations" of the African people (Gordimer 1979, 26; my italics).

In opposition to the government's measures to "keep blacks out of white lives" (Gordimer 1995, 126), Lionel opens his private house to the public and adopts the son of a revolutionary African into his family. To counter white separatism, Lionel espouses Marxism, bringing blacks and whites in a common struggle against injustice:

> I saw that white Marxists worked side by side with blacks in an *equality* that meant taking on the meanest of tasks – tasks that incurred loss of income and social prestige and the risk of arrest and imprisonment – as well as sharing policy-making and leadership. I saw whites prepared to work under blacks. (Gordimer 1979, 25; my italics)

Lionel's efforts to overcome racial separatism earn him his deserved trust and loyal friendship from the blacks of his generation, but not from their children, as the racism being practiced in South Africa grows more and more brutal. In no time, his family gets broken up, and his open house closed down. Zwelinzima Vulindlela – a revolutionary African's child whom Lionel adopted into his family – eventually turns against both him and his daughter.

The failure of Lionel Burger's project can be traced to the blindspots he inherits from the bourgeois revolution. Limited to the vision of a *Bürger*, Lionel seems to be oblivious to the problematic equation set up by the bourgeois revolution between human rights and citizen rights, as well as the failure of that revolution to offer protection against racial, class, and gender discriminations. As Lionel himself points out, "the white people in general in our country [. . .] deny the humanity of the black people they live among" (Gordimer 1979, 25). How can he expect citizen rights to be extended to those whose humanity has been denied in the first place? Furthermore, not unlike many white leftists in his days, Lionel Burger does not understand that racial discrimination cannot be casually glossed over as class discrimination. The incommensurability between the two is rigorously argued by the black activist Duma Dhladhla: "Whites, whatever you are, it doesn't matter. It's no difference. You can tell them – Afrikaners, Liberals, Communists. We don't accept anything from anybody. We take. D'you understand? [. . .] And the black people don't need anyone else. *We don't know about class interests. We're one kind*" (Gordimer 1979, 157; my italics). The visionary politics Lionel inherits from the Enlightenment is better suited to address class rather than racial inequality. Lacking sensitivity to race, Lionel Burger idealizes Marxism as the grand solution to all human conflicts:

> I saw that white Marxists worked side by side with blacks in an equality that meant taking on the meanest of tasks – tasks that incurred loss of income and social prestige and the risk of arrest and imprisonment – as well as sharing policy-making and leadership. I saw whites prepared to work under blacks. [. . .] we as Communists black and white working in harmony with others [. . .] the national liberation of the African people, and thus the abolishment of discrimination and extension of political *rights* to all the peoples of this country (Gordimer 1979, 25-26).[7]

Failing to understand the special dynamics of racism, Lionel Burger's appeal to rights and universal humanity is bound to be inadequate if not ineffective as a response to a racist regime. Robert Boyers observes that "*Burger's Daughter* is in a sense a response to two crucial events, namely, Sharpeville and Soweto" (Boyers 1984, 82). The extreme atrocities committed against the blacks on both occasions fueled black skepticism toward the white rhetoric of universal brotherhood and

universal franchise that Lionel Burger tries to advocate.[8] Ever since the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, the blacks increasingly stopped collaborating with the whites.[9] Lionel's appeal to universalism sounds especially irrelevant given the fact that his defense speech is made around the time when the Black Consciousness Movement is about to begin.[10] His communist brotherhood is no match for the divisive force of racism, and his rhetoric of universal brotherhood sounds outdated for a society deeply divided by racial conflicts and hatred. As it is, things would only get worse *despite of* Lionel's appeal to granting the blacks their political rights on account of their humanity. The black people who have already been denied of their humanity (Gordimer 1979, 25) are further stripped of their South African citizenship and converted into citizens of one of ten tribally based self-governing homelands in 1970.

Return of the repressed: race in South Africa and the two turning points in the political career of Rosa Burger

Nor is it just the children of Soweto (such as Zwelinzima) who find their situation trivialized by Lionel's color-blind Enlightenment universalism. Lionel's own daughter complains: "I don't know how to live in Lionel's country" because the gross injustice committed by racism under apartheid makes irrelevant his colorblind ideals about universalism and equality (Gordimer 1979, 210). A number of critics have pointed out the importance of the two events in Rosa's life – her witnessing the brutal whipping of a donkey by a black man who himself Rosa surmises must have been subjected to frequent abuses by his white masters, and the accusations launched against Rosa by Lionel's black adopted child after he has changed his name back to Zwelinzima Vulindlela. Both are turning points in Rosa's political career: the first drives her to escape from Lionel's country and abandon herself to the pursuit of private pleasures, the second drives her back to South Africa to take up Lionel's legacy. Both incidents have to do with Rosa's confrontation with injustice perpetrated by the whites against the blacks and her painful consciousness that her biology implicates her in the former even though her heart sides with the latter. The two turning points, in other words, pertain to the *race* issue which, repressed by Lionel, returns to haunt his daughter. Although many critics have pointed out the importance of these two events, regrettably, none seems to have analyzed why the first triggers Rosa's flight to Europe, whereas the second brings her back to Lionel's country. This is a question I would like to take up here.

The event which thoroughly demoralizes Rosa into concluding "I don't know how to live in Lionel's country" (Gordimer 1979, 210) refers to her witnessing a drunken black man beating a donkey pulling a cart in which a black woman and a child are seated. Contrary to Lionel's naïve universalism, Rosa has no faith in universal justice because justice itself is perverted by racism in South Africa. Rosa cannot "deliver them [the family] over to the police" (Gordimer 1979, 209) because to do so would mean bearing on the blacks with her "white authority" (Gordimer 1979, 209) – on a family whose "final meaning of a day they had lived I had no knowledge of, a day of other appalling things, violence, disasters, urgencies, deprivations . . ." (Gordimer 1979, 209). Above all, handing them over

to justice would mean handing them over to *white* justice. Justice under apartheid is a white privilege, and it is the white privilege that has caused the man to get drunk and beat up the donkey in the first place. She cannot inflict more of her privileged access to justice by denying him of his humanity like "one of those whites who can care more for animals than people." Contrary to Lionel's naïve understanding of "universal justice," to uphold justice (for animals) under apartheid could mean further denying the blacks their humanity:

> I drove on because the horrible drunk was black, poor, and brutalized. If somebody's going to be brought to account, *I am accountable for him*, to him, as he is for the donkey. . . . I didn't do anything. I let him beat the donkey. The man was a black. So a kind of *vanity* counted for more than feeling; I couldn't bear to see myself - *her* - Rosa Burger - as one of those whites who can care more for animals than people. (Gordimer 1979, 210; my italics)

Significant here also is Rosa's confession that her flight from the scene (and subsequently from South Africa) is driven by "vanity" rather than "feeling" – that is, by her *image* of "Rosa Burger" as she surmises herself in the third rather than the first person. Rosa has special pride in her political difference from other Afrikaners. As such, she imagines that, once she cuts her "*external*" ties from the Afrikaners by leaving South Africa, all that will be left will be her "free and pure *internal* self." Rosa's flight to Europe, in other words, is a gesture of bad faith motivated by concerns for appearance and, above all, an attempt to escape from both the external situation and her own conscience.

Her relinquishment of all moral responsibilities in favor of the exploration of sensuality in Europe is not so much an act of being true to herself as an attempt to run away from her true self and identity. Her return to South Africa is hence a necessity. My argument, however, is that the accusations from Zwelinzima is what truly shocks Rosa into confronting her real identity as a "Burger" in all senses of the word: her identity as Lionel Burger's daughter, her inherited guilt as a white bourgeois (*Bürger*), and her duty as a citizen (*Bürger*) of South Africa.

Zwelinzima and Rosa's phone conversation begins with Zwelinzima confronting her with his identity. He rejects the childhood name given him by the Burgers, stating emphatically that "I'm not 'Baasie,' I'm Zwelinzima Vulindlela. [. . .] Zwel-in-zima. That's my name. 'Suffering land.' The name my father gave me." (Gordimer 1979, 318). When asked whether she knows the meaning of his name, Rosa is at a loss. The question makes her realize that, up till that point, she hasn't even taken seriously the meaning of her own name – that is, her own identity:

> — You know what my name means, Rosa? –
> — Vulindlela? Your father's name... oh, I don't know whether my surname means anything either – "citizen," solid citizen (Gordimer 1979, 318).

Rosa's adopted black "brother", Zwelinzima Vulindlela, rejects her because she was born

Burger – born as a (white) *citizen*, and as a bourgeois. By contrast, he was born Zwelinzima – born as "suffering land," *subjected* to the casual abuses of the racist government.

As the exchange unfolds, it becomes clear that Rosa has never cared enough to find out the real identity and the experience of Zwelinzima and his family as blacks in South Africa. Like her father, Rosa has simply been taking bourgeois comfort in play-acting with Zwelinzima as if they were simply one big, happy, color-free family. Hence Zwelinzima's complaint: "I'm not your Bassie, just don't go on thinking about [. . .] that *black* '*brother*,' that's all" (Gordimer 1979, 321; my italics). Far from being one family, Zwelinzima bluntly points out that "I don't know who you are. You hear me, Rosa? You didn't even know my name" (Gordimer 1979, 322). Not only that; Zwelinzima deems it a big lie to call themselves one family due to the glaring discrepancy in the ways his father and Rosa's father are being treated by their society. Theoretically belonging to the same Communist "family" fighting apartheid, Lionel Burger gets all the honor for his martyrdom, in contrast to Zwelinzima's father Issac Vulindlela who died a disgraceful death. Issac Vulindlela was in all likelihood murdered when he grew old and could no longer work, and he was framed as having committed suicide by "hang[ing] himself with his own prison pants" (Gordimer 1979, 318). The discrepancies in the significance assigned to the death of the white and the black fathers are described impetuously by Zwelinzima:

> Everyone in the world must be told what a great hero [Lionel] was and how much he suffered for the blacks. Everyone must cry over him and show his life on television and write in the papers. [...] there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs, [...]. Getting old and dying in prison. Killed in prison. [...] It's nothing, it's us, we must be used to it, it's not going to show on English television. [...] One of Lionel Burger's best tame blacks [Zwelinzima's father] sent scuttling like a bloody cockroach everywhere, you can always just put your foot on them. (Gordimer 1979, 320).

It is humiliating enough that the apartheid government refuses Zwelinzima's father justice by blatantly misrepresenting his murder as a self-debasing suicide: "hang[ing] himself with his own prison pants." Zwelinzima feels further trivialized by the fact that Rosa does not even bother to find out the truth. Again, Rosa's lack of sensitivity is revealed when Zwelinzima cross-examines her on the subject: "How did they kill him [Zwelinzima's father]? – You see, you don't know, you don't know, you don't talk about that" (Gordimer 1979, 318). Rosa's father and Zwelinzima's father both died in prison for fighting apartheid. The former is hailed by all as a martyr, while the latter is as insignificant as dirt. Diana Cooper-Clark phrases it well in her remarks that *Burger's Daughter* "illustrates the way in which black activists have been ignored while white South-African activists attract world attention" (Gordimer 1979, 221). The incommensurability between the white citizen and the black subject is such that, even when alive, Issac Vulindlela had no say in deciding what kind of school his son was to attend. Rosa even told him that "My mother didn't want your father to take you at all" (Gordimer 1979, 321). It is thus not surprising that Zwelinzima comes to view both the apartheid regime and the Burgers as imperialistic, and that Rosa Burger is guilty simply by being white:

"Whatever you whites touch, it's a take-over. He was my father. Even when we get free they'll want us to remember to thank Lionel Burger" (Gordimer 1979, 321). Zwelinzima also has no scruples telling Rosa to her face: "why do you think you should be different from all the other whites who've been shitting on us ever since they came?" (Gordimer 1979, 322). Zwelinzima further emphasizes that her guilt cannot be absolved by performing occasional good deeds for the blacks, such as her attempt to deliver a fake pass to Zwelinzima's father to allow his return from Botswana:

> He [Zwelinzima's father] was able to go back home and get caught because you took the pass there. You want me to know in case I blame you for nothing. You think because you're telling me it makes it all right – for you. It wasn't your fault – you want me to tell you, then it's all right. For you. Because I'm the only one who can say so. But he's dead, and what about all the others – who cares whose "fault" – they die because it's the whites [her community] killing them, black blood is the stuff to get rid of white shit. – (Gordimer 1979, 322).

Rosa's attempt to help Issac Vulindlela escape only contributed to his captivity because of the racist White South Africa. The individual cannot seek exculpation by physically absenting himself/herself from a wrongful community of which s/he is a member. S/He must face reality and right the wrong of the community itself. This is the real reason that drives Rosa to return to South Africa: while Rosa tries to *exculpate herself by leaving South Africa*, Zwelinzima *inculpates her even as she is far away in Europe*. Seeking refuge in private pleasures in Europe under the tutelage of Katya – Lionel's first wife – is an escape from herself rather than the way to self-realization. Just like her father, Rosa eventually finds it necessary to break away from Katya.

Even before escaping to Europe, Rosa already attempted to seek refuge from being "Burger's daughter" by striking up a relationship with Conrad who, like Katya, is dedicated to the pursuit of private pleasures. Rosa finds no real satisfaction in that relationship either. This is not surprising. Repeatedly, Gordimer underscores in her writings the impossibility of developing wholesome personal relationships in a society poisoned by racism. In her third novel, *Occasion for Living* (1963), for example, Gordimer demonstrates that even love relationships – supposedly the most "private" and intimate of human relationships – are inevitably contaminated by apartheid:

> A line in a statute book has more authority than the claims of one man's love or another's. All claims of natural feeling are overridden alike by a line in a statute book that takes no account of humanness, that recognizes neither love nor respect nor jealousy nor rivalry nor compassion nor hate – nor any human attitude whatsoever where there are black and white together. (Gordimer 1963, 216)

Stephen Clingman comments that *Occasion for Loving*, like many of Gordimer's novels, "explores the degree to which the power of apartheid has on the contrary become internalised, preventing any such authenticity virtually, before it starts, even in the most intimate of ties" (Clingman 1984, 165). Clingman's comments resonate Gordimer's own words in the novel:

> What stronger and more proudly personal bond was there than love? Yet even between lovers they had seen blackness count, *the personal return inevitably to the social, the private to the political*. There was no recess of being, no emotion so private that white privilege did not single you out there. (Gordimer 1963, 279; my italics)

Above all, it is Eugene Goodheart's conclusive insight that might best help us understand why the pursuit of private pleasures yields no way out for Rosa, and why she feels compelled to return to South Africa to take up her political role in the end: "If 'white privilege' is an aggressive intruder into the integrity of personal relations, then any effort to live out one's personal life free of politics is self-diminishing. The apolitical view, *even the illusion of me, is possible only if one is free to constitute one's own personal realm*" (Goodheart 1984, 108). Rosa's infant intimacy with Zwelinzima, for example, could not escape being ruined by a racist society. The reconnection of the personal to the political toward the end of the novel thus seems unavoidable because personal fulfillment is impossible within an unjust society. Eventually, it is only in embracing her political duties with personal conviction that Rosa finds true fulfillment.

Burger's daughter only, not the daughter of (black) South Africa

The novel, however, ends in ambiguity, with no indication that Rosa's commitment to justice would bring about a better South Africa. Significantly, *Rosa realizes herself as Burger's daughter, not the daughter of South Africa, much less the daughter of Black South Africa*.

Rosa matures as a fully committed South African citizen fighting apartheid toward the end of the novel. But commitment in no way guarantees practical success. In fact, commitment means precisely holding fast to a course regardless of the outcome and even despite of the outcome. The committed individual feels that s/he has certain duties in the universe, and it is by carrying out those duties to the utmost of one's abilities that one can claim one's identity and find one's role in the universe. However, while an individual can try his/her best, whether the world responds to this commitment is a separate issue.

Rosa concedes in her reflection on Zwelinzima's accusations: "who was I to think we could be different from any other whites" (Gordimer 1979, 332). As much as she is committed to battling apartheid, there remains an unbridgeable gap between her and the blacks. Zwelinzima brutally punctures the cozy lies with which the Burgers have for years been comforting themselves with – the cozy lies that the Burgers and the blacks (including Zwelinzima) are one big, color-free, happy "family" – when he forces Rosa to confront the fact that she doesn't even know his name and real identity. The Burger's revolution that Lionel attempts to launch on behalf of the blacks in the name of universal human rights is bound to fail, not least because he does not understand the particularity of race issues, in the way that the bourgeois revolution in the eighteenth century was also a failed revolution due to its blindness to class and race issues. And, despite Rosa's growing alertness to the radical singularity of race, she is nonetheless powerless to bridge the big divide in South Africa because, as a white, she is forever divided from the experience of blacks under a racist regime. For

example, even though the Burgers and Issac Vulindlela went to jail for the same cause, they were treated completely differently by both the whites and the blacks. Just like her father, Rosa ends up in prison. Just like her father also, Rosa's experience obviously differs from that of Issac Vulindlela. Rosa is not murdered or subjected to torture. She is even granted special privileges:

> People detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act are not allowed visitors, even next of kin. But when later Rosa Burger became an awaiting-trial prisoner she was entitled to the privileges of that status, and in the absence of any blood relative, Flora Donaldon sought and was given permission to see her. (Gordimer 1979, 360)

While others are denied visits even from immediate family members, Rosa has the special privilege of conversing with a mere friend. As to the conditions of her confinement, we could venture a guess from Rosa's letter to Madame Bagnelli: "In a passage dealing with the comforts of a cell as if describing the features of a tourist hotel that wasn't quite what the brochure might have suggested – *I have rigged out of fruit boxes a sort of Japanese-style portable desk [. . .] and that's what I am writing at now [. . .]*" (Gordimer 1979, 361). Lionel can talk about universal human rights, and Rosa can claim Zwelinzima as her brother, only because they are Burgers and are speaking from the protected, privileged position of South African citizens. In contrast to "*Bűrger*," the Vulindlelas are mere subjects (or citizens of their "homelands") rather than citizens of the nation. While Lionel the citizen has the power to challenge the law at his treason trial, the black subjects are interrogated by the law without any power to interrogate it in turn. The difference in the whites and the blacks' social and political experience renders it very difficult if not totally impossible for a white to fully understand the predicament of the blacks. In "Living in the Interregnum," Gordimer explicitly agrees with Desmond Tutu's rejection of the whites' identification with the blacks, because the former have not been victims of "this baneful oppression and exploitation" (Boyers et al., 1990, 213, 212, 214).

In her interview with Stephen Gray and Phil du Plessis, Gordimer states candidly that "White writers are cut off from the proletariat. There's no getting away from it" (Gray and Du Plessis 1990, 63). This sounds like a direct criticism of Lionel, who, his self-proclaimed "kinship with the blacks" notwithstanding, has no idea how far removed he is from the true sentiment of the blacks. Lionel's naivete is subjected to much more vehement criticism in *Burger's Daughter* by the black activist Dhladhla: "He does not live black, what does he know what a black man needs?" (Gordimer 1979, 159). A white man like Lionel may go to jail defending the blacks' rights, but "he goes for his ideas about me. I go for my ideas about myself" (Gordimer 1979, 159). For Dhladhla, Marxism misses the core issue in the conflicts in South Africa and is totally off the mark in substituting class for race:

> We are going to get rid of the capitalist and racist system but not as a "working class." That's a white nonsense, here. The white workers belong to the exploiting class and take part in the suppression of the blacks. The blackman is not fighting for equality with whites. Blackness is the blackman refusing to believe the whiteman's way of life is best for blacks. (Gordimer 1979, 163)

As if in direct counterpoint to Lionel, Dhladhla declares, "It's not a class struggle for blacks, it's a race struggle" (Gordimer 1979, 163). Robert Boyers summarizes very well Dhladhla's position: "To speak of common goals is nonsense in a country where *the white rule not as a 'ruling class' but as a 'colour.' In fact, to fight for equality with Whites is to accept the Marxist reading of class conflict and to ignore the primary fact of South African society which is colour*" (Boyers 1984, 83; my italics). Boyers bases his observations on the way how Sharpeville divided the black from the white activists. For the former, Sharpeville was a watershed after which the blacks no longer believed that non-violence could be the venue for their cause. In contrast, Lionel's perception and approach to the problems in South Africa remain unchanged:

> For though Lionel Burger and his friends were surely moved to furious protests on behalf of those massacred at *Sharpeville*, their response is consistent with the general feeling of indignation and radical enthusiasm they have maintained all along, As people with a vision of a better future and the patience to wait out the reversals to which any radical enterprise is subject, they can go on with their usual radical politics even after Sharpeville. (Boyers 1984, 83)

It is thus not surprising that young blacks like Dhladhla and Zwelinzima lose faith in the older generation and strike out on their own paths. In her interview with Servan-Schreiber, Gordimer explains why "a new generation of nationalistic and revolutionary blacks" turn to violence as their only hope:

> [. . .] the young, disillusioned by the failures and the resignation of their parents, denounced the illusion that any progress could be made in cooperation with whites. "We must act alone. As long as we are in contact with the whites, we will be allowing ourselves to be defeated by them. Let us find our own way." [. . .] Ashamed of the collaboration that their parents practiced with the whites, the young blacks reject everything about our way of life, thus indicating that they do not intend to allow themselves to be degraded, even by the whites who claim to desire their well-being. (Servan-Schreiber 1990, 111)

As for Rosa, despite her awareness of the special significance of race, in the end, she only succeeds in *bridging the gap between generations, and not between races*. There are reasons why Rosa can only assume the legacy of the Burgers but not that of the black South Africans. In addition to the fact that a healthy degree of understanding between blacks and whites is impossible in a racist society, a certain incommensurability seems to exist between the legacy of a *Burger* – that is, a bourgeois – and of the blacks in South Africa. Conor Cruise O'Brien points out that Rosa is a "Daughter of the South African Revolution" only in the "American sense of daughterhood." Important to note is that America was in many ways founded by the bourgeoisie and for the bourgeoisie:

> The style of *Burger's Daughter* is elegant, fastidious: a high style belonging to a cultivated upper class.

> [. . .] The style is appropriate, none the less, and not just because Lionel and Rosa belong to the white, educated middle class [. . .]. It is appropriate because the revolutionary's daughter is an aristocrat of the revolution, feels herself to be such, and is used to being seen as such. Nadine Gordimer knows revolutionaries and knows them to feel themselves as being, not struggling underdogs, but patricians of a present underworld, and of a future society. Rosa is the daughter of a revolution only just beginning, yet her style has already something in common with a Daughter of the South African Revolution, in the American sense of such a daughterhood: "She didn't understand the shame of the need to please, as royalty never carries money." (O'Brien 2003, 48)

While Rosa engages in frequent self-questioning and is much more self-critical than what O'Brien is ready to admit, Gordimer does discuss in an interview with Bernard Sachs how her upbringing impacts her life – an impact which no doubt can also be felt through her character Rosa Burger:

> A white South African, brought up on the soft side of the colour-bar, I have gone through the whole packaged-deal evolution that situation has to offer – *unquestioning acceptance of the superiority of my white skin*, as a small child; *acceptance of the paternal attitude that "they" are only human*, after all, as an older child; questioning of these attitudes as I grew up and read and experienced outside the reading and experience that informed my inheritance; and finally, re-birth as a human being among other human beings, with all this means in the face of the discrimination that sorts them into colours and races. *Whether I like it or not, this has been the crucial experience of my life*, as the war was for some people, or membership of the Communist Party for others. (Sachs 1990, 8; my italics)

Gordimer's awareness of her limitations as a white in South Africa prompts her to redefine commitment in existentialist terms rather than her fellow Marxists' traditional idea of "right[ing] wrongs on behalf blacks." In a lecture addressed to white university students entitled "Speak Out: The Necessity for Protest," Gordimer urges them to combat racism with an eye to "set[ting] our society free of the lies upon which it is built," but that the fight for authenticity will be "on behalf of yourselves, and that part of yourselves which exists tangled inextricably in human interdependence with the lives of those you live among":

> Our fundamental social problem remains daubed crudely black-and-white. But what is needed to approach it honestly now is a change of emphasis. We shall need to see our efforts not so much as attempts to right wrongs on behalf of blacks, as to set our society free of the lies upon which it is built. The role of the proctor, honourable though it may have seemed, and great courage though it undoubtedly showed in certain individuals at certain times, is one of those lies. If you students are to go speaking out, it will be on behalf of yourselves, and that part of yourselves which exists tangled inextricably in human interdependence with the lives of those you live among, whether or not on the surface of the skin it's their turn to reject you. (Gordimer 1988, 102; my italics)

Rosa Burger at her most mature displays Gordmer's full-fledged awareness of limitations – socio-political as well as existential: the limitations of her society, the limitations of the Burger legacy she inherits, and, above all, her self-limitations. Robert Boyers describes beautifully the evolution of Rosa into a full-fledged Burger's Daughter:

> In its movement towards reconciliation and affirmation it is a novel of growth, with that growth conceived as the achievement of a combined personal and political maturity. In the universe created by *Burger's Daughter,* to come to terms with oneself is to confront without illusion the circumstance one has inherited and in which one must live. (Boyers 1984, 67)

From the failed bourgeois revolution to the failed bourgeois public sphere

As the allusion to Lukács in the title of my essay suggests, *Burger's Daughter* in many ways exemplifies modern bourgeois literature bearing witness against modern bourgeois society. I have already demonstrated how Lionel Burger's revolution is a failed bourgeois revolution due to his blindness to the specificity of race in South Africa. I will now turn to demonstrate the manners in which the potentialities for *Burger's Daughter* to enact a bourgeois public sphere is also stifled by apartheid.

That Gordimer chooses the novel as her genre is significant. The rise of the novel goes hand-in-hand with the rise of the bourgeois-*citizen*. In contradistinction to Ian Watt who focuses on the relationship between the novel and the bourgeois-*economic*-being, I have chosen to focus on the relationship between the novel and the bourgeois-*political*-being – that is, the connections between the "bourgeois genre" and the rising tide of popular-democratic speech, in particular the bourgeois public sphere which invites citizens to engage in democratic debates and exercise their rights to citizenship. Also worth noting is that the novel has been singled out by Bahktin as the genre exemplary of "dialogism" – a feature associated by many critics with democracy.

The text of *Burger's Daughter* consists largely of speeches by different characters, such as "the (Leninist) Marxism which Rosa has inherited from her father, the Freudian existentialism of Conrad, the hedonism of Katya, the liberalism of Bernard Chebalier, the progressive conservatism of Brandt Vermuelen, the radical black nationalism of Duma Dhladhla, and so on" (Martin 1986, 4). The narrative viewpoint of the novel also switches constantly between the first person and the third person, privileging neither the former nor the latter. For these reasons, critics such as Louise Yelin and Nita Schechet hail the novel as demonstrative of Bakhtin's idea of dialogism where all voices are included without hierarchy. Yelin even describes Gordimer's assemblage of a wide range of fragmented voices as "enabl[ing] the circumventing of the prohibitions of apartheid":

> The figure of a set of reflections without an authoritative "original" [in *Burger's Daughter*] . . . suggests a strategy for imagining the nation itself. This figure undermines the hierarchy of signifying practices whereby certain representations are privileged, others are devalued, and still others are repressed or occluded altogether. And, reflecting all South Africans alike, it enables the circumventing of the

prohibitions of apartheid. (Yelin 1998, 114-15)

Contrary to Yelin, I am skeptical about prematurely associating *Burger's Daughter* with "dialogism," much less to assert the novel's ability to "[circumvent] . . . the prohibitions of apartheid." In reality, there exists in the novel hardly any "dialogue" in the sense of real human exchange or "full speech" as Lacan describes it. Instead of finding fruitful dialogues between human beings, we encounter all kinds of fragmented monologues in *Burger's Daughter*, with a variety of characters talking to some absent interlocutors without knowing whether their messages would ever reach the other party, nor do they seem to care. As regards "conversations," whenever they do take place, they can be more accurately described as two ongoing monologues, since such conversations often feature people talking at cross purposes, as in the case of the angry phone conversation between Rosa and Zwelinzima; or they are merely empty palaver, as for instance the exchanges between Conrad and Rosa, with Conrad having "no conversation among other people," and Rosa "los[ing] mental grip of what she was occupied with, keeping still and quiet as if to attract something that might approach her" (Gordimer 1979, 47). The novel is full of fragmented speeches, leading nowhere, reaching no one, and making nothing happen. In Lacanian terms, the novel is populated with empty speeches.

That the characters in *Burger's Daugther* are incapable of genuine dialogues is not surprising, nor is it merely a result of direct censorship. Through state terror and other kinds of intimidation tactics, the apartheid regime divides even people of the same color, trapping each of them in fear. Bakhtin's dialogism or heteroglossia has been lauded for advocating democratic inclusion of all voices without privileging any one of them – a practice that can easily be associated with the Enlightenment public sphere as Habermas describes it, where all voices are equal and equally represented.[11] My argument is, however, insofar as Gordimer's novel cannot really be characterized as "dialogic," its resemblance to Habermas's ideal public sphere is also superficial. As much as Bakhtin's "dialogism" requires genuine human exchange, the bourgeois public sphere as Habermas formulates it requires genuine *communication, debate, and consensus*. Unlike the fragmented monologues in *Burger's Daughter* where no one is really listening to anyone else, the ideal bourgeois public sphere is founded on authentic self-expression, genuine human exchange, participation, and engaged discussion. It is not surprising that Habermas's Enlightenment public sphere presupposes freedom of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision-making, without which there is no real self-expression and human communication. Freedom of speech and assembly are precisely prohibited by the apartheid regime. All attempts at free discussion and real self-expression are stifled in Rosa's days. The two most authentic speakers in *Burger's Daughter* are Lionel and the mature Rosa. Lionel's own defense speech is dotted with ellipses and never gets represented in completion (Gordimer 1979, 24-27). His important line quoted by Rosa at the very end of the book is deleted by the prison censor and "Madame Bagnelli was never able to make it out" (Gordimer 1979, 361), nor can the readers, nor can the third-person

narrator, nor can the author. Dismally enough, Lionel and Rosa's messages cannot even reach a fellow white, not to mention the blacks.

As the missing quote from Lionel in Rosa's letter at the very end of the novel tellingly demonstrates, Gordimer gives us an unfinished story full of fragments of different characters' consciousnesses over which the author imposes no final say. Again, Yelin and others have capitalized on this device as demonstrative and even performative of democracy.[12] Indeed, the surrender of knowledge by the author places her on the same level as her characters – that is, she knows about them no more at any given moment than they themselves do. When this device is assessed in its proper historical context, as I have attempted to do earlier in this essay, however, the more convincing reason for this surrender of the omniscient narrator becomes apparent. The anxious, fractured, and discontinuous world of *Burger's Daughter* is more a reflection of what Gramsci calls a "crisis of authority" – a phenomenon that happens to be highly characteristic of the fragmented spiritual wastelands haunting high modernism also – than that of an ideal public sphere featuring heteroglossia in the sense of fruitful discussions arising from equal, democratic political participation. To a certain extent, Julián Jiménez Heffernan's analysis of Gordimer's *Get a Life* can be appropriated for illuminating *Burger's Daughter*. The earlier novel, no less than the later one, "dramatiz[es] a plural consciousness ailed by dislocation, inertness, and unspeakableness. The novel thus unfolds as a tragedy of point of view, a vocal drama of moral representativeness climaxed in a 'crisis of authority' (Gramsci)" (Heffernan 2010, 87). The fragments and interruptions in *Burger's Daughter*, far from indicating a healthy public sphere, are "morbid symptoms" (Gramsci) of a "diseased condition" (Heffernan 2010, 89) incapacitating both "utopian commitment" and "moral agency" (Heffernan 2010, 87).

The diseased condition, of course, is apartheid, which prevents people from reaching out to each other, less to say speaking and acting on behalf of each other. Gordimer's dispensation with the omniscient narration is hence related to her commitment to "set our society free of the lies" (Gordimer 1988, 102) and her refusal to affect formal unity and the possibility of authorial omniscience in a society plagued by dissonance, violence, secrecy, and a lack of information and communication. As discussed before, apartheid makes it impossible for an individual to act on behalf of those s/he cannot claim to understand; likewise, apartheid also makes it impossible for a writer to speak on behalf of others whose feelings s/he cannot access. While writing *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer published "Literature and Politics in South Africa," in which she laments that the ability of literature to generate a national community is being severely undermined by racist politics:

> The dilemma of the writer in a multi-racial society, where the law effectively prevents any real identification of the writer with his society as a whole, so that *ultimately he can identify only with his colour, distorts this mean irreparably*. And *cultural identity is the ground on which the exploration of the self in the imaginative writer makes a national literature*. (Gordimer 1974, 226; my italics)

Yelin herself points out that Gordimer is suggesting that "*apartheid deforms, even forecloses, the imagination of a [real] community*" (Yelin 1998, 112). This observation of Yelin undermines her

hasty glossing of Gordimer's late modernist style in terms of Bakhtin's heteroglossia. In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin explains how Dostoyevsky creates the polyphonic or dialogic novel: "It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses" (Bakhtin 1984, 81). Note that Bakhtin's dialogue requires a "*unified* truth" and "*contact* among various consciousnesses" – elements conspicuously absent in *Burger's Daughter*.

The "tragedy of point of view" enacted in *Burger's Daughter* is a testimony to the failure of the bourgeois public sphere rather than its efficacy. It is not surprising that, of the Frankfurt School thinkers, it is Adorno rather than Habermas from the Frankfurt School whom Gordimer has invoked in her works. In Adorno's language, Gordimer's novel is committed to "mak[ing] an uncompromising reprint" of the society (Adorno 1997, 28) by "embodying the contradictions [of society], pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (Adorno 1983, 32). What Adorno says of Schönberg could be equally an apt description of Gordimer's artistic creation: in a society beset by contradictions and injustice, "if [an art work] is not to degenerate into deception and ideology, it must assume the form of negation. The *chef d'oeuvre* remained unfinished and Schönberg's admission of failure, his recognition that it was 'a fragment, like everything else,' says perhaps more for him than any success" (Adorno 1983, 164). The multiple interrupted voices that lead nowhere in *Burger's Daughter*, in other words, are much more in the spirit of the many impotent voices of high modernism in T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* than those celebrated by Bakhtin's dialogism.

Coming of age: *Burger's Daughter* versus *the Children of Soweto*

To conclude our discussion about *Burger's Daughter* being modern bourgeois literature bearing witness against modern bourgeois society, let us now turn to the reception of the novel in South Africa. In this regard also, the finding is far from upbeat. Despite the many international awards won by Gordimer, the reception of her novel was beset by all kinds of complications and problems in her home country – the very country her novel was meant to address first and foremost, and where her message was most urgently needed.

B*urger's Daughter* was published in England and banned in South Africa three weeks after its publication for being "obscene, blasphemous, pernicious in the area of race relations, offensive to certain parts of the population, and detrimental to the security of the state" (Servan-Schreiber 1990, 114).[13] It was unbanned several months later only under international pressure (Hurwitt 1998, 263). Even if there were no censorship, it would still have been unlikely for *Burger's Daughter* to bring together a community, less to mention a public sphere, in South Africa. The novel met hostility from both the right and the left, the whites and the blacks. Susan Gardner points out that "Some reactions were crude personal attacks on Gordimer [. . .]. *Burger's Daughter* was [. . .] deplored as a distortion of SA Communist Party history, which also profits from the sufferings of some of the prototypes (members of the Fischer, Roux, Bunting, and Simons families)"

(Gardner 2003a, 168).[14] And even if we discount the bitter criticism from those with a particular political agenda, the sophisticated style (or, in Marxist terms, the "bourgeois style") of the novel did not reach out too readily to the black public which had long been deprived of proper educational opportunities. This poses a very serious challenge to the very meaning (and the "being" in existentialist terms) of the novel itself. As Gordimer herself emphasizes: "A literary culture cannot be created by writers without readers. There are no readers without adequate education" (Gordimer 1999, 16-17).

Far from being able to call into being a community through her work, Gordimer described herself during the apartheid era as a "minority within a minority," "a dissident white; a white writer" (Gordimer 1983, 272). By choosing to be a dissident white writer, she had chosen exile from the white community (see Lazarus 1990, 148-49). Isolated from the whites, Gordimer was likewise isolated from the blacks. By the time of the publication of *Burger's Daughter* (1979), the Black Consciousness movement had been brutally suppressed. With the Soweto Uprising in 1976 and the murder of Steve Biko the national leader of the Black Consciousness Movement in 1977, black resentment against whites – including even the sympathetic whites – was strong. Stephen Clingman opines that "It is the acute marginalisation all this involved which *Burger's Daughter* most powerfully reveals in its very deepest attempts to come to terms with it" (Clingman 1984, 165).

It is perhaps no coincidence that Gordimer published this novel in 1979, the Year of the Child. Gordimer ascribes the whole imminent revolution at the end of the book to children – to the children of Soweto on the one hand, and Burger's daughter on the other. In a way, one can say that the book traces the "coming of age" of two kinds of children – with the Burger's Daughter on the one hand, and the Children of Black South Africa on the other, fighting for the same cause, yet divided from each other, by their skin color and a range of attendant implications including their educational levels which in turn bear on their opportunities for making their voices heard. The contrast in the educational levels turns out to be no less stark than that of the skin colors: two kinds of children coming of age, with white bourgeois eloquence on the one hand and a group still struggling with their spelling and grammar on the other. As Gordimer remarks about the document distributed by the Soweto children:

> In that book [*Burger's Daughter*] I published a document that was a real document, distributed by the students in the 1976 riots in Soweto, and banned by the government. It's in the book with all the misspellings and grammatical mistakes ... everything exactly as it was; and indeed that's important because, as Rosa points out, these kids rioted because they felt their education wasn't good enough. (Hurwitt 1998, 263)

The contrast well reminds us of Rosa who can escape to France versus Zwelinzima stuck in the suffering land. . . .

The contrast also reminds us of Gordimer's observation that apartheid would doom her to be an outsider: "Until every law that set me aside from black people was abolished, until we were all to be born and pursue our lives everywhere in the same right, governed by the free choice of all the

people, my place would not know me. No matter how I and others like me conducted ourselves, we were held in the categories of the past" (Gordimer 1995, 133). Even more striking is her statement about her being deprived of a community she could call "my people" despite her being a South African citizen: "still I was aware that although I could say 'my country' – blacks did not dispute the claim of birthright – I could not say 'my people'" (Gordimer 1995, 133). Rosa Burger–a Citizen of South Africa, and a Burger's Daughter, but she could not call herself the Daughter of South Africa – much less the Daughter of Black South Africa.

Endnotes:

1. *Die Burger* is also the name of the leading Afrikaans newspaper in Cape Town. The name "Burger" thus recalls the Enlightenment public sphere.
2. See, for example, Ian Watt's *Rise of the Novel*, Bram Dijkstra's *Defoe and Economics*, John Richetti's *Popular Fiction before Richardson*, and John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary*.
3. To the extent that Lionel Burger takes the South African government to task for ignoring the "legitimate *rights*" of the African National Congress and the rights of the blacks and the dissidents, he is speaking the language of a *Bürger* rather than a Marxist. In other words, his Marxism (and Rosa's) does not rule out the legacy of the revolutionary middle class in the Enlightenment period. Hence the word "Burger" in both their surnames and the title of the book. Note that despite Marx's rejection of right for its association with bourgeois liberalism, the basic impetus of his theory can be understood as an attempt to fight for the rights of the oppressed. Hence communist countries in the twentieth century can also deploy the language of rights in their promotion of social rights.
4. The commitment to arguing for justice on the grounds of rights is also very pronounced in the thinking of Bram Fischer, the Afrikaner anti-apartheid activist and lawyer on whom Lionel Burger is apparently modeled. See, for example, Fischer's "Message from Underground":

   > In 1965 South Africa presents a surface of ebullient confidence: [. . .] the confidence of a Government which, during sixteen years, has with increasing violence attempted to crush every effort by the majority of the people to win *human rights* until today it appears supremely stable. [. . .] Can any economy long be stable where its prosperity is reserved for a politically dominant white minority? Can any policy produce racial harmony where it imposes economic and social degradation and a denial of *human rights* on the vast majority of people? [. . .] Our police State, now arming itself to the teeth, has used this law with barbarous intensity to try to break the forces striving for basic *human rights*. [. . .] most important, is the extension of *human rights* to all *citizens*. [. . .] If the combination of predictable and unpredictable forces leads to large-scale violence or war, the consequences would be so disastrous in loss of life, in suffering, in economic disruption, in a legacy of bitter hatred and in the threat to world peace, that I believe that white South Africans must at some stage be brought to realise that their own long-term interests lie not in maintaining race supremacy but in extending *human rights* to all." (Fischer 1965, my italics)
5. The novel was first published in 1979.
6. Gordimer bases her character Lionel Burger on Bram Fischer, an Afrikaner lawyer who fought the white government on behalf of the blacks under apartheid. See Gordimer, "The Fischer Case," 21-30 and "Why Did Bram Fischer Choose Jail?", 30 ff.
7. Note again the similarities between Lionel Burger and Bram Fischer in Gordimer's description of the latter in her interview with Marilyn Powell:

   > He [Fischer] became a lawyer and was interested in politics, and clearly had he joined the Afrikaner establishment, had he joined the National Party and followed the apartheid line, he probably could have one day been Prime Minister. But as a young man he became tremendously

> troubled by what he saw around him, by the inequalities in life in South Africa, became very troubled about the position of blacks and the way he saw South African history evolving, repressing them more and more, became very interested in his reading in leftist ideas and eventually joined the Communist Party. Why did he? [. . .] At that time, there was indeed no political party he could have joined which did not have a racial bias and that was the only one that was open to mixed membership. (Bazin and Seymour 1990, 231)

Communism was the only political party which was not racist in South Africa. In other words, the Communist party was the most universalist. But being universalist is not sufficient an answer to racism. The specificities of racial discrimination must be confronted if the problem is to be properly addressed.

8. Lionel Burger's appeal to reason, morality, and the universal franchise is altogether very reminiscent of the Congress Alliance's position in the 1950s. Stephen Clingman points out that the Coalition (of which the ANC was a member) during this period espoused a rather liberal outlook, and was determined as a "moral class" itself to reform the existing system by appealing to reason, education, and bourgeois notions of morality (Clingman 1984, 58).
9. The Sharpeville Massacre marked the beginning of the end of black collaboration with white liberals. The apartheid regime's brutal attacks on the blacks and intimidation of their white sympathizers since Sharpeville increasingly separated the two groups and gave rise to the Black Consciousness Movement in the mid-1960s.
10. Bram Fischer stood trial in 1964, and then again in November, 1965 when he was accused of conspiracy to commit sabotage as well as being a member of the Communist Party. According to Stephen Clingman, Lionel's speech is actually taken from the one Fischer actually delivered in his trial (Clingman 1998, 186 ff.). The speech, in other words, was given shortly before the Black Consciousness Movement emerged in South Africa in the mid-1960s.
11. The novel struggles for voice, its contribution towards democracy, and Hirschkop links this, several times, with the work of Habermas on the public sphere.
12. In addition to Louise Yelin and Nita Schechet, Mari-Ann Berg and M. W. Smith also hold a similar position.
13. Three of Gordimer's novels were banned: *A World of Strangers*, *The Late Bourgeois World*, and *Burger's Daughter*. For Gordimer's comments on South African censorship, see her *What Happened to Burger's Daughter, or How South African Censorship Works*.
14. See also Ross 42 for attacks on Gordimer from both the right and the left.

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A Wetness in Dry Places: Sex and Taboo in Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

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Abstract:

Contemporary critique of trope of sexual liberation in African literature is mostly replete with analysis of prostitution narratives, giving rise to an assumption and monolithic view of what sexual freedom or self-determination could mean. Such narratives, however, often do not yield arguments related to the critical capital of the salacious, since prostitution primarily involves transactional sex and not necessarily an inordinate sexual affair. This study privileges a generic divergence whereby analysis is hinged on the literary appreciation of salaciousness. Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms* departs from prostitution plot to a pornographic depiction of sexual obscenity: the venereal affair between Binta Zubairu, a 55 year old widow and grandmother, and Hassan Reza, a 25 year old street gang leader. The study investigates the existential tragedy of sexual freedom by examining the extent to which sexual relationship that is considered a taboo in a given social milieu is a recipe for self-realisation. Using a feminist view of existentialism, I demonstrate how the individual will to rise above the conventional, by escaping from being a sexually deprived human to becoming one who responds to the body's need for unbridled sexual pleasure, constitutes George Lukács and Arthur Miller's ideas of modern tragedy.

Keywords: salaciousness, tragedy, existentialism, sexuality, taboo, feminism

Studies in the driving force of patriarchy against the struggle for sexual freedom of the female body in African literature often re-imagine sex as a trope that ascribes existential agency to women. When this agency is denied, the subject's dehumanisation manifests in forms of mental, emotional and physical debilitation (Kammampoal 2018, 1). The undermining of the subject's agency leads to her confinement to "the periphery and beyond the view of society and its culturally sanctified 'norms'" (Jonet 2007, 199) where she is expected to quietly exist. Maria Frias (2002, 8) suggests that the aim of such confinement is to disallow women from exercising their agency, to rid them of any opportunity to be on top/take control (literally/literary), to cast them as sexual objects who are not able to set their sexual pace, rhythm, intensity, and variety. Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* engages the power dynamics of this gender relation in a provocative narrative that metaphorically represents and resists the embodied objectification of the black female body as an element of female sexual experience. In Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, the female body is further sexually objectified as one that must conform to society's moral code. The predominantly

Muslim northern Nigeria with its strict religious and moral codes – figuratively rendered as "dry places" for the purpose of this study – serves as the socio-cultural background to the layers of sexual taboo. And, against this background, the full realisation and experience of one's sexual and sensual freedom is articulated as "wetness," serving as a homophone for stimulation of desire (to whet) and as well as a counter-metaphor (wetness) to the stifling "dryness" of the society of the text.

Critical reception on sex and amorous exchanges in contemporary African fiction is yet to significantly enquire into the salacious aspects of sexuality. Previous scholarships on the subject of sex and sexuality are mostly centred on their commercial facets, such as image of the prostitute and the human rights violations associated with sex trafficking (see Homaifar 2008; Nwahunanya 2011; Stratton 1998; Reinares 2014). Contemporary critiques on sex in the Nigerian novel also explore the articulations of romance and the issue of sexual liberation. Onyebuchi James Ile and Susan Dauda have looked at the effect of harmful traditional practices on women and girls in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* (Ile and Dauda 2016, 11), pointing out that such practices limit women's self-actualization, and that revolting against such practices is inevitable, albeit with grave consequences (14). The present study breaks from the conventional discourse around sex and sexuality in contemporary African literature by undertaking to generate a reading which focuses on the liberating power of a salacious affair. To this end, I view the disruption of those "harmful traditional practices" as taboo, and classify the inevitable revolt against such taboo and its attendant tragic end as proceeds from the literary tradition of modern tragedy. To achieve this form of reading, I use the feminist model of existentialism as a derivative method of analysis. The aim, therefore, is to consider both the role of making free choices on fundamental values and beliefs to be essential in the attempt to change the nature and identity of the chooser, and the overall perception of individual freedom and its opposing societal prescriptive morality.

1. Literature, Sex and Taboo

Henry James' assertion that "it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature" (Sampson 1970, 778) buttresses the fact that literature connects its consumers with the community of man, with his struggles and triumphs, setbacks and advancements, hope and despair, approvals and taboos. *Season of Crimson Blossoms* demonstrates how a sexual relationship that is rendered a taboo in a given place is critically re-examined in relation to its tendency to inhibit self-expression and self-actualisation in women, and how such hindrance from sexual freedom lends structure to the development of conflict and its tragic resolution.

Derived from the Tongan "tabu," which is linked to "tapu," a Polynesian word, and "kapu," a Hawaiian term, taboo literally means "marked off," or "off-limits" (Holden 2000, IX). Contrary to the commonly held notion by some anthropologists that taboo is a feature of primitive societies, it is "a phenomenon that is universal" (Durkheim 1963, 70). For Radcliffe-Brown, as quoted in Franz Steiner, taboos are connected with ritual avoidance and prohibition:

> Ritual prohibition...a rule of behaviour which is associated with a belief that an infraction will result in an undesirable change of ritual status is conceived in many different ways in different societies, but everywhere there is the idea that it involves the likelihood of some minor or major misfortune which will befall the person concerned. So far as ritual avoidances are concerned the reasons for them may vary from a very vague idea that some sort of misfortune or ill luck, not defined as to its kind, is likely to befall anyone who fails to observe the taboo, to a belief that non-observance will produce some quite specific and undesirable result. (Steiner 1956, 119)

Radcliffe-Brown's overall submission, therefore, is that within the matrix of taboos is contained a certain level of danger that will befall those who contravene them, which is why they are "restrictive behaviour(s)" (Steiner 1956, 21).

Steiner (1956, 22) sees taboo as a means to an end, with such an end being the maintenance of harmony between God and spirits (the invisible world) and human beings and the rest of creation (the visible world). Breaking of a taboo endangers life and is as well seen as dreadful since it interrupts this harmony by putting everyone involved in danger. Since it is an improper action defined by the society one is a member of, the punishment for offenders could also be administered by the community. The sexual relationship between Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza in *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, for instance, is considered by the northern Nigerian community of the novel as licentious, and hence a taboo.

Sex has an underlying tendency to be a universal, physical and emotional act capable of activating a common feeling among individuals who engage in it. Yet it is an unspoken taboo in societies where religious beliefs continue to influence and dictate sexual thoughts, perceptions and acts. In other words, because religion has been allowed to shape the cultural perception of sexuality in such societies, sexual orientations that are not sanctioned by such religion are outlawed.

2. Radical Sexual Expression as a Feminist Model of Existentialism

There are two broad derivates to the concept of radical sexual expression in feminist existential thought. While the early radical feminists agreed that "women's oppression derived from the very construction of gender and sought its elimination as a meaningful social category," today's radical feminists, on the other hand, claim that their oppression proceeds from "the repression of female values" and hence treat gender differences as if they mirror "deep truths about the intractability of maleness and femaleness" (Echols 1984, 50). Therefore, whereas early radical feminists maintained that the identification of women with nature is a patriarchal construct, "many eco-feminists and pacifist feminists claim not only that women are closer to nature, but that [their] 'bond with the natural order' makes [them] uniquely qualified to save the planet from nuclear holocaust and ecological ruination" (51). Alice Echols identifies the latter strand of feminism as cultural feminism, "because it equates women's liberation with the nurturance of a female counter culture which it is hoped will supersede the dominant culture" (51).

In contrast to radical feminists' view that female biology is a liability and thus in some cases mirrored the culture's devaluation of the female body, Jane Alpert, in her 1973 article, "Mother-

Right," and Adrienne Rich, in her book, *Of Woman Born*, react to this earlier position by arguing that female biology is a powerful resource. Rich particularly argues:

> I have come to believe, as will be clear throughout this book, that female biology . . . has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny. In order to live a truly human life we require not only control of our bodies . . . we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence. (1976, 39)

But not all cultural feminists are keen enthusiasts of biologically-based account of gender. Therefore, while Rich fails to acknowledge that her position, and that of other cultural feminists', might reproduce dominant cultural assumptions about women being intrinsically passive and submissive, Gearhart accepts that it indeed does:

> But if by believing that women are by nature less violent we reinforce the sex roles that have held women down for so long, then perhaps it is time to dare to admit that some of the sex-role mythology is in fact true and to insist that the qualities attributed to women (specifically empathy, nurturance and cooperativeness) be affirmed as human qualities capable of cultivation by men even if denied them by nature. (1982, 271)

In the same vein, Echols (1984, 54) admits that critics such as both Florence Rush and Andrea Dworkin have equally criticised biological determinism. However, cultural feminists have shown more interest in a kind of struggle against male supremacy that begins with women exorcising the male within them and maximising their femaleness. Hence, "while radical feminists were generally careful to distinguish between individual and political solutions, cultural feminists typically believe that individual solutions are political solutions" (53).

Generally, the emphasis that women's more extensive experience with nurturance inclines them towards peace and ecology is widespread among cultural feminists. But as we shall see in the character of Binta Zubairu, and from her relationship with Hassan Reza in *Season of Crimson Blossoms,* pandemonium, not her intended nurturing of peace and warmth, is the outcome of Binta's individual, radical sexual expression. Her adventures end tragically – for the men whose contact with her should yield peace – because she is caught up in a conflict between fully espousing the ideas of sexual liberation and pandering to societal standards of sexual repression. Following this line of thought, one can see that the nuances of sexual relationships and their prohibitions and checks by society, using extant traditional practices, are therefore problematic, particularly when examined from the viewpoint of existentialism, an approach which emphasises the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will.

3. Literature and Existentialism

In literary criticism, the understanding that humans fashion out their own meaning in life by making rational decisions in an otherwise irrational world is central to the subject of existentialism. The crux of its philosophy is the embrace of existence in the absence of satisfactory explanation of its purpose. Embracing existence, in this articulation, relates to the recognition and exercise of personal free will, which invariably comes with individual responsibilities. In literary thought, such responsibilities are essential in rising above the fundamentally absurd human condition of suffering, deprivation and inescapable death.

Existentialism follows Søren Kierkegaard's (2008, 15) rejection of Christian religion's and science's reduction of human experience to dogma and objectivity. In Kierkegaard, anxieties inherent in human existence could only be subjectively discovered and resolved by individual action. Friedrich Nietzsche's privileging of reason and rationality over faith stretches the argument started by Kierkegaard. With an approach that emphasises an understanding of life from a personal perspective (Buchanan 2011, 285), Nietzsche replaces the idea of a fixated truth (God) with one of science and rationality, where both are drawn from the instance of personal experience. By relegating the subject/object duality, Edmund Husserl proposes an intuitive knowledge system in which primordial prejudices are to be eschewed for a renewed understanding of the world through – not a bracketed analysis but – a direct engagement and description of every phenomenon (Moran 2000, 42). This phenomenological reduction, following Martin Heidegger, is best exemplified in poetry (literature), since the latter is capable of yielding greater, deeper insights into worldliness than scientific knowledge could. Therefore, in literary analysis, we follow Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of an individual's insertion of self into the social and political world of the text (2007, 54).

The existentialist thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir, an important existentialist who spent much of her life alongside Sartre, is of significance in this study considering its profound connection with the feminist contentions and questions in the novel, *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. De Beauvoir writes about feminist and existential ethics in her works, including *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* which serve as forerunners for Second-Wave Feminism. This wave of feminism refers to a period of feminist activity from the mid 1960s through the late 1970s, an era in which cultural and political inequalities are seen as inextricably linked, and one in which women are encouraged to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicised – the personal is political (De Beauvoir 2011, 136) – as well as reflective of a sexist, dualist structure of power and stereotyping. This, therefore, calls for an existential analysis that shuns and questions the limitations of subject/object dualism and scientific objectivity (generalisation) or religious fixations and norms.

Simone de Beauvoir devoted her work to the re-evaluation of the existentialist concept of freedom and free will. As an existentialist, she asserts the precept that existence precedes essence and that therefore one is not born a woman, but becomes one (2011, 330). Her feminist existentialism hence prescribes a moral revolution. She questions philosophy's lack of understanding of the historical and specific nature of women's oppression, and also questions how, if everyone

possessed the freedom to make decisions and the capacity to take existential "leaps into the unknown" as existentialism suggested, the endless oppression of women could be explained. Did men choose to oppress women, or was the freedom to choose actually illusory (especially for women themselves)? Beauvoir argues that women have historically been considered as the "Other," as a deviation from the normal, as outsiders attempting to emulate male "normality," and that this attitude necessarily limits women's success.

4. An Existential Attitude towards Sex

In *Season of Crimson Blossoms,* the existential attitude of the two main characters, Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza, towards their sexual affair is variously portrayed in the ways they react to the socio-cultural and traditional prescriptions and expectations typical of the predominant Muslim northern Nigeria.

Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche "shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject – not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual" (MacQuarrie 1972, 18). While the predominant value of existentialist thought is commonly acknowledged to be freedom, its primary virtue is authenticity (Flynn 1986, 39, 53). In the view of the existentialist, the individual's starting point is characterised by what has been called the existential attitude or "a sense of disorientation, confusion, or dread in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world" (Solomon 1974, 1). For Kierkegaard, each individual – not society or religion – is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely, or "authentically" (Watts 2003, 4-6; Lowrie 1969, 37-40). In this study, authenticity is one aspect of existentialism that is employed in the analysis of the internal thought processes related to the sexual relationship between Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza, and its significance on the self-realization and sexual expression of the former.

Authentic existence involves the idea that one has to "create oneself" and then live in accordance with this self. What is meant by authenticity is that in acting, one should act as oneself, not as "one's acts" or as "one's genes" or any other essence requires, for the authentic act is one that is in accordance with one's freedom. In contrast to this, the inauthentic is the denial to live in accordance with one's freedom. This can take many forms, from pretending choices are meaningless or random, through convincing oneself that some form of determinism is true, to a sort of "mimicry" where one acts as "one should."

How "one should" act is often determined by an image one has of how one acts, as a hustler, a sales rep, a receptionist, and so on. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre relates an example of a "waiter" in *bad faith*: he merely takes part in the "act" of being a typical waiter, albeit very convincingly and thus he is "taking himself to have a fixed nature that determines his actions" (Webber 2010, 1). This image usually corresponds to some sort of social norm, but this does not mean that all acting in accordance with social norms is inauthentic. The main point is the attitude one takes to one's own freedom and responsibility, and the extent to which one acts in accordance with this freedom. The

sexual attraction between Binta Zubairu, a 55 year old widow and grandmother, and Hassan Reza, a 25 year old street gang leader is considered salacious by other characters in the novel, and thus a taboo for a reason that borders on its contextual inappropriateness and its extant disregard for accepted societal conventions in matters of sexual propriety.

The contextual inappropriateness of their sexual affair is so-called given its oedipal nature. Hassan Reza reminds Binta Zubairu of her late son Yaro, with whom she missed opportunity to form an enduring filial bond due to the restrictions which the traditional practices of her society has placed on the expression of such affection between mothers and their first children. (Binta Zubairu, being a first child, also failed to establish such relationship with her own mother.) Therefore, after Binta Zubairu's first awkward contact with Hassan Reza, Hadiza is surprised that her mother, Binta Zubairu, suddenly started talking about her late brother:

> It was the first time since his death, fifteen years ago, that she had heard her mother make reference to him. It had seemed to her, when she thought about him, that they had buried not only his corpse but also his name that was not a name. And memories of him as well. (2015, 17)

It is a "name that was not a name" (17) because Binta Zubairu never called Yaro by his name. This reverence to the "Kunya" tradition of not calling the first child by their name nor showing them filial affection (Yusuf 2005, 11) serves as a pointer to the cultural deprivation of expressing motherly love towards her first son. Yet "memories of him" (17) linger, but this time brought back by her encounter with a young man to whom she is sexually attracted, an encounter which comes with the "moistening of her long-abandoned womanhood. . .provoked by someone who reminded her of Yaro" (28) her late son. Nevertheless, Binta Zubairu reminds Hassan Reza, in return, of his mother: "I robbed this woman who reminded me of my mother. She had this golden tooth, you know, just like my mother..." (38). Also Hassan Reza's real name, Hassan Babale, is said to have "sounded like an echo from his memory" (46) of his short-lived or rather un-nurtured relationship with his mother.

However inappropriate this sexual encounter is, it is a mark of freedom for Binta Zubairu, a relationship that has impacted "the petals of her life, (which), like a bud that had endured half a century of nights, began to unfurl" (46). This newly found wetness, this budding sexual freedom, is found in her subsequent sexual escapades with Hassan Reza, which breaks down the "reinforced fence that imprisoned her scented dreams" (139). This freedom is a contrast to the "dry" sexual suppression she has endured in the hands of her late husband, "the stranger she had spent most her life with" (26). The times with her late husband are described with visual images of uncertainty and suppression thus:

> Memories of his touch were shrouded in a decade of cobwebs. What she recalled, albeit vaguely, was the sensation of his hands pressing down on her shoulders, his lower lip clamped down by his teeth to suppress his grunts as his body hunched over hers. (26)

Zubairu, her late husband, "was a practical man and fancied their intimacy as an exercise in

conjugal frugality. It was something to be dispensed with promptly, without silly ceremonies" (50-51). But Binta "wanted it to be different. She had always wanted it to be different" (51). Yet she is sexually enslaved by the snares of societal instrument of sexual repression such as ethical expectations that are rooted in moral prescriptions. Following such emotional and ethical entrapment, her tendency to own, exercise and enjoy her sexual life is branded a taboo. Just as her late husband would not condone her attempt to express her sexual desire, (for instance, by stopping her from caressing his hardness when she, "instead of rolling on her back and throwing her legs apart...rolled into him and reached for his groin" [51]), Dijen Tsamiya, the marriage counsellor of Kibiya town, also instructs her against exploring her sexuality:

> "See how you look into my eyeballs. Don't look your husband in the eyes like that, especially when you are doing it. Don't look at him down there. And don't let him look at you there, either..." (49)

Her love-making with Hassan Reza negates and breaks this convention and frees her from the shackles of sexual subjugation, as, "With his tongue, he unlocked something deep within her" (56). While her late husband's hand evokes an image of suppression, Hassan Reza's tongue does the opposite in inducing a palpable image of sexual liberation.

But to what extent does Binta Zubairu, bound by the fringes of patriarchy and tradition, religious order and cultural norms, act in accordance with her freedom, with the concept of choice and authenticity residing at the heart of existentialism? Being a member of a society that brands her carnal extrication a taboo, she often becomes self-judgemental, seeing as "her search for Yaro in the eyes of a stranger had unshackled her long-suppressed desires and left her objectionable stench of fornication clinging to her" (54-55). She nurtures feelings of guilt after each sexual encounter with Hassan Reza. In many occasions, after having sex with Hassan Reza, she heads "to the bathroom to wash away her indiscretions" (60), "the objectionable smell of fornication she was certain she exuded" (53). She is not aware, however, that Hassan Reza also wonders "why he was sexually attracted to a woman who was older than his mother" (59). She enjoys love-making with Hassan, but feels it is not right, likening herself to "some stupid flower," which her daughter says "waits a lifetime to bloom" (178):

> "I was just thinking how much like that flower I am. I have waited my whole life to feel...as I do when I'm with you, you know...No one has ever made me feel this way. But like that flower, after all those years waiting, when I bloom, it doesn't feel right. I don't know if you understand me." (179)

Just like the flower's bloom takes a lifetime, Binta Zubairu's sexual liberation comes at the eleventh hour of her life. And the timing is accompanied with doom, since sexual affair by someone of her old, grandma age of 55 (with a much younger Hassan Reza of 25 years old) is considered by society as a taboo.

Hassan Reza, on the other hand, does not understand why the affection they share must be right in accordance with outsiders' set standards of morality: "'Why must anything be right or wrong? Why can't things be just as they are?'" (178). While Binta Zubairu's existential stand is

ruffled by her awareness of society's stand on her relationship with Hassan Reza, the latter's stems more from his understanding of circumstances that inevitably push one into a particular path in life:

> "We are like clothes...We get rumpled, and creased and torn, sometimes irreparably. Some of us are stitched up, patched up, others are discarded. Some clothes are fortunate. Others are not. They are born into misfortune and ink spills and whatnots..." (180)

The feeling of guilt by Binta Zubairu shows that she is aware of the salacious nature of her relationship with Hassan Reza, and its possible consequences in a hypocritical society such as the one they live in. For it is a society where a "perpetual divorcée Ladidi" (256) condemns the sexual, existential preferences of Binta Zubairu and is viewed objectively as more acceptable than Binta Zubairu as long as she, unlike Binta Zubairu, repeatedly engages with older men; a society in which Munkaila, Binta Zubairu's son, would rather endorse Mallam Haruna, a man with "reputation as a vibrant proponent of plural marriage" (190), to marry her widowed mother, than pause to find out why her mother ever prefers a relationship with a younger Hassan Reza; a society where a corrupt and deceitful politician, senator Maikudi, makes fun of Hassan Reza's sexual proclivity and refers to him as "dan iska," an abusive Hausa term which means useless person or a fool.

As noted earlier, there is a certain level of danger that befalls those who break taboos. But the logical arrival at such misfortune in *The Season of Crimson Blossoms* is what sets it apart as modern tragic novel, different from classical form of tragic expression or account whereby punishment against norm breakers are divinely ordered. It could be argued that the shame Binta Zubairu faces in the hands of her fellow women and her ultimate punishment, the loss of her son Munkaila, who is inadvertently killed by her lover, Hassan Reza, in the latter's attempt to wrestle himself away from Munkaila's ferocious attack, is a divinely orchestrated punishment for her unbridled lasciviousness. However, such argument panders to classical tragedy. The idea of human struggle is central to both traditional and modern tragedy. But, while the former deals with the struggles of great personalities who face ruinous challenges, the latter chronicles "society, the men rooted in it, and the relationships against which they are incapable of successful struggle" (Lukács 1965, 155); while divine fate is behind the hero's tragic flaws in traditional tragedy, man, not fate, is the center of his own tragic downfall in modern tragedy. In combating the scheme of things that degrade her, Binta Zubairu sets herself against "the seemingly stable cosmos," the "'unchangeable' environment" (Miller 1978, 3), and from this comes her tragedy.

Hassan Reza's tragedy also proceeds from a similar logical, tragic necessity. Senator Maikudi could afford to spare Hassan Reza's life and still put him to good use, but he instead regards him as a disposable liability and, most importantly, a useless goon ultimately due to Hassan Reza's sexual lifestyle than because of his failure to complete the task of assassinating the senator's political opponent. Senator Maikudi, in his moralist sentiments despite being a corrupt politician, is thus an embodiment of the hostile, rigid "environment" against which Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza struggle.

5. The Repression of Female Sexuality

An underlying problem that proceeds from the suppression of female sexuality using the repressive parameters of traditional practices is the prevention of the victim's expression of their full humanity. And from the foregoing, it is inferable that the disruption of the status quo by any woman in a society that perpetuates such prejudice is seen in terms of breaking a taboo: religious and cultural. The Eve story and that of other female religious and historical archetypes project women as weak and prone to sin; thus a woman's sexuality is referenced in the context of seduction with malicious intentions and therefore outright condemned.

But sexuality and sexual expression are not just a matter of sexual intercourse. They constitute a psychological affair that does not just distinguish our uniqueness from others but most importantly acquaints our minds with the anatomy of its power and the capabilities of our humanity. The salacious affair between Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza is therefore a manifestation of the enigmatic "bond between mothers and their children" (2015, 246), such bond which cultural feminists agree emanates from a woman's "bond with the natural order" (51), which designates Binta Zubairu as uniquely qualified to save Hassan Reza from ruination, but a bond which normative social standards brand a taboo and, thus, deny both characters:

> ...when she looked into his eyes and saw the vortex of emotions, she thought of her son Yaro, to whom she never gave the chance to tell her how confused he must have felt...How could the world not understand what he was going through, how he needed her, how she needed to save him as she had failed to do with her own son? How could they judge her? (273)

Just as it is with Hassan Reza's life struggles, Binta Zubairu is also a victim of gender inequality and subjugation of women. As her son Munkaila remarks, Binta Zubairu has "always enjoyed teaching" (30); but early marriage deprives her a lot of such privileges to attain that image of a fulfilled self. Hence she urges Hassan Reza to return to school and recreate himself, a step she considers their redemption, that is, "making him a better person" (265).

6. Conclusion

The metaphor of "a wetness in dry places," from the above study, reveals the literary existentialist feature of the novel on two poles of association. One, it is "at the twilight of her sexual life" that Binta Zubairu's "desires had finally been unleashed" (265). And yet "the lifetime of deprivation she had endured" (265) is only momentarily rescued by a salacious affair, considered as licentious and thus as perpetrating a taboo. And so she finds in the end that, even with that symbolic blossoming of her sexual life, she is "fighting against loss all the while" (289), and that "There is nothing quite like fighting against loss and, despite one's best efforts, losing all the same" (260). But perhaps what is important even in this loss is the healing that comes with expressing her sexual desire, for humans heal by releasing, not by suppressing.

This understanding is what particularly emphasizes the work's literariness, vis-à-vis its

propagation of tragic existentialist thought. For existentialism takes into consideration the underlying concepts of human free will, maintaining that human nature is chosen through life choices, without there being social values and structures to control the individual; it is not a ground on which to dictate "what is" as enough in life, and yet it does not presuppose that the attainment of wealth, pleasure or honour can make one live a good, peaceful life. Instead, its creed obtains in seeing a person as best when struggling against their individual nature, and thus fighting for life. Hence decisions are not without stress and consequences, and the individual will have to confront at some point forces that are not necessarily rational, such as the unnatural and arbitrary traditional religious and written/unwritten rules of society. And yet this understanding of tragedy does not assume that people are basically good but ruined by society or external forces. In an individual's struggle, personal responsibility and discipline are vital to their survival, for if worldly desire is ultimately futile, and the individual pursues happiness and freedom, then such pursuit envelops them in a web of culpability.

Therefore, the salacious affair between Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* is a leeway to a full expression of their humanity through the discovery of their past losses and their attempts, in the present, to fill the emotional void which those losses have created in them. This is the sense conveyed in Binta Zubairu's assurance to Hassan Reza when she says to him, "'I want you to understand why I have not given up on humanity, and why I won't give up on you'" (229). To them, the status quo, the "what is," is not enough. However, their pleasurable freedom has a catastrophic end; because the "wetness" (sexual freedom; and desire for sexual pleasure) exists in dry places (a society with sexual repression as part of its social norms). Their decision to break a taboo, therefore, comes with its corresponding tragic consequences. But then, it is the traditional and distinctive mark of the modern tragic hero to struggle for this freedom. As Arthur Miller puts it:

> But there are among us today, as there always have been, those who act against the scheme of things that degrades them, and in the process of action everything we have accepted out of fear of insensitivity or ignorance is shaken before us and examined, and from this total onslaught by an individual against the seemingly stable cosmos surrounding us – from this total examination of the "unchangeable" environment – comes the terror and the fear that is classically associated with tragedy. More important, from this total questioning of what has previously been unquestioned, we learn. And such a process is not beyond the common man. In revolutions around the world, these past thirty years, he has demonstrated again and again this inner dynamic of all tragedy. (1978, 3-4)

Tragedy, for Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza, therefore obtains in the emergence of a slippery ground (when the blossoming of their "wetness" clashes with the "dry" mud of societal values). They barely had a chance to savour the experience. Their flawed human nature manifests in the way they are incapable of escaping the tragic futility of worldly pleasure. It is a tragic futility considering the abominable status of their indulgence as taboo, and since in an attempt to fulfil this sexual

gratification, they act against their surrounding cosmos/environment. They learn, ultimately, but on a slippery ground which facilitates their fall.

Finally, following existential thought, Binta Zubairu and Hassan Reza do not necessarily have to be good persons, basically, who are ruined by society. What is instructive to note is how they struggle to get more out of what life has offered them, and how, given their human nature, they fail to uphold the personal responsibility required of them in their journey to freedom and pursuit of happiness. This failure therefore exposes their guilt, and, at the same time, the futility of their worldly quest. This way, the literariness of the text is unfolded as an estranged language, one in which the subject of sex and taboo resists a definitive, traditional interpretation, but instead yields other possibilities, such as the one we have explored above: the metaphor of "a wetness in dry places."

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"What On Earth Did They Think They Were Doing?" — Slavery and the White Mistresses in Valerie Martin's *Property*

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Abstract:

Taking as its main corpus Valerie Martin's neo-slave narrative, *Property*, this paper portrays a violent relationship based on racial domination between a white mistress, Manon Gaudet, and her black slave woman, Sarah. This work highlights the subversive aspect of *Property* in unsettling the conventional historical accounts which neglected white women's active involvement in the institution of slavery in the Antebellum South. Instead of looking at the American white mistresses as delicate upper-class women who are themselves victims of the white male patriarchy, this paper, instead, portrays them as violent perpetrators who engaged in subjugating and dehumanising the black subject.

Despite the overriding narrative voice of the white mistress, I argue that the novel does not stop short at portraying Sarah as a victim of slavery. It becomes a contrapuntal historical narrative which highlights the struggle of this slave woman to free herself from bondage through her transgressive modes to resist both racial and gender paradigms. In so doing, Sarah becomes a foregrounding voice who responds back to her white mistress who remains metaphorically and literally a bonded woman because she refuses to free herself from the slaveholding culture and thought.

Keywords: Resistance, domination, race, gender, freedom, slavery, property.

The writing of historical events is often a reductive and subjective reproduction, a process in which the historian resorts to some distortions and variations because "history is a verbal model of a set of events external to the minds of historians" (White 2001, 1721). In her grounding work on "historiographic metafiction," Linda Hutcheon observes that "unitary, closed, evolutionary narratives" of traditional historiography have given way to new pluralised counter-narratives which not only de-doxified the monoltithic discourses but also foregrounded the externalized abjects such as class, race, and gender (Hutcheon 1988, 66). In White Mythologies: Writing History and the West, Robert Young argues that "postmodernism is a self-conscious [discourse] about a culture's own historical relativity- which begins to explain why, as its critics complain, it also involves the loss of the sense of an absoluteness of any Western account of History" (Young 1990, 19). Relying on these subversive assumptions about history and identity, this paper focuses particularly on Valerie Martin's *Property*. I highlight the unsettling aspect of *Property* in deconstructing the conventional historical accounts which neglected white women's active involvement in the institution of slavery. In so doing, I reflect upon Manon Gaudet's racialized treatment of her black female slave as a form of master-slave relationship, which negates the humanity of the racial other. I demonstrate that,

despite the overriding narrative voice of the white mistress, the novel is an unsettling historical form, which excavates the silenced voice of the black female subject, Sarah, through her transgressive modes to resist both race and gender paradigms.

Property is narrated from the perspective of the first-person omniscient narrator, Manon Gaudet, the wife of the slave owner, who lives on southern Louisiana sugar plantation in 1828. It starts with the spyglass, an image that Michel Foucault calls, "the panoptican," an instrument of power to discipline and control the subject. Manon uses the spyglass to spy on her husband who uses it to spy on his slaves. "The Glass is on the landing, pointing out of the only window in the house that faces the quarter. He had it specially mounted for this purpose, to watch the negroes at their daily business, to see if they are congregating" (Martin 2003, 18). As an instrument of power, the spyglass is a self-reflexive image that conveys the controlling gaze of the white master. The opening scene starts with Manon who uses the spyglass to witness her husband's sexual abuse of the naked slave children:

> There were five of them. He gets them all gathered at the river's edge and they are nervous... First he reads to them from the bible...then they have to strip...One by one they must grasp the rope, swing over the water, and drop in.... He encourages them to shout and slap at one another once they are in the water. Then they have to come out and do it again, only this time they hang on the rope two at a time, which means one has to hold on to the other...Their little bodies displayed to him in various positions...The boys rub against each other..., and it isn't long before one comes out of the water with his member raised. That's what the game is for. (Martin 2003, 3-4)

The purpose of this homoerotic game is to prove that the slaves "are brute, and have not the power of reason" (Martin 2003, 4), a pretext so that "the servant's tumescence subsides as quickly as the master's rises, and the latter will last until he gets to the quarter. If he can find the boy's mother, and she's pretty, she will pay dearly for rearing an unnatural child" (4). Manon's depiction of her husband's sexual activity translates her passivity in a sense that she does not seem to react to the sexual subordination of the slaves, despite feeling disgusted by his perversion. Manon is not a bystander. She is a witness to her husband's sexual abuse of the black children, and her inaction makes her a participant in the dehumanization process of slavery. As a white Southern woman, she lacks empathy and imagination because she represents the mindset of her slave-holding society, wherein the discourse of property shapes the subject's moral order.

Manon's entrapment in the ideological context of her era is conveyed through a peculiar scene of mastery over her slave, following the death of her mother. Next to the room where her mother's body lies, Manon kneels in front of the breastfeeding Sarah, who has just finished nursing her child. She methodically begins to suck the milk from her slave:

> Sarah was sitting forward, her long hands folded in her lap, her eyes resting on the child. The drop of milk still clung to the dark flesh of her nipple...I dropped to my knees on the carpet before her and rested my hands upon her wrists. I could feel the smooth, round bones through the thin cloth of her

> sleeve. I leaned forward until my mouth was close to her breast, then put my tongue to capture the drop…I dissolved instantly, leaving only a trace of sweetness. I raised my hand cupping her breast, which was lighter than I would have thought. It seemed to slip away from my fingers, but I guided the nipple to my lips and sucked gently…How sweet… I closed my eyes, swallowing greedily…How wonderful I felt, how entirely free. My headache disappeared; my chest seemed to expand. (Martin 2003, 76)

Critics argue that this passage reflects a lesbian scene which translates Manon's love for Sarah. Joyce. C. Oates, for instance, contends that "wordless scenes between mistress and servant, tenderly and sensuously described by Manon, are surrogate for romantic, erotic expressions for both women" (Oates 2005, 134). She stresses that "Manon is unwittingly in love with her servant" (139) and that "most of her actions, even when she lashes out bitterly against Sarah, are guided by this thwarted passion" (139). Lesbianism, in fact, is a resistance to the male-dominated world that plagues and confines women's life. To use Amy King's words, "it allows women to assert their independence from the patriarchal social structure and take part in female community" (King 2010, 211). However, Manon's "erotic" scene with Sarah does not highlight lesbianism as a form of liberation from patriarchy. "The theory that triumphant female desire will overshadow the harms of male dominated society does not reflect the realities of societies that privilege ownership of people, as in the antebellum South" (King 2010, 211). Rather, the scene illustrates Manon's dehumanizing control of Sarah. In an "uncanny" way, it echoes the prototypical white male master's rape of the slave woman. Sexual abuse was a culturally accepted practice and an institutionalized right and rite of the white male dominating group in the Antebellum South. Rape was legitimized because black women were considered to be innately lustful beings and were valued for "irresponsible, covert sexual adventurism" (McD Beckles 2018, 74).

This hyper-sexualization made them the object of the white man's fantasy and a pretext to build and reinforce white man's own masculinity while simultaneously preserving the oppressive ideals of both white female purity and black deviance (Feinstein 2018, 33). "Long hands," "the dark flesh," "her nipple," "the smooth, round bones," "her breast," and "light" skin are all terms that prefigure Manon's perception of her slave. Her depiction is voyeuristic. Her focus is on the naked body of her slave. In sexually abusing and objectifying Sarah, Manon feels empowered and free. Her headache suddenly disappeared and her "chest expanded" (Martin 2003, 76). In sucking Sarah's nipple, Manon reiterates what her husband does and feels when he rapes his female slave. She feels pleasure savouring her slave's warm milk. "This is what he does," Manon explains in referring to her husband. "How thin it was, how sweet!" (76), she says. In sexually abusing Sarah, Manon, in a fashion reminiscent of her husband, controls and exercise power on her slave. She looked at Sarah and was satisfied by the fact that she looked scared. "She's afraid to look at me" (Martin 2003, 77), Manon thought. "She is right to be. If she looked at me, I would slap her" (77), she contends.

Manon's sexual abuse coincides with the death of her mother, a crucial moment of self-empowerment because Manon now owns another property, her inheritance. For Manon, ownership provides power and freedom, which further legitimises her control over the body of her slave.

"Mother's estate is left entirely to me and is greater than I thought," she says (Martin 2003, 83). "She had set aside a small inheritance I knew nothing about, and it has grown impressively. So I am to have the house, the furnishings, sufficient income to live comfortably, and two slaves, Peek and a boy named Isaiah whom mother had hired out to a baker in town. All this is mine" (83). Yet, this feeling of empowerment and independence in owning her mother's property is impeded in a phallogocentric culture because her "husband can, and doubtless will, dispose of it as soon as [she] can get it" (83).

Manon's awareness that her property will be taken from her conveys that oppression in *Property* is not only restricted to owning the black body. It also refers to another kind of subjugation; white women's confinement in the phallogocentric discourse. From Manon's first-person perspective, the husband has the power to own the property of his wife since, by marriage, the wife is a subordinate. Not only Manon's husband has a claim over her own inheritance, he is also sexually violent and a lustful perpetrator. He has two sons from his slave and concubine, Sarah. Not only is his adultery an issue, but also it is his lack of wit and tenderness that also matters. In Manon's words, "in his home he was tyrant. He drained the color from every scene, the flavor from every bit of food, the warmth from every exchange of sentiment. He has not so much destroyed my life as he emptied it" (Martin 2003, 153). Manon's husband "could talk about sugar, he was knowledgeable about wine and spirits, he liked to shoot animals, this was the range of his interests" (152). However, "art and music meant nothing to him; he could not concentrate on a picture long enough to see it" (152). As a victim of her husband's tyranny, Manon sees herself a prisoner in "the madhouse of his cupidity, perversion and lust" (89).

As a result of her subordination, Manon assumes that she can identify with Sarah since she thinks they both share the same gender oppression by the same perpetrator. She refuses to sell her because her husband would find another. She believes that Sarah suits her for she hates him as much as she does. Through gender identification, Manon naively fails to understand that her slave's oppression is of a different order. She, therefore, further hegemonizes Sarah's oppression within her gender narrative. This myth of gender identification between white mistresses and her black female slave is accounted for in a scene when Manon sarcastically recalls the "touching" departure with Sarah to see her dying mother: Her husband bids farewell to his wife and her servant, fearing that one of them will die of Cholera. Manon knows that he wishes her own death instead of Sarah's. As a white mistress, the idea that her husband prefers his black concubine to his own wife is a frustrating thing. As a result, she wishes that he "might be killed while shooting rebellious negroes" (Martin 2003, 63). However, Sarah "wishes them both dead" (63) because they both represent the discourse of her double subordination as a black female slave.

Sarah escapes after the murder of Manon's husband, following the black insurrection. Instead of celebrating her slave's escape, Manon angrily thinks that Sarah "took advantage of the confusion and of that event she must have longed for, her husband's death" (131-132). She equates the insurrection with "confusion" and Sarah's freedom with the foolish act of taking the advantage from the death of the master to vilify her slave. "My husband is dead," [Manon] thought. "Why should she run now, when she was safe from him? It didn't make sense" (Martin 2003, 23). Sarah's flight

makes perfect sense, for the slave understands something about her mistress that Manon does not know about herself: that the white woman is as much a part of the power structure of slavery as her husband (Ryan 2008, 179). Manon is maddened by the lies and hypocrisies that underlie patriarchal power, but she fails to comprehend that she is part of this system and depends upon the privileges it bestows- that she, too, is an oppressor (Ryan 2008, 179). As Fox Genovese puts it, "The hard truth is that slave and slave-holding women occupied antagonistic positions... [Slaveholding] women lived-and knew they lived- as privileged members of a ruling class" (Genovese 1988, 179). Overwhelmingly, "they supported slavery and its constraints as the necessary price for their own privileged position... [They] accepted and supported the social system that endowed them with power and privilege over black women" (Genovese 1988, 98, 145, 243).

History on the Antebellum South has often neglected white women's involvement in sustaining the institution of slavery, because it was predominantly written by men. In her poignant book, *They Were Her Property*, Stephanie. E. Jones-Rogers destroys the sentimental approach to white women's relationships with the slaves. Enslaving was not improper to "the delicate" white women. On the contrary, they invested in slavery. "Slavery with all its abuses, constituted the fabric of their beloved country-the wrap and woof of their social position, their personal relations, their very identity" (Genovese 1988, 334). Starting from an early age, they were given slaves as gifts. Owning human property thus became part of their socialization (Jones-Rogers 2019, 45). Manon Gaudet's father was a slave owner. He wrote treaties on the efficient ways his fellow planters should take to better manage and discipline their slaves. In Manon's words, "he was obsessed by his negroes" (Martin 2003, 182). He "was full of energy it seemed impossible that he would make no more distinguished account of his life than his list of business and domestic preoccupations" (Martin 2003, 87). Manon's father never allowed his slaves to work garden patches of their own because, as she recalls him saying, "it gave them a notion of independence and divided their loyalty, so that they might take more interest in their own patch than in the farm" (Martin 2003, 22).

Manon learns from her father an essential fact that the farm is the slaves' only "provider and protector" (Martin 2003, 22) and "the only place they come from and where they will be valued and cared for until they die" (22). As she recalls, she was never allowed to play with the negro children on the farm because, according to her father, it was "a perverse practice that resulted in a coarsening of the master's children and was the source of inappropriate expectation in the negroes, who must feel themselves the equals of their playmates" (22), a situation which, he believes, "could breed naught but contempt" (22). As a child, Manon internalized her father's racial divides and learnt to live by his dictates. She, subsequently, made of her dolls her only companions and understood that the only place destined to the negroes is the farm, a metaphor for slavery. Manon's mother, on the other hand, is even more invested in the institution of slavery than her own slaveowner husband. As an expert in this enterprise, she blames him for his failure to manage his plantation and rebukes his suicide as a final instance of what she would term, his management failure. The mother is more knowledgeable about the kind of plantation that brings more profit. She criticizes Manon's husband

for investing on sugar plantation because "there's no reliable profit in it "(Martin 2003, 68). Instead, she suggests the cotton plantation because it is "more practical" (68).

In *They were her Property*, Jones- Rogers goes even further as to chronicle white women's petitioning against the coverture law, which promulgates that married women's assets and property will be their husbands,' because they want to maintain and secure the property they have already owned even before marriage (Jones-Rogers 2019, 30). Property, in fact, helped them achieve their social and economic stability and sustainability. White women were, subsequently, against the Civil War because they were given more slaves than any other kind of property and were more invested in slavery than their own white men. The idea of liberating their human property became a problematic issue because slavery at that time was their sole mode of economic autonomy and freedom. Even after Abraham Lincoln's emancipation proclamation, which ended slavery, white women were often violent to preserve this institution and perpetrated "white terrorist acts" in order to secure the free labor they had. Manon exactly illustrates this category of women. She opposes the emancipation of her slave. She considers the abolitionist movement to be a Northern conspiracy against the South (Martin 2003, 99). As an active participant in the institution of slavery, she engaged in slave-hunting Sarah in order to be sent back to the segregating South.

Manon's failure to liberate Sarah is twofold. It disrupts her naive gender identification with her black slave and further grounds her in the anti-abolitionist sentiment of the Antebellum South. This failure is vehemently illustrated in their different strategies at dismantling their oppression. Manon refers to her voluntary failure to bear her husband's children. She consumes the sleeping tincture which makes her a "dead body" and sexually indifferent to the embrace of her husband (Martin 2003, 56). By rejecting her gender performativity, Manon thinks that she can transcend her phallogocentric definition as a natural body, a conception which legitimizes men's domination over women for being, on the other hand, associated with culture. As Monique Wittig points out:

> We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the idea of nature that has been established for us. Distorted to such an extent that our deformed body is what they call 'natural,' what is supposed to exist as such before oppression. Distorted to such an extent that in the end oppression seems to be a consequence of this 'nature' within ourselves (a nature which is only an idea) ...Woman is a myth... No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and enuch, which is described as feminine... The capacity to give birth (biology) is what defines a woman. (Wittig 2003, 2015)

Whereas Manon rejects sexual domination, Sarah resorts to other racialized means of resistance. Publicly she performs the stereotypical character of "the Sambo," a "docile [body] but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing" (Elkins 1971 82). Sarah's citational performativity makes her an object of suspicion. "She is poisoning me," Manon's husband says (5). Her black and "darting look" is disturbing because in Manon's words it is "a death

mask" (Martin 2003, 55). Sarah's role of the docile body and her blank looks constitute her private protective tactic, or what James C. Scott terms, "the hidden transcript," the underside of the "public transcript" wielded by the dominant over the subordinate (Scott 1990, 2). Public transcripts, Scott suggests, plot out "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (2), that is, the rule for "hegemonic conduct" (xii). "Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that presents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant" (xii). Such critiques, Scott contends, are "expressed openly, albeit in disguised form," in "rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theatre of the powerless as vehicles for insinuation insubordination" (xiii).

Through her pretended subordination, Sarah, in fact, succeeds, although momentarily, to escape to New York. Her escape epitomizes Manon's stereotypical belief that "sometimes the dullest Negro is discovered to have a perfectly good wit when it serves his purpose" (Martin 2003, 145). As a transgressive black woman who can pass for a white, Sarah disguises into an aristocratic white gentleman, Mr. Maître, through the helpful mediation of Mr. Roget, her free black lover, and an unidentified white abolitionist couple who reside in New York. She had boarded the sailing vessel accompanied by a fake black servant named Midge who pretended Sarah's baby was her own. In passing for a white gentleman, Sarah performs what Judith Butler terms the role of the drag figure, which uncovers the illusion and fantasy of normative heterosexuality through its paraodic imitation (Butler 1990, 176). The drag imitates an imitation, the "myth of originality itself" (176), an imitation that mocks the notion of an original. As Esther Newton puts it: "At its most complex, [drag] says: 'my outside appearance is feminine, but my essence inside [the body] is masculine.' At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; 'my appearance outside [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence inside [myself] is feminine'" (Newton 1984, 103).

By passing for a white aristocratic man, Sarah not only subverts her white mistress's patriarchal perception of women, but also her dichotomized perception of race. She imperils both the essential binaries of race and gender by passing as white and as a man. Her passing narrative subverts the conventional perception of identity as a natural and biological given. In performing the role of a white gentleman, she proves that identity is a mere cultural construct and an instance of what Judith Butler terms, "a set of citational repetitions" dictated by traditional cultural norms. Through her manipulative strategies to escape bondage, Sarah becomes a figure of transgression who resists confinement within the ideologies of race by trying to reorder her world and reconstituting herself as empowered to act and to be a subject. She intervenes in the legal practices of dehumanization and reclassifies herself against the hegemonic ideology and structure of a slave culture. Despite her failure to escape, Sarah, nevertheless, develops a consciousness. She experienced freedom and the abolitionist atmosphere of the urban North. She becomes a changed person capable of responding back to her mistress, because in Manon's words, "she has traveled about the country as a free white man" and "has passed as a free woman, and that experience is generally deleterious to a Negro's character" (Martin 2003, 189).

At the end of the novel, Valerie Martin portrays a sharp contrast between the two women. Whereas Sarah comes back with an awareness of the possibility of freedom in New York, Manon remains a flat character whose future, as she puts it, was "dark" and small" (Martin 2003, 179). As a cultural construct of the Antebellum South, Manon remains obsessed with owning property. Now that her bankrupt husband died, she thinks that she can sell the plantation, pay his debts, and manage her life in sustaining her slaves. Instead of seeking to liberate herself from patriarchy, she chooses to perpetuate it, claiming for herself the patriarchal authority to which she was once subject by recapturing her escaped maid, even refusing a monetary offer from Mr. Roget that is "twice what Sarah was worth" (Martin 2003, 169). Manon had an ample opportunity to identify with her black slave's plague. When the black rebels chased her to the dark woods, she went through the black captives' experience of terror, loneliness, and helplessness when they are chased by the patrollers. In being tracked, Manon lost consciousness, but when she woke up, she was looking at a black hand (Martin 2003, 117). She moved her fingers and understood that the hand was hers (117). Reference to her black hand metaphorically symbolizes the interchangeability of the journey she experienced as a white captive.

Despite the horror of this journey, Manon has no empathy for her slave nor the will to liberate her. Instead of freeing herself from the institution of slavery and its horror, Manon herself engaged in slavecatching to hunt down Sarah who was sent back in a closed carriage. In so doing, Manon epitomizes those white women who were "economic actors, managers of slave-based household, and conduits in the process of socio-ideological transmission" (McD Beckles 2018, 68). In omitting the figure of the tyrant slaveowner husband, Valerie Martin supplies us with a female substitute slaveholder, who participates in the market economy as an autonomous agent to establish strategies based upon the ownership and possession of slaves. Manon envies Sarah for escaping unharmed, for she herself has been disfigured by the blow of one of the rebels and crippled by a gunshot wound as she flees into the nearby swamp and hides, significantly enough, coated with mud and unexpectedly accompanied by Sarah's wild child, who clings to her (Donaldson 2008, 276). What Manon cannot finally forgive Sarah for is the freedom her runaway slave has experienced, which is in sharp contrast to anything Manon herself felt. Nor can she forgive Sarah for that last revelation with which *Property* ends, where Sarah suddenly unveils what James Scott would call that hidden transcript, "the repository of refusal, rebellion, and indignation," (215) which Scott notes, "often takes the form of a public breaking of an established ritual of public subordination" (Scott 1990, 215).

What Sarah does is tell Manon what appeals to her about her time in the North: "They invites you to the dining room, and they asks you to sit at the table. Then they offer you a cup of tea, and they asks, "Does you want cream and sugar'"? (Martin 2003, 192). Manon is, in turn, dumfounded by the longest speech Sarah has ever made to her, because it is a speech that underscores Sarah's new openly voiced expectations to be treated not as a subordinate but as a subject in her own right, one who is acknowledged and whose sense of self is recognized and confirmed by those around her (Donaldson 2008, 280). In response, Manon regards Sarah's words in disbelief and judges that her uncle was right because "Sarah had changed; she had gone mad" (Martin 2003, 192). Her

statement implies that, as a product of the Antebellum South, Manon cannot imagine a society which sees a black slave worthy to sit at a table with white folk and drink tea. "What on earth did they think they were doing?" (Martin 2003, 193), Manon rhetorically contests in referring to the white abolitionist couple involved in Sarah's escape.

Valerie Martin's *Property* remains one of the most poignant neo-slave narratives written by a white woman author. In reflecting upon the master-slave relationship between a white mistress and her slave, Martin sheds light on the reductive historical accounts which omitted the involvement of the white women in consolidating the institution of slavery and implies that, in the end, owning human property does not only thwart the freedom of those who are enslaved, but also of those who enslave. Manon had the possibility to sever all ties with the confining past by reinventing herself anew and outside the racial and sexist paradigms of the slaveholding society. However, her inability to step outside the comfort zones of the Antebellum South makes her literally and symbolically a crippled character who can not transcend the conventional dictates of her era. It strikes me the ways Valerie Martin humanizes those who are dehumanized: She gives voice and agency to Sarah through transgressive actions and speeches, which not only unsettle the discourse of the slaveholding society, but also the very homogenizing voice of Manon, the first-person narrator who has long silenced her.

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The Freedom of Womanhood: Oriana's Eroticism in *Amadis of Gaul*

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Abstract:

Amadis of Gaul is a medieval romance written in the early 14th century and edited by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo for its publication two centuries later. Montalvo, apart from emending the first three books, was the author of the fourth one. This neo-Arthurian[1] work, as Tierney described it (1999, 1221) very much like many other works of its genre, fed itself upon romantic, classical Roman and Greek stories whose central axis stood on the journey of the hero for spiritual quest[2] (Savary 1984, 108). It also became an important source of inspiration for the well-known masterpiece *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, whose countless references to the hero of Gaul officially confirmed Amadis as the quintessence of chivalry novels in the history of literature.

The focus of this analysis is going to be drawn to some extracts taken from *Amadis of Gaul*, more specifically, the desperate letter that princess Oriana writes to Amadis, along with special mention to some other extracts in which certain aspects of their relationship will be dissected in this essay. The main purpose of this research is to reveal the underlying meaning to the traditionally conceived role of women in this type of literary genre.

Keywords: chivalry, gender, male, female, power, transfer, erotic.

The aim of this project involves primarily the character of Oriana, the remarkable princess whose heart Amadis strives to keep throughout his journey. Amadis has been conceived in a secret relationship between Perión, king of Gaul, and Elisena, daughter of Garínter, king of Great Britain. He marries Oriana, with whom he has three children. After battling monsters and other enemies, he manages to help queen Briolanja to regain her throne. Because of this, Oriana's jealousy of Briolanja makes her prohibit Amadis to come to see her and Amadis flees to Peña Pobre, where he names himself Beltenebros and lives like a hermit until he is forbidden by Oriana. They marry and Amadis retreats from chivalry to devote to governmental issues. Once king Lisuarte abdicates, Amadis takes over the reign of Great Britain and defends Constantinople.

According to Bullough (qtd in Mandel 1999, 66-68), traditionally, women in medieval romances were conceived of as being subjugated to a male figure or conditioned by a patriarchal structure, where they were deprived of a voice and overshadowed by the ever-present male power:

> what we usually see in the medieval romance is a male-gendered view of a woman's contribution to a

> medieval male world of adventure and action. [...] The noble man was chiefly absorbed in war and the chase, [...] women had no particular place, and often [a man] was not particularly interested in them as individuals.

In spite of this, however, Oriana herself has a major influence on Amadis' actions to the extent of overturning, in the absence of this influence, his expectations of success in his epic deeds:

> Then was he overcome with such pleasure, that he had no power to answer, and Oriana, who now saw the whole power that she had over him, went to the queen and learnt the cause of her sadness, and, returning to the Child of the Sea, told him, that it was for the queen her sister, who now was so distressed. He answered. "If it pleased you that I were a knight, with your leave I would go and aid the queen her sister." "With my leave! and what without it? would you not then go?" "No", said he; "for without the favour of her whose it is, my heart could not sustain itself in danger." (Book 1, 1: 31)

The authority executed by Oriana is also portrayed in the ceremony of identity assignment to the hero when, for instance, he receives a letter from Oriana in which she reveals his origins[3] (Book 1, 15: 113). Actually, "the key to the hero's name is in Oriana's hands, and it is for her that his name has been revealed" (Russinovich de Solé 1974, 139) *(my translation).* This is evidenced when, after having been deprived of Oriana's love, Amadis changes his name into Beltenebros, a proof that only his lady can grant him his real identity. "The transfer of power from such strong female characters to the male hero [...] contribut[es] to the resolution of the hero's quest for self-realization." (Tierney, 1221)

Along this course of action, the idea of identity can be expanded a bit further: the extent to which the perception of Oriana can be flawed, considering the arquetypically female role in the medieval romance, reaches the existence of a gender role reversal: the knight, contrary to what has always been established for this character, can indeed reveal a womanly side in his suffering from a weakness attack upon reading the distressful letter from his lady:

> his grief he could not conceal when he had read those strong and bitter words, for neither his courage nor reason could support him then, for he seemed struck with death. When Durin saw him so disordered, he cursed himself and his ill fortune, and death, that had not overtaken him on the way. Amadis, for he could not stand, sate down upon the grass, and took the letter which had fallen from his hands, and, when he saw the superscription, again his grief became so violent that Durin would have called his brethren, but feared to do so, observing what secresy Amadis had chosen. Presently Amadis exclaimed, 'Lord, wherefore does it please thee that I should perish, not having deserved it!' and then again, 'Ah, truth, an ill guerdon dost thou give him who never failed thee!' Then he took the letter again, saying: 'You are the cause of my unhappy end; come here that it may be sooner!' and he placed it in his bosom. (Book 2, 3: 265)

Amadis is clearly blinded by the excessive, almost zealous love he feels for Oriana, "hoping and expecting death, – all for the anger of a woman!" (Book 2, 6: 285). Having been left powerless by his maiden's painful, groundless accusations and rage of jealousy, Amadis is unable to regain his position

as an invincible figure who can be, however, easily defeated by something as feeble as love (Morros 2004, 43). It is precisely his dependence on Oriana's constant moral support and guidance[4] (Russinovich de Solé 1974, 24-26) that establishes a link between Amadis and the power bestowed by her woman, and, hence, this female power represents the ultimate force that can be found within a man's *anima*, as if breathed into his soul by her:

> In the Middle Ages, long before the physiologists demonstrate that by reason of our glandular structure there are both male and female elements in all of us, it was said that every man carries a woman within himself. It is this female element in each male that I have called the *anima*. (Jung, qtd in Russinovich de Solé 139)

Shifting the focus of analysis now to Oriana's letter to Amadis, it is noteworthy that her reliability on the weight of her words successfully aids her in achieving her goal: catching Amadis' attention: "The letter exists as a document of authority because women have control of language, [it] illustrates how a written text can have a performative force" (Fletcher 2003, 30). And it is likewise revealing that this letter becomes the perfect framework for her to unconsciously[5] (Jung 2009, 166) grasp *the other* that, according to Lacan "resembles the self, which the child discovers when it looks in the mirror and becomes aware of itself as a separate being. It [...] ground[s] the hope for an anticipated mastery; this [...] will become the basis of the ego" (Lacan, qtd in Ashcroft et al 1998, 170). In this sense, the letter is the mirror where Oriana discovers the reflection of her *other* self, identified by her difference from the man's identity. It is in her recognition that female inferiority can be abused (by the presumed infidelity on Amadis' part) that she desperately looks for self-assertion uttering a speech as a means to construct her own identity and subjectivity as opposed to a dominant male figure: "The position of the *I* within language, the subject, [...] produces [itself] by a system of differentiations between the *I* and that which is not the *I*, [...] the subject being in a continual process of development" (Lacan, qtd in Ashcroft et al 1998, 223). Thus, the process of construction and assertion of the self through language is the only reliable resource for Oriana to vindicate herself. In examining Oriana's construction of her-*self* through the use of the language she employs, it can be noted that the use of formulae such as "most disloyal and cruellest knight in the world," (Book 1, 19: 120); "I withdraw all that exceeding and misplaced love which I bore towards you" (Book 2, 1: 262) or "as the wrong is manifest, never appear before me!" (Book 2, 1: 262) could be considered as oaths in the assumption that they represent "a woman's control of language, demonstrate that women honor their pledges [...] using oaths to obtain power over men" (Fletcher 2003, 30). Comparatively similar in structure with the Greek tragedies[6] (Fletcher 35), the fulfilment of these oaths constitutes the tragedy itself, which in the case of Amadis, represents his own tragic spiritual death. This validates the powerful nature of women's language in controlling men and in challenging the old belief that women could only attain moral excellence as long as they remained voiceless, for otherwise male hegemony would be potentially threatened (Fletcher 36). Ironically, Oriana seems to be fulfilling more than just the punishment of her knight by means of this letter. It is not by chance that she begins the letter thus: "My frantic grief, accompanied by so great a reason, causes my weak hand"; "I

have no other revenge in my power" (Book 2, 1: 262). By rendering herself weak and distressed, she deliberately conceals her real purpose as a manipulative strategy to remain in a victimized position, given that she already finds revenge in cunningly turning to the mastery of her own language, and not in dismissing her feelings towards Amadis.

The dissection of Oriana's psyque additionally lends itself to a Freudian study of Oriana's narcissism: in regarding Amadis as unthankful for, presumably, rejecting her love, she manifests the extent to which she becomes the prey of her own jealousy, and, ultimately, of her egotistic love. Her strategy for conveying an apparent self-hatred only serves to emphasize the opposite: her self-loving nature demands that she prevail over everything else within the knight's scale of values. For this reason, blaming oneself for loving the other (more than oneself) translates as her frustrated expectations of becoming Amadis' love-object, and hence, as her repentance for transferring and placing her own narcissism onto the man. According to Freud (qtd in Kofman 1980, 40):

> To love the other, to overvalue the object is for the woman to love in accord with [...] a displacement of her purely feminine narcissism, just as man himself can only love another through a transference of his own narcissism. Narcissism then is indeed the ground of all love.

Furthermore, in the quote "I am deceived and deserted" (Book 2, 1: 262) there is a reinforcement of the idea that her deluded expectations of being the only object of desire for Amadis contribute to the creation of her narcissistic self. Thus, as one's own narcissism can be transposed to the beloved one -making them the object of desire-, discrediting the assumption that the medieval female character does not regard her knight as a sex-object, rather than love-object, will be the point of discussion in the next section.

Insofar as can be ascertained, this research has demonstrated how Amadis and Oriana have adopted personality traits that are not arquetypal within the canonically established. In an attempt to take this study a bit further, again, the canonical and religious expectations for a woman in the Middle Ages were far from harbouring obscene and lusty thoughts. However, what is contended contention here underscores a process of humanization of Oriana, considering her sexuality as a potential aspect that conforms her female identity. As Mandel (1999, 63) puts it:

> Scholars of medieval romance have been comfortable in our assumptions about sexual labelling [...] the assumptions that historically have been made about the sexual identity of men and women in medieval romance can be misleading [considering] the special interests that have shaped [their] form and content [...] and that they were aimed at an aristocratic audience.

The notion of sexual identity especially alludes to the sexual role assigned to virile, masculine, strong, brimming with testosterone knights[7] (Mandel 66) and to weak, pure, dainty, feminine, chaste damsels revealing thus the double standard of a medieval society that "relegated women to the sphere of the lustful because of their reputedly inherent physical and moral weaknesses" (Hahn 2008, 486).

Much as medieval society acknowledged sex as a natural act, the contradictory nature of this recognition lies in the fact that "women are forced to mask their true desires behind the cloak of social respectability or the male model that has been projected onto them" (486). Hence, women's main purpose is to preserve and extol the moral standards fostered by a noble readership. In order to discredit this assumption, ambiguity can be ascribed to some of Oriana's words; sexual innuendos can be found in medieval texts being "the nature of the situation which admits to a secondary, sexual meaning. If [this meaning] were primary, then it would be a matter of bawdy, not innuendo" (Christoph 2008, 281-2). This means that, even though we need to be very careful in ascribing a more or less sexual meaning to these utterances, considering the historical context, this should not prevent us from contemplating the eroticism both in Oriana (as a humanized female abstracted from the text) and in the text itself, considering the sexual abstinence that must be kept in a couple before marriage. Hence, the categorization of her speech as chaste is proven wrong in favour of a more virile representation of carnal desire, confirming the myth in the ascription of sexual labelling: "my continual sighs and passions" (Book 2, 2: 263); moreover, the recurrence of phrases such as "(raging) anger" often ascribed to Oriana, as well as the imagery of fire "burning [her] on all sides" (Book 1, 11: 69) and "the fire, wherein you saw your lady enveloped, is the great pain of love which she suffers for you" (Book 1, 24: 144) all depict a manifest sexual repression imposed by the rules of a patriarchal society in which the noble damsel had to be loyal only to his father, the king, and wait for marriage in order to consummate and unleash her "sighs and passions". Similarly, allusions to Oriana's death seem to suggest her (again repressed) longing for the culmination of the sexual act: "Oriana's heart died away within her, and she fell [...] she recovering her senses, exclaimed, 'ah friends, let me die and be at rest [...] yet greater shall be our lovers when in the other world we are united!'" (Book 1, 21: 129) And again, in her letter to Amadis: "and so put an end to my life" (Book 2, 2: 263); certainly, in some medieval texts, "to die" was a metaphor for "sex" or "orgasm". As Llewellyn argues: "we find that sex is inextricably linked with death in medieval and early modern literature." (qtd in Hahn 162). Furthermore, moral virtues such as sexual abstinence and fidelity do not translate as a rejection of sexuality. In fact, the bodily consummation of their love before marriage does take place (Russinovich de Solé 162) as in the case of Lancelot and Guinevere, undermining thus the concealment of sexual motivations in this literary genre:

> The hero and heroine figures [...] represent the spiritualizing force of love, which in this case is not engendered by the erotic negation but by the physical and spiritual consummation – they assert the possibility of earthly bliss, and, with this, the beauty of the world. (167) *(my translation)*

The conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis of the medieval female character is that, contrary to all assumptions, it is possible to underpin female self-governance based on woman's acknowledgement of the magnitude of her own authority over men. In so doing, Oriana's manipulative techniques contribute to the destruction of the clichéd notion of selfless love and, simultaneously, to the exaltation of her ego. Running parallel to Ophelia, who chooses death as an act of freedom and so put an end to female anxiety in a male-ruled world, Oriana's own subversion comes through in her recognition

that her freedom cannot be granted by a man since he is the only source of all her distress and misery.

In extrapolating Oriana's and Ophelia's personal circumstances for a general, conclusive study, it is worth noting that women in medieval and Renaissance times were seen as political and social constructs, whose personalities were conferred by a tyrannical hierarchy which prevailed an ongoing family lineage and high social ranks, and that being so, the subversive nature of women in literature may sometimes make them slaves to their own undertakings. But whereas Oriana finds her freedom and identity in writing the letter, Ophelia has to meet her own death for the same purpose; however, in both cases, they seem to succeed in bringing forward and deterring assumptions of the delusory nature of their female roles:

> you get a protagonist who pits herself against the status quo and either smashes herself against it, or momentarily brings down the structure. [...] Individual action is always doomed to failure, and collective action is probably the only way to right the wrongs of this society. (Bogdanov 1988, 94)

It can be contended that death and suicide attempt as vindictive practices carried out by female character –*Hamlet*'s Ophelia is to be mentioned here– are a strong case for their consideration as the ultimate means to embrace self-assurance. Contrary to Ophelia's fulfilment of her own death, Oriana's words weigh on Amadis with accusations of metaphorically murdering her. By appealing to her symbolic death –that of her female ego on getting (sexually) rejected by Amadis– Oriana finally embraces self-governance as the only way to escape her oppressive love for a man.

Endnotes:

1. A description of the origins of this concept is given here.
2. More on spiritual quests in all its forms during the Middle Ages is tackled in this book.
3. In this chapter, the fact that Oriana's letter contains the truth about Amadis' origins constitutes one of the moments of rising action.
4. In this article, the close relationship between Oriana and Amadis is further discussed, and how he acquires his identity and moral integrity by means of her countless interventions as a mediator in various conflicts.
5. (The unconscious). The unconscious comprises all subliminal psychical contents of the forgotten and the neglected; it is constantly in action and creates combinations of materials that enable one to determine the future. *(my translation)*
6. The Corinthian women do not approve of Medea's infanticide but can say nothing to stop her. Upon hearing her appalling plan, they protest, "I forbid you to do this" (813), but their attempt at performative speech misfires. "It will not be otherwise" (814), responds Medea, who has a singular power to create action with words.
7. "[Medieval] culture was designed by men to privilege testosterone."

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The Perfectly Unadjusted Woman: Reading Adaptation in "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper"

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Abstract:

Sylvia Plath and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's openness on the restraints of the domestic sphere appear in their autobiographical and creative texts. Both authors employ the figure of an unadjusted woman as their narrator, a figure forced into docility and obedience; she denies her passions and forgoes isolation at the hands of patriarchal figures. Deemed 'mad' and 'unnatural,' the transplanting of this woman into seclusion intersects the work of the nineteenth-century gothic writers with twentieth-century feminist poetry. In "Tulips," intrusion appears as the uncanny presence of a gift – red flowers. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the walls, grotesquely yellow and fungal, disturb the narrator. In advancing the perfectly unadjusted woman, Plath reframes the domestic gothic in the twentieth-century while consciously utilizing classic gothic tropes, images, and themes. She redefines isolation as an escape from not only motherhood but also from her career as a writer. Oppression, isolation, and flight link Gilman and Plath's domestic gothic texts, and the parallels found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" demonstrate the advancement of the unadjusted woman into the twentieth-century imagination. This advancement complicates and redefines the oppressed woman's adaptation from patriarchal confines, subverting the expectations of motherhood for imaginative thought.

Keywords: Domestic gothic, ecocriticism, gothic feminism, gothic poetry, postpartum literature, gothic fiction.

The unadjusted woman, forced into docility and obedience, denies her passions and forgoes isolation at the hands of dominating patriarchal figures. The perfectly unadjusted woman exists as a "simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine" (Scharnhorst 1993, 157). Deemed 'mad' and 'unnatural,' the transplanting of this woman into seclusion intersects the work of the nineteenth-century gothic writers with twentieth-century feminist poetry. In Sylvia Plath's "Tulips," the intrusion appears as the uncanny presence of a gift – red flowers. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," the walls, grotesquely yellow and fungal, disturb the narrator. Gilman, introducing the perfectly unadjusted woman through domestic gothic qualities, shapes a character that would later manifest in Plath's poetry, particularly in "Tulips." Thus, Gilman creates a figure that would become Plath's primary narrator, a female protagonist distinct to female Gothicism. However, Plath pushes this character beyond madness and metaphoric protest. Plath advances this character, as well as the domestic gothic as a literary genre. Likewise, the feminist resistance Gilman defines in "The Yellow Wallpaper" would pave the way for twentieth-century

confessional feminist poets, who eradicate the reliance on metaphoric coding found in nineteenth-century feminist writing. In advancing the perfectly unadjusted woman, Plath reframes the domestic gothic in the twentieth-century while consciously utilizing classic gothic tropes, images, and themes. She redefines isolation as an escape from not only motherhood but also from her career as a writer, a profession she deems male-dominated. Plath's definition of escape deviates from Gilman's definition that emphasizes the importance of escapism through writing. Oppression, isolation, and flight link Gilman and Plath's domestic gothic texts, and the parallels found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" demonstrate the advancement of the unadjusted woman into the twentieth-century imagination. This advancement complicates and redefines the oppressed woman's adaptation from patriarchal confines, subverting the expectations of motherhood for imaginative thought.

Although Plath did not explicitly identify as a gothic writer, the qualities echoing throughout her work suggest an intentionally gothic hand shapes her poetry. In poems like "The Manor Garden," Plath describes a death-ridden home, "more suitable for a Gothic horror tale than for a birth," repeatedly conveying babies as lowly creatures but natural signs of life. Gina Wisker examines Plath's fear of nurturing another human being in a destructive and oppressive world, offered through a domestic gothic lens. Wisker states in "Viciousness in the Kitchen" that Plath "utilizes the strategies, images, and tropes of the literary Gothic and horror to express hidden secrets, the undersides of our complacent everyday" (Wisker 2004, 104). This forbidden underside, the taboo of women subverting the patriarchal notions of naturalness, Plath explores with the unadjusted woman's voice in the domestic gothic genre. This unsatisfied voice exists in both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," as discontent from restrictive gender roles confines both women. However, fearing the revelation of their discontent, both stories contain hesitancy in expressing this hidden underside that exists. Growing resentful, the voice in "Both the domestic incident and the terrifying short story suggest the familiar Gothic themes of confinement and rebellion, forbidden desire and 'irrational' fear" (Johnson 1989, 522). Both authors utilize Gothic tropes, such as the distraught yet pervasive heroine, the forbidding room, and a repressive male antagonist. In "Tulips," the unadjusted woman confidently derails the need for the heavy coding and metaphoric language. Although the symbolic resistance of motherhood found in "The Yellow Wallpaper" progresses in "Tulips," and other poems, through Plath's uninhibited confessional voice, she opts for a flight from the patriarchal hierarchy that opposes Gilman's call for female unity and action; death, not writing, becomes Plath's escape.

Restraint and oppression appear in the domestic gothic, and the triumph over the patriarchal hierarchy occurs in both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." Gilman and Plath utilize the gothic, framing the natural word as encroaching upon the constructed environment as a way to demonstrate resistance and flight. In "Tulips," Plath's narrator becomes disturbed by a flower bouquet's presence, a 'get-well' gift from her husband. Likewise, Gilman's narrator describes the hideous, unreliable, fungal wallpaper as torturous, as John confines her to this room. She describes how "You think you've mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face and knocks you down, and tramples upon you" (Gilman 2013, 398). The natural world becomes pervasive to both women, at least initially, as it serves as a reminder of maternal expectations, the naturalness of childbirth, life, and motherhood. These expectations burden both Plath and Gilman's narrators, yet their similar escape from the patriarchal hierarchy becomes focal – the depths of the mind as its epicenter. John and the husband who brings tulips live bound to rationality

and incapable of understanding the unadjusted woman's oppression, but more significantly, Plath and Gilman express the men's inability to access imaginative thought.

Ironically, John places his wife in the yellow-wallpapered room as a means to contain and control her. The narrator in "Tulips" enters confinement willingly, as physical illness results in her hospitalization. The confined space frees both women, as creative discovery and greater autonomy follow their isolation from the restrictions inflicted upon them by a predominantly patriarchal society. The unadjusted woman's placement into this space opens both texts to a Marxist lens, given the emphasis on hierarchy and flight. The isolation of women signifies their worth, a phenomenon Bruce Robbins notably explored in his Marxist critical essay on another domestic gothic text, *The Turn of the Screw*. In Henry James's novel, the placement of figures on a staircase magnifies the story's social hierarchy and, shortly after that, the disruption of that hierarchy. Placement, encasement, and the confusion of locations infiltrate gothic tales, and as shown in "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," operate as disorientating forces, disrupting the familiar. For example, in the final scene of "The Yellow Wallpaper," John's social placement above his wife, inferiorly residing in a child's room, inverts when her metaphoric protest against domestic confines actualizes as she physically triumphs over him. In this disturbing scene, the narrator "creeps" over John, demonstrating her successful escape from the hierarchy. Likewise, the yellow-wallpapered room, initially her prison, with unbreakable bars and intrusively fungal, transforms into a liberating and creative space, becoming a haven from John's oppressive watch. The narrator states, "John is so pleased to see me improve...said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wall-paper...I had no intention of telling him it was because of the wall-paper – he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away" (Gilman 2013, 399). The tulips and the hospital room mirror this transformation, evolving from the confining reminder of the narrator's role as mother and wife to a source of relief, as her triumph ensues. In this disturbing scene, she sees recounts:

> The walls, also, seem to be warming themselves.
> The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals;
> They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat,
> And I am aware of my heart: it opens and closes
> Its bowl of red blooms out of sheer love of me. (Plath 2007, lines 57-61)

For both women, the wallpaper and tulips, symbols of confinement and restriction, become enablers of free thought and self-acceptance. As each woman accepts her environment and adapts within it, fungal walls and tulips, once reminders of naturalness and motherhood, no longer function as imprisonment. Instead, the women reshape the confined space as an area in which they can explore. Both the wallpaper and the tulips, organic, fungal, intrusive, and even animalistic, embody qualities that define motherhood. Restraints against free thought and flight bind each woman. Returning to a Marxist lens, both women adapt away from the patriarchy within their environment. John, overly confident in his ability to control his wife, attempts to restrict her. Ironically, what he deems as madness liberates her imagination, allowing subversion of his shortcomings as a solely logical physician. However, since the story ends in madness, and she remains within the walls of her confinement, she does not wholly escape her imprisonment. Similarly, Plath's narrator does not escape the confines of her place in the hierarchy either since she forces herself to accept the tulips, symbolic of her servant role as wife and mother. The complicated ending of "The

Yellow Wallpaper" describes, "It is so pleasant to be out in this great room...I don't want to go outside...Why there's John at the door! It is no use, young man, you can't open it! How he does call and pound...It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!" (Gilman 2013, 402). She has no desire to go outside. She seems unwilling to explore the world outside, a now foreign environment to the one she adapted to within the nursery. She mocks John, declaring that "the key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!" and that "I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in" (Gilman 2013, 402). In order to gain access to the room, he must go beneath her and the stairs for the key. Furthermore, he faints after opening the door, and she comes to "creep over him every time," overturning his rule (Gilman 2013, 402). Therefore, she successfully subverts the patriarchy.

Gilman's narrator gains a sense of superior wisdom over her arrogant and overly rational husband while maintaining her imaginative freedom (perhaps her only freedom) within this society. She was aware from the beginning of the story that people of their class do not receive "ancestral halls" and exquisite positions of wealth and authority. John, however, attempted to overthrow the system, neglecting the only sense of freedom he could have had – imaginative freedom through his wife's "nervous condition." However, just as in "Tulips," illness confines both women, a confinement John does not face. Though he faces a literal downfall and faints, her mental illness peaks and possibly prevents her complete liberation from the room. Their roles as servants, wives, and mothers, dissipate as each woman redefines the wallpaper and tulips, accepting them as a means of creative escape, imagination, and exploration.

In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator discusses dissatisfaction with marriage, as well as rage and distaste towards motherhood. Incessantly undermined by her husband, the narrator describes how she takes "pains to control myself – before him, at least, and that makes me very tired" (Gilman 2013, 393). As aforementioned, she initially asserts her dislike for the room, a place of John's choosing, an "atrocious nursery" (Gilman 2013, 394). The nursery, a domestic sphere used against the narrator as a place of confinement, initially worsens the narrator's nervous condition, a condition that has been identified as postpartum depression, a condition Gilman's physician Dr. S. Weir Mitchel diagnosed her with (Ghandeharion 2016, 116). Gilman records in her 1935 autobiography that Mitchel advised her to "Live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time. Lie down an hour after every meal. Have but two hours intellectual life a day. And never touch pen, brush or pencil as long as you live." Given the details available through her autobiography, "The Yellow Wallpaper" functions as a text rejecting such treatment, as the narrator finds multiple women entrapped behind the walls, confined to the inescapable roles of domesticity; the unadjusted narrator refuses to find gratification as a mother and housewife. Instead, she fights for her right to imaginative expression and independence from John and motherhood. Her desire to free the women in the walls from the nursery's confines, paired with Gilman's rejection of Mitchel's treatment, support the claim that motherhood is the ultimate source of anxiety, inserting the uncanny into the narrative. In the "atrocious nursery," a place where nothing hinders the narrator's writing, she writes as much as she pleases, so long as her strength prevails (Gilman 2013, 394). However, when the narrator finds herself, "In his presence, John's wife behaves according to socially accepted norms...she must do what she likes in secret...But the longer everyone leaves her alone, the stronger her individual identity becomes" (Griffin 2000, 11). Hence, she discovers an escape despite the intrusive nature of the wallpaper, for once she recognizes her struggle in the faces of the women behind the paper, John becomes the intrusive presence.

Only in her solitude can creativity flourish, an idea that Plath utilizes throughout her final and most notable book of poetry, *Ariel*. Despite the prison in "The Yellow Wallpaper" becoming a place of imagination, her flight from restriction occurs in the very space John places her in. Plath would later take the concept of motherhood's uncanniness, and her call for escape from all roles, including her creative identity as a poet, to show concerns of patriarchal dominance in the working place of writers as well, almost with a tinge of defeat. Notably, Plath's advancement of Gilman's call for higher female agency differs in that she does not find escape through advocating the right for women to write. In focusing again on the domestic Gothic world, a place that carries into the twentieth-century imagination, this refocuses the release of imaginative power as present in both texts. Yet what Plath does as a twentieth-century confessional and feminist writer not only calls attention to repression in the domestic sphere, through her poetry, she also concludes "that our ideas about motherhood and poetry are in fact dead or useless because they are formed from and adhere primarily to the traditional, formal conventions of our society. By repeating life patterns, such as continuously having the same opinions, beliefs, and associations about things (like motherhood and poetic form), we are distracted and living automated lives, and therefore not truly living at all" (Zane 2011, 270). This quote fits well when examined in light of Bruce's Marxist concerns with female gothic characters, suggesting either more work must be done to break the hierarchal structure, or that since the structure dominates the narrative, vain efforts will not succeed.

Rather than dwell extensively on how the isolated space changes over time, or whether the breaking of the hierarchy in place can be successfully done, turning attention back to the intrusion of the natural world into this imaginative and isolated space creates a critique on naturalness. This functions in linking the texts though the anxieties surrounding the horrors of motherhood. These anxieties surrounding domesticity and in rarity, its pleasures, exist within the framework of "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." For in both Gilman's short story and Plath's poem, the placement within an enclosed environment operates as the primary indication of the domestic gothic in action. Twentieth-century concerns with female agency, the uncanniness of motherhood, and madness harken back to Gilman's era, and it becomes clear that the burden of motherhood weighs heavily on female gothic writers. What Gilman begins in "The Yellow Wallpaper" Plath completes in "Tulips": a call for the perfectly unadjusted woman to acclimate against domestic constraints. However, looking at the biographical contexts that shape why each woman enters solitude becomes necessary before arriving to this essay's claim that Plath advances Gilman's unadjusted woman. Likewise, the gothic heroine each author creates operates differently within the unique nineteenth and twentieth-century conditions. The conditions in which Plath's narrator and Gilman's narrator enter isolation differ, as Gilman's narrator's faces psychological impairment and for Plath's, physical. By placing his distraught wife in a nursery, John "is merely following the nineteenth-century equation of non-maternal women – that is, spinsters and 'hysterics' – with helpless children. Yet he is unthinkingly allowing her the free play of imagination and abdication of social responsibility also characteristic of children. Thus, as the story progresses, the narrator follows both her childlike promptings and her artistic faith in creating a Gothic alternative to the stifling daylight world of her husband and the society at large" (Johnson 1989, 524). John defines the illness, creates the space of isolation, and instigates fear. Yet in "Tulips," also autobiographical, Plath's then-husband Ted Hughes did not impose her hospitalization, yet the same fear and hatred Gilman describes would permeate this solitary space nonetheless.

The narrator in "Tulips," who has been identified as Plath, finds herself isolated in a hospital, following an appendix removal. She describes how she gives her "name and day-clothes up to the nurses," and likewise, her "history to the anesthetist and my body to surgeons" (Plath 2007, lines 6-7). In contrast, the female protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is forced into her confinement, a bedroom rather than a hospital room, an entirely different landscape. Although the degree of agency each woman displays seem unequal, with Gilman's narrator being placed and Plath's placing herself, there are natural elements that become othered to each woman, connecting their narratives far more closely than initially perceived. In the pivotal study, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar examine nineteenth-century female writers, such as Charlotte Bronte, and how they express discretely their "forbidden emotions in powerful but carefully disguised forms" (Gilber and Gubar 1979, 338). This hidden expression of emotion, for Gilman, was the only way she could reach a broader audience while also creating a call for women to demand further agency and escape the restrictive domestic sphere. In no way a flaw on Gilman or Bronte's part, this less-obvious way of criticizing restrictive norms would allow writers such as Plath to push symbolic action further, derailing the need for a discrete expression of spousal horror and more powerfully, the horrors of birth and motherhood.

For Plath, willingly entering the hospital due to physical ailment rather than a mental one, shapes her adaptation as effortless. This decision may be a mark of the times changing, asserting adaptiveness in an era quite different from Gilman's. Alternatively, perhaps it is not whether or not each woman chooses to adapt in solitude, but it is what each woman adapts away from that becomes central. In acknowledging that much of what both women wrote was likely inspired by their own domestic experiences, both women write in ways that alert readers to the horrors of this sphere. Plath less subtly "alerts readers to the domestic limitations in a reader's life...she tries to reach the reader through a shared set of references to domestic relationships with which they can identify. Plath represents these domestic issues not as simply confessions of her own problems in life, but as a means of defamiliarizing the reader and the reader's conventional assumptions about the domestic" (Zane 2011, 261).

Plath's narrator finds forgoing mental stimulation cathartic, whereas Gilman's, forced to forgo stimulation, finds it torturous. An interesting dichotomy, despite both perfectly unadjusted women's directness in their desire to abandon motherhood, their longing for a distinct sense of independent-self are quite different. Although the gothic qualities of Plath's work are underexamined, the domestic sphere and anxieties of motherhood have long been subject to conversation. For Plath, "There's a hex on the cradle" and "death in the pot," as the horrors of infants and domicile dwellings permeate her poetry. Both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "Tulips" focus, at one level, on sickness, madness, injury, torture, death, and confinement, forms of suffering recurring in the feminine domestic gothic. Male gothic pioneers, such as Charles Brocken Brown and later, Edgar Allan Poe, also focus on such themes, yet within the repressed conditions of the perfectly unadjusted woman, endurance and flight within confined spaces develops. The desire to be free from baggage, exist utterly empty and ultimately escape the female roles and domestic experience demonstrate a disharmonizing view of life. Writing decades apart, both Plath and Gilman write about the looming tension between obligations to home and the creative desire for a career. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," sharp images of the physical act of writing and the inability to hide it inserts the gothic's element of repression. Likewise, in "Tulips," Plath also explores repression, but of another kind – repression of the role of motherhood and writing. She rejects the ensnarement of her family and career, and the gift of flowers propel her into rage. She expresses, "I didn't want any flowers,"

and continues to describe the intrusive tulips to be "like an awful baby" that "eats my oxygen" (Plath 2007, lines 38-49). The context of this poem helps support how Plath intentionally frames it, one of her last to be written, as akin to Gilman's domestic gothic. Ted Hughes would go on to detail that not only was "Tulips" written after Plath's hospitalization from appendectomy in March of 1961 but that she had also miscarried a child shortly before this operation, as depression following this loss touches Plath's work (Dobbs 1977, 21).

The physical and mental suffering inflicted upon women through pregnancy inserts an uncanniness that Gilman frequently writes on as well, and in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator, also a new mother, copes with postpartum depression. The treatment of female depression by male physicians in Gilman's story contrasts the feminine nurses in white that swab Plath's narrator "clear of my loving associations," allowing her entrance into a place so pure, where she meets her desire:

> To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
> How free it is, you have no idea how free—
> The peacefulness so big it dazes you (Plath 2207, line 26-28)

Only after the nurses arrive, she adapts within the confined environment, the hospital room, and empties her mind. Focusing on the enclosed space, she describes how in the emptiness of the light that "lies on these white walls," she starts "learning peacefulness, lying by myself quietly" (Plath 2007, lines 3-4). The narrator's adapting qualities foster her survival. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the narrator's mind mirrors the room that encloses her. She and the wallpaper are intertwined, as "Its remoteness and neglected beauty unsettle her. It oozes with everything a practical, positivistic husband says do not exist and adds Gothic mystery to the realistic surface" (Van 2010, 53). Hence, the room, a placidly colored and solitary space, becomes a haven away from husbands and children. However, Gilman's perfectly unadjusted woman triumphs memorably at the end when she creeps over her husband, signifying defiance and empowerment. Although Plath's unadjusted woman does find relief momentarily from such restrictive roles, the tulips' intrusion permeates through an ecological conceit that both harkens to earlier female gothic writers while also inserting fears of nature; the tulips become the vessel for reinserting the domestic into the poem.

The tulips are perhaps the most horrifying and perplexing presence in the piece. Their animalistic qualities eerily provide a gothic moment similar to what has been interpreted as a rape in Harriet Elizabeth Prescott Spofford's 1860 story "Circumstance." The tulips are described as consuming the narrator, as she recounts with disgust how the tulips are "Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour, / A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck" (Plath 2007, 41-42). Moreover, by the end of the poem, they are explicitly stated to be panther-like, as she asserts, "The tulips should be behind bars like dangerous animals; / They are opening like the mouth of some great African cat" (Plath 2007, lines 58-59). The scenery pairs with the early frontier preoccupation with the monstrosity of felines and the wilderness, an uncanny moment in the poem, providing a stark contrast to the many images of purity, cleansing, and escape found in earlier stanzas. The tulips, an organic presence, are directly tied to the domestic sphere. A gift from her husband, they painfully reunite her with her role as a mother. The redness corresponds to the wound, lifeblood, and motherhood. The red is a stark contrast to the white, death-like sterility of the hospital walls. Her preference of white over red puts illness and death above the domestic restraints that life offers. However, some critics have argued that "the fact that white and all it stands for (post-natal

depression, hospitalization, sickness, loneliness, bareness, withdrawal from life) is the choice of an (by patriarchal standards) abnormal woman, reaffirms rather than challenges the healthy, traditional values of motherhood and of caring for the family" (Gjurgjan 1997, 138). However, the perverse, rape-like descriptions of the flowers invade the perfectly unadjusted woman's isolation, complicating the space and destroying a place of mental relief and lack of dedication to expectations.

Examination of the flowers provides support that Plath intentionally utilizes gothic qualities to subvert domestic expectations. Plath "applies strange, abstract, and conceptual descriptions to these domestic settings and relationships in order to force readers to think differently about them. More specifically, she consciously uses tropes that are trademark to the feminine and domestic gothic rather than rely on broader gothic qualities" (Zane 2011, 273). The lasting effect: a story of horror that is also understandable. However, this advocates a bold statement for Plath's time, despite the progression of feminist views decades after Gilman's era. "Tulips" is one example of several in Plath's vast body of poems that expand upon the domestic gothic's grotesque imagery, yet perhaps the most notable example of this shock effect occurs in "Stillborn." With subtle hints at sorrow and feelings of maternal loss, the perfectly unadjusted woman's voice of protest underlies this poem, in which "Plath suppresses the reader's traditional connotations of motherhood, such as warmth, nurture, and love – which are being defamiliarized. Instead, she associates motherhood with new images. She not only invokes death and decay here but the deceased" (Zane 2011, 269). Furthermore, the natural world and its creatures become symbols for horror, as "The 'mother' compares her 'children' to pigs or fish, which are not animals that are typically associated with human children. The connotations with "dead fetuses in jars are usually things for scientific study that is dehumanizing" (Zane 2011, 270). In doing this, Plath replaces the expectations of love and motherly adoration with monstrosity by degrading them as less-than, as repulsive animals.

The demonizing of the domestic sphere by taking animals and plants and making them monstrous reappears in the domestic gothic as a way to invert the natural and biological associations with maternal instinct, creating a way for female gothic writers to boldly, or subtly as Gilman does, resist and redefine patriarchal norms. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," the natural world outside the constructed yellow world become horrifying, inserting a commentary on the pressures of natural law. Likewise, "As the story ends, the real natural world outside the room becomes the strange, misfitting one in which she feels like an alien. She finds that 'outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.' Nevertheless, she becomes fully comfortable creeping openly in her yellow world." (Scott 2009, 202). Likewise, in Plath's sterile hospital, "The focus on the details of the operation suggests once more that the peacefulness is temporary and somehow unreal" (Efron 1975, 118). The constructed environment in which the women find freedom becomes a haven contrasting the natural world, a place of little to no escape from gendered expectations of women as mothers. Despite both narrators being required to forgo intellectual and social stimulation, to eat and sleep indulgently, and to remain almost entirely in isolation, for Gilman, in "the strange upstairs room of a rented colonial mansion... this woman is forced by the rest-cure to adapt to her surroundings" (Scott 200). In a complicated society, the specific social constructs of John and his wife's world are never implicitly given. Though readers do not receive details of the specific societal restrictions and regulations of this society, the dialogue and actions of the characters depict a hierarchy in place, and the unfolding of actions and events within the tale highlight both the restrictions and the minimal possibilities of finding freedom under this system. In both "Tulips" and "The Yellow Wallpaper," illness, both physical and mental, are the primary

confinements both women face, and though they seem to find a sense of liberation in the space they are physically confined too, they never truly escape this ensnaring imprisonment. Likewise, since the narrator in "Tulips" comes to accept the flowers' presence and even relies on them, she remains entrapped as her servant role as a wife and mother. Finally, in a similar fashion, though the unstable narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" attempts to free herself from the confines of the society she lives in, she only does so through her engagement with the yellow wallpaper, symbolic of John's imposed treatment of her nervous condition.

Only in an isolated space does each narrator find a possible outlet within the system, though it is doubtful that either woman finds a true escape. John's downfall evokes what Robbins calls the "unfallen state of something." It is both of the narrators' imaginative minds that represent the unfallen state, and ironically, it is John's assimilated logical mind that is the accurate indicator of being trapped, in every sense, within the hierarchy. Both women try to escape their confining roles as mother and wife, and though their roles and treatment are imposed upon them, it is in this solitary space that they find the only sense of freedom available – creative thought. Likewise, it seems that the subject who sees subversive versions of fungal walls and flowers, as well as sick and strangled life forms, reveal their own sick and strangled psyches by these articulations. Nevertheless, amid sickness, each woman finds a new kind of health, as imagination grows receptive to the world around them. Stimulated through adapting to the restrictive environment, the perfectly unadjusted women reclaim purpose by breaking gender norms.

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Novel in Between: the Necessity of Semi-Periphery for Peripheral Literature in World Literature

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Abstract:

Diasporic narratives live a nomadic existence, wandering in the in-between space of core and periphery, with the final destination to be somewhere, at best, closest to the core and, due to the transnational cultural different, what we may call Semi-Periphery. Mandanipour combines the semiotics of words and forms to showcase the unattainability of the core literature for a diasporic process of thinking, subjects, and forms, all of which still function under erasure and censorship.

This paper is going to study the resistance of a diasporic narrative, which both defies and is defied by the standard sets of the core of world literature. It focuses on the resistance is shown by the simultaneously present mechanics of typing and process of thinking in Shahriar Mandanipour's *Censoring of an Iranian Love Story: A Novel*.

Keywords: censorship, hybridity, liminality diaspora literature, translation, readership, core/periphery, being under erasure, publicity, transnationality, cultural dialogue.

> . . . There are those rare moments when the shadows and the naked bodies of the writer and the words, in one time frame of the story, in one setting of the story, are coupled. They become two lovers who have long known each other and who in their clandestine meetings have frequently concealed their longing for one another.
>
> Shahriar Mandanipour, *Censoring an Iranian Love Story*

Shahriar Mandanipour – an Iranian author who is currently living in the United States – initially wrote *Censoring and Iranian Love Story* (*Censoring*) in Farsi. Deciding to leave the original Farsi version unpublished, he sent the English version – translated by Sarah Khalili, a fellow Iranian who is culturally aware of the geopolitics of Iran as a contemporary literary margin – to the market. In the present essay, the reader follows the exodus of the story from its land to the diasporic wanderings through the world literature – the term ironically named as such since it is basically rooted in the Western/North American view towards it – a journey that at times seems impossibly endless. Nonetheless, its final reach at best happens to be not the core, but a diasporic in-between

condition – more open to the hybrid texture of the travelling text – a literary space which is resistant to any solid definition. The novel is decidedly unpublished in the vernacular, Farsi. While avoiding the rigid literary norms of both core and periphery of world literature, the translated version takes the peculiarly Persian problem of censorship to the hybrid zone of diaspora, intending to seek a different audience by voicing out literary innovations in the face of innumerable domestic oppressions and repressions.

There is even no need for literacy at all – Farsi, English, or any other ones for that matter – for the reader to know what the novel is about; the visual rhetoric of the book cover and the semiotics of the typing technique are tell-tale enough (Fig. 1 and 2). *Censoring* is a two-fold story about an author who is making up his mind of whether to write a love story, and the not-yet-written tale of two youths Sara and Dara who are being shaped in the mind of the narrator.[2] On one level, the narrator who happens to be the implied author, i.e. the fictional Mandanipour, struggles to write his tale in such a way that could possibly survive the executing blades of the censor and censorship, and reach the market after the publication; on another level, there is the impossible tale of love which is constantly interrupted in the fictional author's mind.

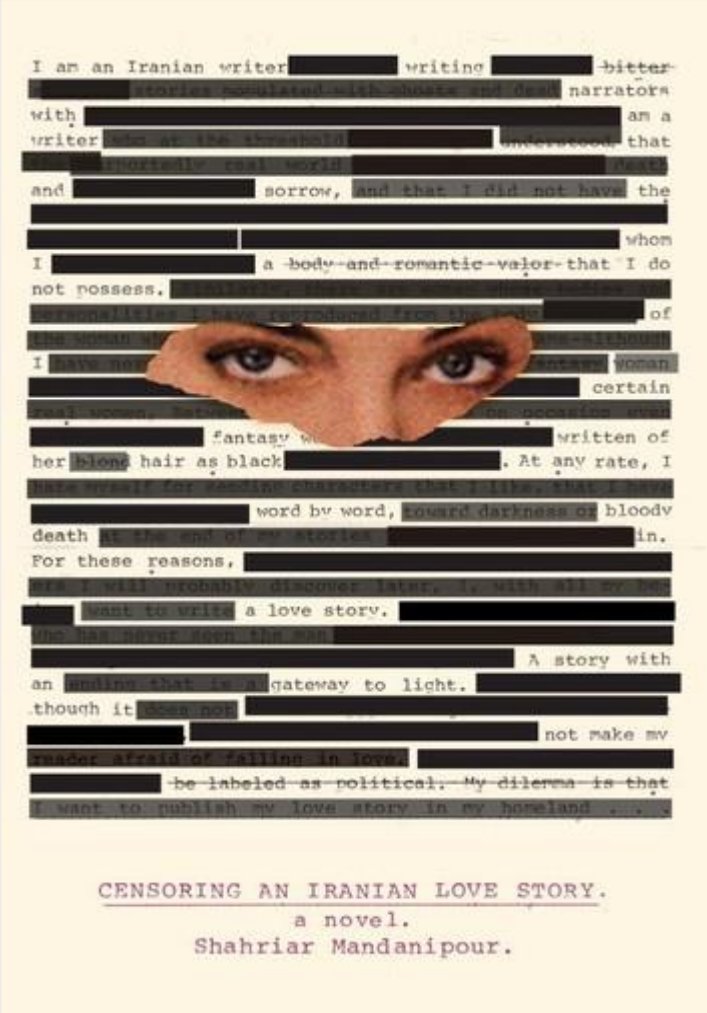
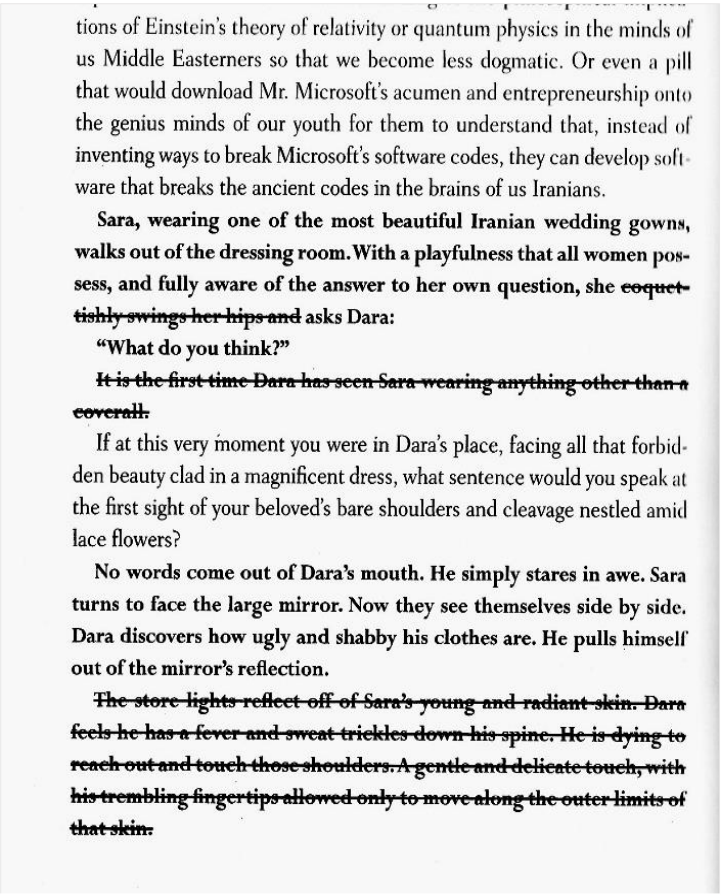


Fig. 1. Book cover as the thematic visual rhetoric containing the two layers of the narrative

In *Censoring*, Mandanipour's main challenge is *language as a whole* and what slips its indifferent and dispassionate system of signification, especially when the text enters the fluid realm of diaspora. Accordingly, the body of the text implies the incomprehensibility of censorship, as a repressive and ideological means, unless one has experienced living under its omnipresent watch. This is especially true for the diasporic reader who has not experienced the ordeals of writing under the guillotine of censorship. In a deconstructive manner, the not-have-penned-yet story manifests



tions of Einstein's theory of relativity or quantum physics in the minds of us Middle Easterners so that we become less dogmatic. Or even a pill that would download Mr. Microsoft's acumen and entrepreneurship onto the genius minds of our youth for them to understand that, instead of inventing ways to break Microsoft's software codes, they can develop software that breaks the ancient codes in the brains of us Iranians.

Sara, wearing one of the most beautiful Iranian wedding gowns, walks out of the dressing room. With a playfulness that all women possess, and fully aware of the answer to her own question, she ~~coquettishly swings her hips and~~ asks Dara:

"What do you think?"

~~It is the first time Dara has seen Sara wearing anything other than a coverall.~~

If at this very moment you were in Dara's place, facing all that forbidden beauty clad in a magnificent dress, what sentence would you speak at the first sight of your beloved's bare shoulders and cleavage nestled amid lace flowers?

No words come out of Dara's mouth. He simply stares in awe. Sara turns to face the large mirror. Now they see themselves side by side. Dara discovers how ugly and shabby his clothes are. He pulls himself out of the mirror's reflection.

~~The store lights reflect off of Sara's young and radiant skin. Dara feels he has a fever and sweat trickles down his spine. He is dying to reach out and touch those shoulders. A gentle and delicate touch, with his trembling fingertips allowed only to move along the outer limits of that skin.~~

Fig. 2. Censorship happening in the mind of the implied author before the existence of the actual text

the immaterial process of thinking which can be lived, but defies the actualization of words. Love is presented in Bold font, as if the mechanics of typing, itself, resists the domestically inevitable condition of censorship under which the expression of love is erased. The thread of the narrator's mind, then, obsessively anticipates how the body of text is going to be torn to pieces, and – before it actually happens – keeps crossing out words after words, and even the sequence of sentences so that it would become more palatable the censor, the executioner of language. In such self-reflexivity, the English reader – if so s/he desires – has the chance to read what is left out from this unfamiliar diaspora of language, and wonder about the absurd tyranny of censorship. Unfortunately, the Farsi reader as the necessary national sacrifice is deprived of the privilege of reading which has driven beyond the borders;[1] it already evanesced once the author refused to have the novel published in vernacular. The novel is aptly out for the non-Iranian reader/critic so that it could display the numerous hurdles a travelling text confronts and needs to overcome, and that its value may be noticed by the determining measures of a global literature which does not really suffer the uncertainty of diasporic literature. For Mandanipour, this seems the only way through which his text shares the experience of being constantly aborted before it is even conceived, that is *being* under erasure. *Censoring* textualizes the possibility of an exilic tale which wishes to find its way into the monopoly of the global core languages, English being the most prominent of all. It enlivens, as nakedly as possible, the issues that a peripheral text confronts on its way to global recognition, from the conception of the idea in author's mind and the mere possibility of thinking it, to its translation which leaves the vernacular out and suffices to a second-hand version of the diasporic textual trauma, to its global acknowledgement. The novel is a testimony, in the face of its severely oppressive condition of writing, to the condition which the problematic standardization of diasporic literature, if not totally blind to, cannot possibly comprehend.

Literature of diaspora is indeed as problematic a discipline as fascinating and liberal it may initially sound. It is the locale where varied divides between the developed and developing countries bolster or

weaken, not only given to their international socio-political relations, but also in terms of the potential of the cultural and literary (mis)communications. The ideal goal is the initiation of dialogue between culturally unfamiliar literatures and readers. On the other hand, there has always been "a variety of complex fundamental issues" that are basically associated with the "traditional hierarchies" in the "opposing forces" between the developing and developed countries," problems that, in terms of literary economics, divide literature into core and diasporic hybridity of periphery (Aydinli & Mathews 2003, 289, 290). Franco Moretti reads the nature of today's literary world as "one and unequal," one in which literary shares of nations and cultures are distributed disproportionately (2000, 54). Naturally, diasporic texts like *Censoring* are engaged with more impediments on their path towards world recognition and readership. One may simply notice the discomforting fissures between the privileged host reader and not-so-much privileged cultural and literary values of home which highlight the unequal chance of success among them. Unfortunately, the lack of equality – similarly determined by both the public readership and diaspora literature as an academic discipline – is measured in terms of the standards which paradoxically only include the Western literary core of global literature. The reality of this unequal contribution turns the publicity of diasporic literature to an insoluble dilemma; its literary values are measured in terms of the standards that are not all-encompassing and by the readers who are geopolitically unaware of the peripheral values strange to their own cultural norms.

The literary dynamic among diasporic nations is imbalanced, and world literature witnesses "very little contribution from the periphery" (Aydinli & Mathews 2003, 297). Language proficiency is an immense impediment for the exiled authors and the émigrés, and when learnt it basically functions as a communicative means. A diasporic text, then, has a very poor chance outside the intermediary agency of translation to communicate with its international readership. Thanks to the local socio-political conditions, a text like *Censoring*, owes the possibility of its being to whether or not it departs from home and lands on the liminality of diaspora, and of course at the unfortunate cost of the home reader. *Censoring* as an uprooted wandering text has no belonging to the soil; it in fact floats on the tides of exilic waves with nowhere to stay on. The problem with a diasporic text as such is that even its *translation* as a hybrid means can never do justice to the vernacular text. We may here pause to consider *The Symphony of the Dead*, the nationally praised novel of the renowned Iranian author Abbas Maroufi (who is currently living a life of exile in Germany), the German version of which became a success, whereas the English one failed to be so. In other words, one may conclude that even for a text to enter the hybridity of diaspora, it is almost necessary for the text "to be rewritten, [and] not translated," owing to the "cultural idiosyncrasies of a world shaped by one linguistic system [which is to transfer] to another language" (Braz 2014, 126, 124). Cultural particularities are at times linguistically inexpressible so far as they are only translated within the linguistic system of signification, and in this regard, translation fails to domesticate and familiarize the unknown. What it can do at best, is to cut ties between the text and its home and give it the liberty to

enter the literary imbalance of the *one and unequal* system, in hope of reaching equilibrium somewhere in-between, a semi-peripheral condition.

In a semi-peripheral space, the vernacular is more restraining than liberating, especially for an author like Mandanipour who means to target a different type of audience for his text. For example, Mandanipour's in-between *Censoring* aims for a market where the "compromise between a western formal influence . . . and local materials" plays a huge role (Moretti 2000, 58):

> [*Censoring*] had to have been written with an audience outside of Iran in mind, but in a language that this audience would mostly not understand; it depends on translation for its being, yet its being is thoroughly Iranian, lovingly and allusively so, dense with local reference. And it takes as its subject exactly these paradoxes, for it is explicitly about what can and cannot be written in contemporary Iranian fiction. (Wood 2009)

Such a paradoxical texture is essential destiny of both the diasporic author and text; they both remain in the local culture, but neither the former can express what they mean, nor the latter be expressed. Meaning is expressed in another language, but it is never experienced as such. Translation, thus, turns English to a currency, a medium by which the Anglophone reader and the novel can communicate. It functions "like the dollar in economics," a metaphor standing for the value of literary works like *Censoring* as the system's commodities (Moretti 2003, 76).

The one and unequal system of diaspora ideally accepts every nation from all around the world as participants; however as Moretti describes it, the absence of equality manifests itself in the form of "geographically-based divides between developed and developing" core and margin which "must be bridged" in the diasporic dialogue with each other (Aydinli & Mathews 2003, 289). On the other hand, world literature, appropriated from the world-system of economic history, has a lot to do with the capitalist values in an economic sense. Today, measured by such values – basically measured and *globally* standardized in and by the core – national literatures are interpreted as being "one-sided and narrow-minded" (Moretti 2000, 55). By the same token, these values may even put more pressure on the peripheral diasporic/exilic – and in our case, Iranian – authors who are already challenging the socio-political red-flags raised by the totalitarian governments, even long before their works are domestically published. Accordingly, while innovative techniques could be voluntary options for the Western authors, they are imperatives for the diasporic counterparts who want to think outside the box and get round the impeding hurdles that constantly confront every single word which is/is going to be penned.

We must bear in mind that the field of "translation is never just about language" but "also very much about cultural politics;" and the veiled cultural sense of the words are not always easily transferred (Braz 2014, 130). For this reason and in addition to the high dependence upon the linguistic manoeuvring in translation, there is "always a point where the study of diaspora must yield to the specialist of the national literature" from which the text arises (Moretti 2003, 66). Moreover,

some, like Mandanipour, feel the necessity of moving *beyond the boundaries* of "translingual practices" and innovatively engage various semiotic significations to their texts for the world reader to better "understand great political dramas" that happen in the world of their works (Moretti 2003, 80).

Obviously, the challenges towards world recognition start long before the idea of *world* is even planted in the mind of the peripheral writer. In a society governed by an anxious totalitarian regime like Islamic Republic, censorship is an unyielding problem before anything is penned. The constant negation of daily repression has long been the most frequently applied strategy instead of solving the problem, and consequently, the critique turns to a ricocheted accusation: "'there are some . . . [who] accuse us of censorship," so said Mohsen Parviz, the Iranian deputy minister of cultural affairs in 2008 (Atwood 2012, 39). In Iran, under the dogma of the theocratic regime, "one which has established itself on war and violence," censorship is not simply limited to writing; it is broadly effective as "a lived experience . . . [and] a collective trauma" of everyone's day to day life (38, 41). Consequently, the nature of words becomes essentially slippery; accusations are answered by threats, and the whole problem eventually gets caught in an endless spiral till the complainant forgets what the problem initially was. The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution is concerned about moral and ethical destabilization in vastly different issues, from dress code to literary publications; but there is no clear-cut law regarding the demarcations of the boundaries in any of the areas. Somewhere in the Kafkaesque Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, there sits a person – or at best an assembly – *morally* responsible for reading the literary texts and subjectively deciding on the extent of their corruptibility or appropriateness for publication. Naturally, the artist and intellectual, frustrated by the herculean process of obtaining the permit for publication, longs for a crossing over such boundaries and getting around the absurd procedure, one which is no less horrifying than the Medieval Inquisition. While "the author cannot think freely" in a context where he is to reconcile his own creativity and the censor's oppression, it becomes the "censor's job to ensure that they never do" (41). The anticipation and reality of censorship paralyzes the tale teller's mind, hand, and mouth; they turn the process to a self-reflexive, internalization of lingual mutilation.

On the other hand, the "traditional hierarchies . . . [of both] core and periphery," are reluctant to loosen up the grip on alternative, cross-boundaries worldviews (Aydinli & Mathews 2003, 290). Susan Strange harshly criticizes the core – mainly American – scholars for being "deaf and blind to anything [that is] not published in the USA," and Moretti, in a broader sense, finds the literary core "completely ignor[ing]" the diasporic contributions (qtd. in Aydinli & Mathews 2003, 291; Moretti 2000, 56). One must consider that world literary system is an essentially "political phenomenon as [much as] an aesthetic one," besides the hegemony of languages where a peripheral literature highly depends upon how (un)biased the receptivity of the core may be (Braz 2014, 119). Literary system is an intricate ensemble of traditions, cultures, and multicultural relations into which a peripheral text enters with difficulty, not just because of the linguistic barriers, but for the socio-political and cultural ones. The entrance is further conditioned by the pre-conceived images of the West on peripheral cultures which are "predominantly shaped by extraliterary concern[s]" (Rosa qtd. in Braz 2014, 130). Likewise, what has

been desired by the core to be reflected in contemporary peripheral literature, in our case about the post-Islamic Revolution Iranian society has been almost only limited to the lowbrow culture, the image of families who constantly struggle for their economic, ethical, and moral survival. If such desire is not met, the text has almost no chance of winning the required attention from the core.

However, not everything is as disappointing as it seems; the peripheral repressive machine, the core's biased taste, and self-censorship can all lead the author to innovative ways in which the author, narrator, and the reader cope with "realities of control and censorship" and apply other signifying codes to communicate together creatively (Atwood 2012, 40). Mandanipour's narrator's voice and comments provide the necessary fluidity for the peripheral text to flow into the tides of world literature, and when translated, enforce an overall "recontextualization of the source text by creating a receiving intertext that replaces relations to the source literature with relations to literary traditions in the receiving culture that a reader of the translation must possess" (Venuti 185). Such a shift of associations is made via the novel's typography, i.e. the crosses over the lines of the Sara and Dara's love story, which moves beyond the linguistic signification and relates with the world reader in a visual context, the space which belongs neither to the core, nor to the periphery of language as such.

Naturally, for the author who resorts to extra-linguistic innovations, it is necessary to locate anywhere other than the discomforting comfort zone of their homeland; this is where the lure of the semi-periphery comes as a way out – although as another Iranian author in exile, Abbas Maroufi, reminds us about the most basic challenges the writer on the run faces: "an author in exile, running for his life, is cut off from his daily bread, his name, and his foremost concern now turns to how to survive from one day to another" (16:45-17:10). Yet, all considered and having moved beyond what Maroufi contends, the way to the core and world recognition seems possible through an in-between space, the semi-periphery which is necessarily a different geographical space from the writer's homeland. It is an "amorphous" zone between the "unambiguous core-periphery patterns" and is characterized by containing the "residual . . . Or transitional" material of either of the two (Derruder 2008, 91). This in-betweenness does not literally overlap on a specific geographic location; it is, in other words, some place like a Deleuzian deterritorialized one on which boundaries get endlessly formed and reformed. As the seabed of mutation and hybridity, it facilitates the voice of the author fading into the words of the translator, and a national concern being expressed in a *world* language. Uprooted from its land, the work grows into a thing which has no solid sense of belonging; it grows to be a *world thing*. Imagination finds ways out of either core or peripheral restraints – those like what *Censoring* shares with the reader – and "move[s] in several directions" in hope of an entrance into the core of the literary tides (Moretti 2003, 75). The benefit will be providing, for peripheral voices, some space as a locus where cultures and words become fluid and move "in and out of the core," where "innovation may arise . . . then be captured and diffused by the core of the core" (77, 78).

Censoring efforts to slip the dictates of the peripheral censor; just as the two lovers eventually break free from the authority of the fictional author, it is "an escape from the hegemony of censored lives – whether it is characters' lives censored by authors, authors' lives censored by a government,

or books'" (Ostby 2013, 93). Such practices are made possible in the form "of a transnational, transhistorical alliance" in an in-between condition, moving away from the peripheral corner and located elsewhere which is not solidly dominated by the hegemony of the core (93). Ostby (2013) suggests that only in a:

> . . . decentered state of cultural divorce from its author, can an argument be made for the 'exported' contemporary Iranian novel-memoir hybrid as a literary space for unique dialogic performances of context-specific affective transnational appeal. (93)

Eventually, peripheral literature as such, planted under the restricting censorship and constant observation of thought, necessarily comes to fruition in a climate other than the writer's homeland. For a peripheral author, like Mandanipour, "an Iranian writer tired of writing dark and bitter stories, stories populated by ghosts and dead narrators with predictable endings of death and destruction" – looks forward to a semi-periphery as the closes condition to the ideal, for the translation of what he creates, and chooses a different reader to share with, an unstoppable pen under the noose of the censorship (Mandanipour 2009, 7). Translation without the original text, for him, becomes the space in which text, divorced from the ideological and geopolitical fuss around both core and periphery, may survive the guillotine of censor and censorship.

Endnotes:

1. Here I am referring to the etymological meaning of *diaspora* which is "driving beyond boundaries" (Baraheni 2006, 39).
2. The names Sara and Dara are taken from our pre- and shortly post-revolution first grade Farsi books whose pictures were after a while covered, gradually disappeared and were finally substituted by Islamic names, Amin and Akram in later years! Figure 3 shows two pictures on the top that were published in 1978, and two others on the bottom published in the Post-Revolution 1985. The unveiled children in the top two were given Persian names: Sara (the girl) and Dara (the boy), and the veiled ones on the bottom two Arabic/Islamic ones: Akram (the girl) and Amin (the boy).



Fig. 3. First-Grade Farsi course book's brothers and sisters

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Artistic Anxiety and the Pressure to Perform in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*

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Abstract:

Though they are not conventional visual artists, the characters in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* each engage in creative acts – Virginia writes stories, Laura makes a home for her family, Clarissa orchestrates a party – but these creative acts are ultimately unfulfilling for each of them. These creative acts are not simply unfulfilling, however; they also, more significantly, cause deep-seated anxiety as the women consciously or subconsciously recognize the divide between their "undisputed origin" (Trinh Minh-ha 1998, 649), their true selves, and the roles that they are expected to perform: successful author able to craft the perfect story, supportive wife and mother able to create a perfect cake and birthday celebration, and pleasant hostess able to create a warm, effortless, memorable party. The identity crises that these women experience are due in part, then, to societal expectations that press them to simulate, in the Baudrillardian sense, their lives to the point where the difference between their authentic selves and their performed selves becomes dangerously indistinguishable. These simulations are further reinforced by new names and corresponding identities that men have given them by way of nickname or marriage and are so devastating that they lead some even to suicide.

Keywords: postmodernism, performance, art, identity, simulation, naming, anxiety

In postmodern critical theory, Jean Baudrillard's ideas of simulacra and simulation have been immensely important for understanding certain aspects of the literature of this period. In *The Precession of Simulacra*, he suggests that "pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary'" (Baudrillard 1998, 633). Simulations, then, feigning to have what one does not, threaten modernism's idea that, while the true and real have been replaced by the false and imaginary, they are recoverable. In order to accomplish simulations, a certain level of creativity is required. Trinh Minh-ha identifies a similar condition in her *Woman, Native, Other*, but also explains its implications:

> *Authenticity* as a need to rely on an 'undisputed origin,' is prey to an obsessive *fear*: that of *losing a connection*. Everything must hold together. In my craving for a logic of being, I cannot help but loathe the

> threats of interruptions, disseminations, and suspensions. To begin, to develop to a climax, then, to end. To fill, to join, to unify. The order and the links create an illusion of continuity, which I highly prize for fear of nonsense and emptiness. Thus, a clear origin will give me a connection back through time, and I shall, by all means, search for that genuine layer of myself to which I can always cling. (Minh-ha 1998, 649-50)

Minh-ha identifies the tentative nature of authenticity. Any interruption, dissemination, or suspension can threaten the connection to the genuine layer of self, and not only that, but the ordering of a life creates the *illusion* of continuity only. If the continuity is revealed to be nothing more than illusion, then nothing is left but empty chaos. Both Baudrillard's ideas of the collapsing separation between the true and false, and Minh-ha's dialectic of authenticity and the illusion of continuity are helpful in understanding Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, published in 1998. Cunningham's novel stems from Virginia Woolf's 1923 *Mrs. Dalloway*, a novel that helped shaped literary modernism. Claudia Olk notes that, "In taking a fictional reality as its point of reference, *The Hours* dwells on the notion of a permeability of the boundary between reality produced and reality perceived" (Olk 2004, 204). Not only does it engage in the permeability of the boundary of reality and perceived reality, but it also, more significantly engages with Baudrillard's and Min-ha's postmodern theories of the realities of the self. *The Hours* offers readers multiple experiences of the artistic anxiety and the pressure to perform pre-determined roles, resulting from interfered identities.

In addressing some characteristics of postmodern literature, Stacey Olster suggests that, "Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, novelists could not fall back upon religion when they needed to find a new ordering principle behind history...If writers wished for an ordering principle behind history, they had to construct it for themselves" (Olster 1989, 8). This is something like what we see in *The Hours*. Characters attempt to construct ordering principles for their lives in the midst of societal pressures; engaging in creative acts seems to promise order but fails to deliver. Mary Joe Hughes, in an article entitled "Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* and Postmodern Artistic Re-Presentation," explores some of the issues related to art in the novel. She claims that "The [repeated image of the] plunge and its associated meanings are ultimately linked to the role of literature, especially in *The Hours* and, more generally in both novels, to the act of creation" (Hughes 2004, 350). Hughes identifies an important role of literature and other acts of creation in *The Hours*, but she unfortunately ignores the troubling condition of Cunningham's artists in the text, all of whom suffer from anxiety that is, at times, debilitating to the point where suicide is the only alternative for two of them. The artistic anxiety stems from the pressure to perform pre-determined roles; rather than living life as they would like, each of Cunningham's characters are forced by others to create a self, a life other than what would, perhaps, be more natural, authentic, and enjoyable. Although postmodern art and literature may have an "animating power" (Hughes 2004, 355), they also throw into relief the instability of personal identities; Cunningham's female characters face anxiety when given the task to create or perform roles that have been assigned to them under new names given to them by men.

The novel's prologue foregrounds the disastrous implications of creating, or attempting to

create art, particularly when the art is created to fit society's expectations. On her way to drown herself, Cunningham's Virginia Woolf passes a farm worker who is cleaning a ditch, a mundane, but necessary act. As she sees this man, Virginia "thinks of how successful he is, how fortunate, to be cleaning a ditch in an osier bed. She herself has failed. She is not a writer at all, really; she is merely a gifted eccentric" (Cunningham 1998, 3-4). In contrast to this stranger's work, writing has been a false pursuit, according to Virginia. In her letter to Leonard, Virginia again acknowledges her failure as a writer: "You see I can't even write this properly" (Cunningham 1998, 6). In contrast to the man engaging in physical labor, Virginia sees herself as a creative failure, a gifted eccentric only. Although her husband, Leonard, and perhaps even she herself, had expected her to be a writer, Virginia now sees that he was only playing at that role, and not convincingly. Certainly her health, the severe headaches she suffered, may have contributed to her decision to put a stone in her pocket and walk into the river, but perceiving herself as an artistic failure is more meaningfully painful for Virginia. As she contemplates her suicide, the physicality of Virginia's surroundings impress upon her, but they remain parenthetical: "(the fur collar tickles her neck)" (Cunningham 1998, 4), "(the bottom [of the river] is mucky)" (Cunningham 1998, 5), "The yellow surface of the river (more yellow than brown when seen this close) murkily reflects the sky" (Cunningham 1998, 5). In her last moments, Virginia seems to shift from her attempts at creating something to simply experiencing her life, though these new experiences have not become integrated with her life, and they never will.

When the novel steps back in time from Virginia's suicide to 1923 as she writes *Mrs. Dalloway*, the artistic anxiety that leads to her death immediately confronts readers. Virginia wakes up in the middle of the night, worrying about how to start her novel:

> This might be another way to begin, certainly; with Clarissa going on an errand on a day in June, instead of soldiers marching off to lay the wreath in Whitehall. But is it the right beginning? Is it a little too ordinary?" (Cunningham 1998, 29)

Perfecting the creative act consumes Virginia to the point where she dreams about it; she cannot escape it. Not even being in the presence of her sister later can stop Virginia's mind from continually returning to her art. However, when she forgets the line that she had imagined, Virginia tells herself that "it doesn't matter, really, because she still has the feeling it left behind" (Cunningham 1998, 30). Unfortunately, feelings are fleeting, and Virginia realizes that nothing can disturb her if she means to capture the feeling. She determines to skip breakfast because "she can't bear the interruption it would entail, the contact with Nelly's mood" (Cunningham 1998, 34). Virginia sacrifices the nourishment she needs for the sake of her work, for the sake of creating. And although she does enjoy writing when she can tap into the mysteries of the world, "her access to it comes and goes without warning" (Cunningham 1998, 35). Because creativity is fickle, so is Virginia's pleasure in it, and yet it presses her, waking her up in the middle of the night with its urgency. There is inherent uncertainty, leading Virginia to question her competency, even her identity:

> She may pick up her pen and follow it with her hand as it moves across the paper; she may pick up her pen and find that she's merely herself, a woman in a housecoat holding a pen, afraid and uncertain, only mildly competent, with no idea about where to begin or what to write. (Cunningham 1998, 35)

The creativity has an agency of its own, leaving Virginia to simply follow the pen's lead. If she is unable to create, the thought of being simply herself seems to terrify her. The illusion of a connection to her true self or the deep mysteries of the universe, when exposed as false or otherwise inaccessible, leads to emptiness at Virginia's core, as Minh-ha would suggest.

Although Virginia is able to write on this day and she feels powerful in doing so, she also knows that "tomorrow she may look back at what she's written and find it airy, overblown. One always has a better book in one's mind than one can manage to get onto paper" (Cunningham 1998, 69). The inspiration exists, the skills exist, and yet, directly translating thoughts into the material world is impossible, especially extended over a period of time. Virginia has to stop writing after a few hours because something inevitably "within her falters, and she worries that if she pushes beyond her limits she will taint the whole enterprise" (Cunningham 1998, 70). The writing process is tentative, and works in fits and starts, but an even more problematic aspect of the creative impulse is the insecurity, the lived falsity of her identity. Virginia accepts that "sanity involves a certain measure of impersonation" (Cunningham 1998, 83), implying that no person is quite sane, including herself; there are only people who perform sanity well.

This impersonation begins to collapse what is real and what appears to be real, as it does for Virginia, who "feels fully in command of the character who is Virginia Woolf" (Cunningham 1998, 84). Here, then, is Baudrillard's theory of simulations beginning to take hold, threatening the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' of who Virginia is. At this point, she is still aware of the difference, since she controls the character, but because she is fully in control of creating a convincing character of Virginia, the potential exists for that character to become Virginia. Not only are there implications for Virginia's writing, but it complicates her relationships with people. One of her weaknesses is managing the servants, and though she wonders how she might be both firm and kind with Nelly, commanding respect and love, Virginia does nothing to address that part of her life. Instead, Virginia endows her character, Clarissa Dalloway, with "great skill with servants, a manner that is intricately kind and commanding. Her servants will love her. They will do more than she asks" (Cunningham 1998, 87). Virginia's artistic anxiety leads her to attempt to solve the problems in her own life by simply creating someone who does that part of life better than she. Her control over the character of Virginia is just as much a control over her own actions as it is a control over her fictional creation.

The anxiety, the restlessness that haunts Virginia, persists, even once a good deal of her novel is complete. She has to convince herself that:

> It is enough to be in this house, delivered from the war, with a night's reading ahead of her, and then sleep, and then work again in the morning. It is enough that the streetlamps throw yellow shadows into the trees. (Cunningham 1998, 164)

Virginia looks to physical details of her surroundings for comfort, but they provide nothing substantive to ease her. Even the lure of London cannot soothe Virginia. After she convinces Leonard to move, Virginia imagines the ways in which art will save her:

> She will go to the theater and concert halls. She will go to parties. She will haunt the streets, see everything, fill herself up with stories...She will write and write. She will finish this book, then write another. She will remain sane and she will live as she was meant to live...in full possession and command of her gifts. (Cunningham 1998, 209)

However, as readers will remember from the prologue, or from the real Virginia Woolf's life, art could not save her, whether she was surrounding herself with the art of theaters or creating her own art through writing. The inspiration she gained from other created things does nothing to help her perform as a sane woman, or, if they do, the performance is fatal.

Laura Brown, though not an artist in the same way as Virginia Woolf, yet struggles with artistic anxiety that develops out of the pressure to perform as a housewife in the 1950s should, and like Virginia, Laura wraps up her identity with a created thing – in this case, *Mrs. Dalloway*. Readers are first introduced to Laura when she is reading in bed, and in doing so, "trying to keep herself by gaining entry into a parallel world" (Cunningham 1998, 37). Though she might achieve some level of self-preservation in reading, Laura is still plagued by her role as a wife and mother:

> She should not be permitting herself to read, not this morning of all mornings; not on Dan's birthday. She should be out of bed, showered and dressed, fixing breakfast for Dan and Richie...She should be there, shouldn't she? She should be standing before the stove in her new robe, full of simple, encouraging talk. (Cunningham 1998, 38)

Laura knows exactly what is expected of her, and yet none of it appeals to her. She debates the issue at length as she lays in bed, avoiding reentering that world and playing a role that she believes she is not meant to play. Laura knows well enough that each day she puts on an act for her family and uses that terminology to describe her attitude: she finds herself feeling like she's "about to go onstage and perform in a play for which she is not appropriately dressed, and for which she has not adequately rehearsed" (Cunningham 1998, 43). Unfortunately, today will not be a good day because Laura "knew she was going to have trouble believing in herself" (Cunningham 1998, 38), which would also make it difficult for Dan and Richie to believe her behavior as authentic. Dan and Richie expect that Laura's "undisputed origin," to use Minh-ha's language (1998, 649), seeks to be a good wife and mother, though Laura knows otherwise. The disconnect plagues Laura throughout the novel, but she takes advantage of it when it suits her, allowing herself to shirk responsibility because she is pregnant, although, in her pregnancy, she is fulfilling another expectation: to be a nurturing mother with a house full of kids.

Not only does Laura engage in art as an avid reader, but as a post-war housewife, she is charged

with the duty of helping to design and build a new society. She reflects that:

> we are here, all of us, making homes, having and raising children, creating not just books or paintings but a whole world – a world of order and harmony where children are safe (if not happy), where men who have seen horrors beyond imagining, who have acted bravely and well, come home to lighted windows, to perfume, to plates and napkins. (Cunningham 1998, 42)

Hughes posits that Laura here channels the spirit of Clarissa, "clearly nourished by the novel she is reading, in which the re-creation of life after the devastation of war is a central theme" (Hughes 2004, 354). According to Hughes, reading *Mrs. Dalloway* somehow gives Laura the courage to create a life for her family. However, for Laura, there is no comfort in this kind of creative act. By participating in the life of one soldier's wife, Laura, willingly or not, participates in creating a stable environment for her family and post-war America. And, especially since Laura does not seem to be invested in that project, her work is more of an art form than it might have been for other women at her time. However, this venture causes her anxiety; Laura knows exactly what society expects of her, but instead of motivating her to act in those ways and fulfill those expectations, she is paralyzed, eventually seeking escape through attempted suicide and then a move to Canada.

Part of the larger work of creating a society is creating things on small-scale for her family, and Laura begins her day by creating a cake for her husband, with the help of her son. As they mix ingredients, Laura seems to revel in her ability to perform at that moment: "She is herself and she is the perfect picture of herself; there is no difference" (Cunningham 1998, 76). Whereas Virginia was on the verge of simulating herself, Laura has achieved it: the real Laura and the projected Laura are identical at that moment, and the artistic power urges her on to imagine

> making, out of the humblest materials, a cake with all the balance and authority of an urn or a house. The cake will speak of bounty and delight the way a good house speaks of comfort and safety. This, she thinks, is how artists or architects must feel (it's an awfully grand comparison, she knows, maybe even a little foolish, but still), faced with canvas, with stone, with oil or wet cement. Wasn't a book like *Mrs. Dalloway* once just empty paper and a pot of ink? It's only a cake, she tells herself. But still. There are cakes and then there are cakes. (Cunningham 1998, 76)

Suddenly Laura gets consumed by the notion that she can make a perfect cake for her husband, so when the cake fails to meet her own expectations – "It looks amateurish; handmade" (Cunningham 1998, 99) – she decides the cake has to be thrown out. Not even the second cake can stand up to Laura's critical eye: "What [she] regrets, what she can hardly bear, is the cake. It embarrasses her, but she can't deny it...she had hoped to create something finer, something more significant, than what she's produced, even with its smooth surface and its centered message. She wants (she admits to herself) a dream of a cake manifested as an actual cake" (Cunningham 1998, 144). Part of the anxiety that grips Laura is the impossibility of making manifest her thoughts and dreams for

the cake, which is the same anxiety that Virginia suffers from.

Virginia escapes her artistic anxiety through suicide, and though Laura eventually attempts suicide, she first escapes by spending time alone at a hotel. Laura finds herself at a clean, respectable hotel "under false, or worse, inexplicable circumstances – she's come, in some obscure way, to escape a cake" (Cunningham 1998, 147). Escaping a cake sounds like an activity fit for the insane, but Laura is not insane; she simply wants to put distance between herself and everything the cake represents: a perfect cake for a perfect family. However, for Laura who is probably not meant to be a homemaker, the failed cake reminds her how imperfectly she plays her role and also the perceived impossibility of living out a different one. Of course, booking the hotel room under false pretenses makes Laura an effective performer: she "intends to tell the desk clerk that her husband has been unavoidably delayed, and will arrive with their luggage in an hour or so. She has never lied like that before, not to someone she doesn't know or love" (Cunningham 1998, 147), and she surprises herself when her performance is believed, or is at least sufficiently uninteresting to avoid raising questions. Although she lacks motivation or ability to perform for her family in creating a perfect life for them, when Laura has the opportunity to create a new identity, a new reason for being, she is successful, happy, and even excited by the possibilities it offers. She performs easily when it is on her own terms.

Perhaps because Laura finally escapes the life she had to convince herself to participate in and has the opportunity to leisurely read, it suddenly occurs to her that "It is possible to die. Laura thinks, suddenly, of how she – how anyone – can make a choice like that" (Cunningham 1998, 151). Before leaving the house without her son, it's unclear that Laura had ever made a choice of her own true will. Even her decision to marry Dan seems to happen to Laura, rather than her actively seeking it: "What could she say but yes? How could she deny a handsome, good-hearted boy, practically a member of the family, who had come back from the dead?" (Cunningham 1998, 40). Laura is left without options throughout her life, and the sterile hotel room signals a new space for her to simply think, to imagine something outside of the duties of wife and mother – even if that something is death. She admits that "There is comfort in facing the full range of options; in considering all your choices, fearlessly and without guile. She imagines Virginia Woolf, virginal, unbalanced, defeated by the impossible demands of life and art" (Cunningham 1998, 152), and the connection between art and choice crystalizes for Laura. Unless she finds an escape-route, art's demands will defeat Laura, just as they defeated Virginia Woolf.

When Laura returns to the neighbor's house to retrieve Richie, "She is herself and not herself" (Cunningham 1998, 187), and then "She is overtaken by a sensation of unbeing" (Cunningham 1998, 188). As Laura reenters her former life, she has a small identity crisis, or she at least becomes hyper-aware of the performance she is about to begin again. She fights off dizziness and gathers courage, but still Laura "doesn't know how she'd explain two and a half hours spent reading in a rented room" (Cunningham 1998, 189). In creating a space for herself, Laura violates society's expectations for her; no one could possibly understand Laura's rationale (if one exists), let alone her impulse. Returning to Baudrillard's theory, Laura now senses that there is a disconnect between her

true self and her false self, and in simulating a good mother, picking up her son to prepare a party for her husband, that disconnect becomes more prominent in her life, destabilizing her identity. Olk suggests that "[Laura's] efforts to balance self-image and self-experience grow increasingly complicated because Laura Brown's notion of reality is undermined by a sense of role-play she acquires when looking at herself" (Olk 2004, 210). Although mirrors do complicate Laura's identity, as we see here, her reality is shaken even without seeing herself in a mirror, indicating the depths to which she has engaged in simulations and the difficulties she faces in finding her logic of being, as Minh-ha would suggest.

Once back in the domestic sphere, the same instability reigns as Laura finds herself swinging back and forth in her attitude toward her situation. She gets angry when her domestic creation, the cake, degenerates: Dan is "coarse, gross, stupid; he has sprayed spit onto the cake," and Laura finally realizes that "She herself is trapped here forever, posing as a wife" (Cunningham 1998, 205), but not long after, when Laura sets the table for dinner,

> it seems she has succeeded suddenly, at the last minute, the way a painter might brush a final line of color onto a painting and save it from incoherence; the way a writer might set down the line that brings to light the submerged patterns and symmetry in the drama. (Cunningham 1998, 207)

Moments before, Laura had to calm herself down from a flash of anger at the role she is forced to play and the beautiful cake that was not treated with care. Now Laura revels in completing the picture of her home, just as a painter or writer revels in making his or her work a unified piece of art. And the celebration of the goodness of her home quickly fades, too, when Laura attempts to overdose on the pills in her medicine cabinet as she and Dan prepare for bed. She remembers the freedom of the hotel and the simplicity of achieving that freedom, and "think[s] how wonderful it might be to no longer worry, or struggle, or fail" at creating a world, at performing a life (Cunningham 1998, 214). Although Laura is unable to escape the worry and struggles through suicide, she does eventually escape by leaving her family behind, moving to Toronto, and becoming a librarian, work in which she has access to as much art and literature of her choosing as she could hope for.

Clarissa's artistry is again different from either Virginia's or Laura's. Rather than creating a novel or a home for a family, Clarissa's focus is on creating a successful party for Richard, whom we later find to be Laura's son. Not only does Clarissa work to create a masterpiece of a party for Richard, but perhaps more significant for her, Clarissa surrounds herself with art and artists, including Richard, an award-winning writer. As part of her preparatory work, Clarissa visits Richard, dying from AIDS, and just as Virginia and Laura are pressed with expectations, so is Clarissa: Richard "seems to have decided early on that Clarissa stands not only for herself but for the gifts and frailties of her entire sex" (Cunningham 1998, 19). Clarissa's audience is narrow, but nonetheless significant in shaping her, pushing her to perform in particular ways.

Clarissa looks to literature as a source of comfort for her friend Evan, whose health is

tentatively returning. She searches for the perfect book but finds that nothing satisfies: "They are all, at once, too general and too specific. You want to give him the book of his own life, the book that will locate him, parent him, arm him for the changes" (Cunningham 1998, 21-2). No matter how much art promises to help people better understand themselves in relation to others, not one specific piece can be just suitable enough, which leads Clarissa to the conclusion that:

> There is no comfort, it seems, in the world of objects, and Clarissa fears that art, even the greatest of it...belong stubbornly to the world of objects...She wants for Evan and she wants for herself a book that can carry what that singular memory [of the tree branch tapping a window] carries. (Cunningham 1998, 22-3)

Clarissa's memory of the tree branch, "more than any other feels urgent and deeply, almost supernaturally comforting" (Cunningham 1998, 22), but she realizes, just like Virginia and Laura do, that she cannot make her immaterial memories into material objects that she can touch and feel and interact with, though perhaps that is for the better, since objects provide no comfort. In any case, not even art can materialize memories, so Clarissa leaves the bookstore empty-handed.

The everlasting quality that Clarissa seeks in art and memory finds some substance in film. On her way back from the florist, Clarissa sees a movie star for a brief moment – either Meryl Streep or Vanessa Redgrave, possibly Susan Sarandon – and finds that she "can't help being drawn to the aura of fame – and more than fame, actual immortality" (Cunningham 1998, 50). Of course this movie star will not live forever, but recordings of her will be stored away in archives with other objects, physical mementos of her art. Although this may be true, the immortality is qualified by what is done with these objects, similar objects to the ones that Clarissa was skeptical of earlier: they are simply catalogued and stored away, perhaps taken out once in a while, but surely forgotten eventually as more and more objects join the collected archives.

Once Clarissa begins the party preparations at her apartment, she too feels pressured to create a perfect experience for her honored friend: "She will give Richard the best party she can manage. She will try to create something temporal, even trivial, but perfect in its way...What more can she offer him?" (Cunningham 1998, 123). Richard is receiving a special award for his life's work, his writing; Clarissa can give nothing to this artist except a temporal experience, and perhaps in part because her creation is for another artist, the pressure to succeed is even greater. Clarissa strives to create a perfect party atmosphere for Richard, and an important part of that is the ability of the hostess to be pleasant, entertaining, and effortless in doing so. When Louis stops by later, he "wonders if they're calculated, these little demonstrations of self-knowledge that pepper Clarissa's wise, hostess performance" (Cunningham 1998, 130). Clarissa's party is cut short, but in Louis's company, we see a sample of the role she plays as the perfect hostess. And later, just before Clarissa watches Richard fall to his death from his window, she notices that she "can feel herself acting well in a difficult situation – but at the same time is removed from herself, from the room, as if she is witnessing something that's already happened. It feels like a memory" (Cunningham 1998, 197).

Once again, Minh-ha is helpful for understanding the self-awareness and the out-of-body experience that Clarissa has at this moment. Clarissa knows that Richard will jump out of the window before her very eyes, disrupting her logic of being; earlier, Clarissa revels in life and loves the indestructability of the world (Cunningham 1998, 14), and Richard's choice for death interrupts her connection to the part of her that values life. By making the present moment into a past memory, Clarissa copes more calmly with Richard's impending suicide.

Even with her partner Sally, Clarissa puts on performances, as Sally reflects, though they are not as convincing as the performance for Louis or the performance for herself:

> Clarissa refuses to admit it when a gift doesn't please her, despite Sally's exhortations. Every present, according to Clarissa, is perfect, exactly what she'd hoped for, and all the hapless giver can do is wait and see whether the watch will be deemed 'too good for everyday,' or the sweater be worn once, to an obscure party, and never appear again. (Cunningham 1998, 181)

Some might classify Clarissa's actions as simple politeness, but after eighteen years with Sally, she should be able to be honest with her. Instead, Clarissa checks herself and puts on a performance as the ever-thankful recipient of unwanted gifts, though Sally can see through the act.

As with the other characters, Clarissa experiences moments of instability, particularly regarding her identity, when she engages in creating or performing something, or when she simply thinks about the potentially dangerous power of art in her life. At one point, Clarissa contemplates what her life would have been like if she had stayed in a relationship with Richard, rather than committing to Sally:

> She could have had a life as potent and dangerous as literature itself. Or then again maybe not, Clarissa tells herself. That's who I was. That's who I am – a decent woman with a good apartment, with a stable and affectionate marriage, giving a party. Venture too far for love, she tells herself, and you renounce citizenship in the country you've made for yourself. You end up just sailing from port to port. Still, there is this sense of missed opportunity. (Cunningham 1998, 97)

Clarissa envisions a wild and exciting life with Richard, something made for art, rather than the reality of life. But then she can't decide if she is still the same person who wants that evocative life, or if that was simply something from her past. She decides finally that her life is good, but somewhat lacking. The illusion of order or continuity is tentative for Clarissa, so she grasps for peace in the decisions she has made. Unfortunately, she is only partially successful as she senses that she has missed something important in life.

In many ways, Richard, an author like Virginia, exemplifies the artistic anxiety that can grip a person and not let go. In contrast to Clarissa, who is drawn to the aura of fame, Richard has no interest in the illusion of immortality that fame offers. Instead, Richard makes everyone around him "an essentially fictional character, one he has invested with nearly limitless capacities for tragedy and

comedy not because that is your true nature but because he, Richard, needs to live in a world peopled by extreme and commanding figures" (Cunningham 1998, 61). Although this approach to life and interaction with people may help his art, it's unclear whether it also improves his relationship with people. How well does he really know Clarissa, for example, if he continues to call her a name that she would prefer to do without (Cunningham 1998, 55)? And at the end of his life, Richard admits to Clarissa that he has failed, and it is a failure born of his art:

> I just feel so sad. What I wanted to do seemed simple. I wanted to create something alive and shocking enough that it could stand beside a morning in somebody's life. The most ordinary morning. Imagine, trying to do that. What foolishness. (Cunningham 1998, 199)

Richard must be suffering greatly from his battle with AIDS, but at the end of his life, Richard focuses on his art, and just like the others in *The Hours*, is unable to translate his vision for creative work from his mind to reality, leaving him greatly disappointed and unfulfilled.

Cunningham crafts each of his characters to experience anxiety over their various art forms and performances, but not without reason. The artistic anxiety sends each character into personal identity crises, perhaps in part because each is renamed – someone else has fashioned them into something or someone new. Virginia is renamed through virtue of her marriage to Leonard, causing a doubling effect on her identity. Leonard, in reflecting on Virginia, reminds himself that:

> she is his wife. She is Virginia Stephen, pale and tall, startling as a Rembrandt or a Velázquez, appearing twenty years ago at her brother's rooms in Cambridge in a white dress, and she is Virginia Woolf, standing before him right now. (Cunningham 1998, 33)

This person is both a young, single woman, incredible as any painting, and also a "craggy and worn" married woman, looking "as if she's carved from very porous, gray-white marble" (Cunningham 1998, 33). Not only does the past become immediate for the present at this moment, but Cunningham here gives readers a glimpse into the two beings contained in Virginia's body, and explains at least some of her difficulty in reconciling the various parts of her identity.

Laura undergoes a similar transformation, though with different results. After reflecting on the events leading up to her marriage, Laura seems resigned to the changes: "So now she is Laura Brown. Laura Zielski, the solitary girl, the incessant reader, is gone, and here in her place is Laura Brown" (Cunningham 1998, 40). Whereas Virginia held her past alongside her present self, Laura's present replaces her former self completely, or at least that is how Laura attempts to live in order to conform to the expectations set up for her. Reading as much as Laura would like to is not possible for a responsible wife and mother, so Laura at times tries to suppress her former interests and desires, reminding herself that "It seems she will be fine. She will not lose hope. She will not mourn her lost possibilities, her unexplored talents (what if she has no talents, after all?)" (Cunningham 1998, 79). Despite her insistences that she can live fully as Laura Brown rather than Laura Zielski, the former

self will not be put to rest, and eventually Laura succumbs to it, escapes to the hotel to read for a short time, and later escapes to Canada to do the same indefinitely.

Cunningham draws the same attention to Clarissa, who, though never taking a man's surname in marriage, is nevertheless renamed by one. When she and Richard were young, he decided that:

> Vaughan was not the proper name for her...Richard had insisted that Mrs. Dalloway was the singular and obvious choice. There was the matter of her existing first name, a sign too obvious to ignore, and, more important, the larger question of fate. (Cunningham 1998, 10-11)

Richard simply takes it upon himself to give Clarissa a new name, imagining her life to be something different than what Vaughan suggests. Clarissa, young and in love "was eighteen, renamed. She could do what she liked" (Cunningham 1998, 11). Although Richard acts out of authority over her, Clarissa seems to find freedom in her new name, at least at first. Twenty years later, Clarissa wonders whether "Isn't it time...to dispense with the old nickname?" (Cunningham 1998, 55). Clarissa wants to be rid of the name that she believes no longer adequately represents her, and on its own, this might be an innocent desire to move on from a tired nickname. However, at other points in the novel, Clarissa reveals that she struggles with her identity. Sally walks in on Clarissa looking "as if she is not quite sure who she is" (Cunningham 1998, 184), and earlier Clarissa feels a strong desire "to be Louis; not to be *with* him (that can be so thorny, so difficult) but to *be* him, an unhappy person, a strange person, faithless, unscrupulous, loose on the streets" (Cunningham 1998, 155). Mrs. Dalloway, if she cannot escape the name and the pressures associated with living a life worthy of a literary character, would rather become someone else entirely, let alone regain her former name.

Trinh Minh-ha suggests that "The *real*, nothing else than a *code of representation*, does not (cannot) coincide with the lived or the performed" (Minh-ha 1998, 650), and it is precisely this struggle that Michael Cunningham's characters experience in *The Hours*. They try to grasp the real of themselves while also living performed lives for their families and close friends; however much the performances may at times be indistinguishable from the real, in Baudrillard's terms, they ultimately cannot coincide with the real. Any attempts at simulation only end disastrously, particularly if the simulation is prompted by others' expectations. Interestingly, Cunningham himself engages in the creative act in writing *The Hours*, and though we cannot fully know his motivations for doing so, he completed that act more successfully than any of his characters were able to, and in doing so, raises a number of important questions about the role of art in postmodern literature.

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Redemption and Forgiveness in the Film *Dead Man Walking*

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Abstract:

The film *Dead Man Walking* focuses on the transformation of death row inmate Matthew Poncelet, who is about to be executed for a rape and two murders. Poncelet initially is unrepentant and unwilling to confess. However, under the guidance of Sister Helen Prejean, Poncelet undergoes a spiritual conversion and repents for his crime. He sees that Sister Helen loves him, so he learns to love himself. His anger toward the families of his victims evolves into understanding and remorse. His genuine remorse, confession, and settling of accounts lead to his redemption. The change in Poncelet's attitude manifests director and screenwriter Tim Robbins's theme that even villainous criminals are capable of reform and thus should not be executed; furthermore, the killing of murderers – no matter how heinous their deeds – constitutes cruel and inhumane vengeance that does nothing to heal the pain and suffering of the victims' families.

Keywords: Forgiveness, redemption, death, murder, capital punishment, remorse, Christianity, repentance.

In Tim Robbins's highly-acclaimed film *Dead Man Walking* (1995), Matthew Poncelet (Sean Penn) has been sentenced to death for the murder of Walter Delacroix (Peter Sarsgaard) and the rape and murder of Hope Percy (Missy Yager). Initially, he uses Sister Helen Prejean (Susan Sarandon) for selfish reasons, wanting her merely to help him with his appeal and to locate a lawyer for him so that his death sentence can be commuted to life imprisonment. However, after he witnesses Prejean's selflessness and devotion to him, Poncelet gains respect for her and begins to take seriously her thoughts on faith and spiritual redemption. As a result, Poncelet starts to engage in a more meaningful dialogue with her. With her help, Poncelet undergoes a gradual but significant transformation. In fact, Poncelet discerns a transformation in Sister Helen herself that affects him and brings him closer to redemption. Poncelet starts, with her support, to read the Bible and to repent his violent misdeeds and racist and pro-Hitler thoughts. Just before the film concludes, Matthew finally confesses to the double murder, taking responsibility and expressing genuine remorse for his crime. Poncelet never becomes a model citizen, yet he does change, and, rather than acting as a self-absorbed criminal, he begins to consider the welfare of other people, such as Prejean and the Delacroix and Percy families. Poncelet eventually relinquishes his hard feelings for his victims' families. His hatred for the Delacroix and Percy families evolves into an attempt to understand their pain, a confession, and a final request for their forgiveness, which leads to his

redemption. Prejean indicates that Poncelet's case in the movie derives partly on that of Dobie Williams: Williams's "last words were to forgive his persecutors: 'I just want everyone to know I don't have any hard feelings against anyone.' You see that strength and peace in him to meet his death in this courageous and loving way – that's God" (Dear 2000). With the spiritual guidance of Sister Helen, Poncelet becomes a changed person, as Williams did, ready to ask God and his victims' families for forgiveness, and ready to meet his Maker.

Robbins's movie focuses on the transformation of Prejean and the concomitant change in Poncelet, as well as the spiritual growth in Earl Delacroix (Raymond J. Barry), murder victim Walter Delacroix's father, who eventually forgives Matthew for the murder of his son. It is the change in Prejean that incites the positive alteration in Poncelet. Initially, she appears hesitant to visit and help him. She seems anxious and uncertain concerning what to expect as she drives for the first time to the infamous Angola penitentiary in Louisiana. Perhaps her anxiety derives from the heinous nature of Poncelet's crime, which she attempts to visualize in her mind. Her attitude begins to change, however, even before she meets Matthew. Sister Helen has a brief meeting with Chaplain Farley (Scott Wilson) in which he coldly informs her of her role (to "save" Poncelet) and acts condescendingly toward her, implying that she is unsuitable for this role. Farley challenges her regarding her clothes, clearly disapproving of her for not wearing a nun's habit. Even when she informs Farley that members of her order have not worn a nun's habit for a long time, he expresses his disapproval. He emphasizes her clothing, not the mission of her church or Poncelet's soul. Farley fails to realize that "the communal dimension [of the Church] is important. We are not alone. The community is a communion" (Malone 2005, 146). Farley's behavior is significant because it manifests his shallow character – that to him, her ability to administer spiritual counseling depends partly on her clothes – and his lack of sympathy for Poncelet. If he cared about Matthew, he would not change his focus from the doomed man to preoccupy himself with Prejean's clothing. He would also realize that Poncelet's spiritual fate derives solely from his acceptance of Christ and redemption, not on the clothes of the nun who comes to help him. Farley's comportment illustrates a man more interested in rules and regulations than in compassion for prisoners or their spirituality or soul. Although Sister Prejean considers capital punishment "the opposite of baptism in a community" ("Angel on Death Row" 1996), Farley, contrariwise, accepts it without question.

Yet this is the man who would counsel Poncelet if not for Prejean's arrival and commitment. Wendy Moon says:

> [W]riter/director Tim Robbins portrays Chaplain Farley as the stereotypical bureaucratic priest who follows the letter rather than the spirit of the law [....] He does, however, state Prejean's goal in his bureaucratic way: to "save" Matt. Prejean, as witnessed by the lack of a habit, operates in the "spirit of the law." She wants to "save" Matt – literally save his life, but more importantly, help him obtain the freedom and peace that will come from taking responsibility for his crime. Her goal doesn't preclude Farley's goal – receiving the sacraments – it goes far beyond his. (Moon 1997, 88, 89-90)

Here Robbins effectively juxtaposes the bureaucratic Farley, who considers his role merely his job and means of earning a paycheck, with the humane and idealistic Sister Prejean, who becomes disillusioned with the lack of spiritual concern for Poncelet and decides to effect change. To her, working with Matthew is not a job, but rather a calling. Moon says that through the juxtaposition of their characters, Farley and Prejean "convey Robbins' theme: only those who operate outside the system are free to act with integrity and only those who look past their prejudice can learn to care for one another" (Moon 1997, 90). Prejean, therefore, ignores Farley's attempt to dissuade her from offering genuine spiritual comfort to Poncelet – thus highlighting the difference between the two spiritual officers – and is more determined than before to help Matthew.

Prejean is also disturbed by the indifference and animosity exhibited toward Poncelet in the Angola penitentiary. In addition to Farley's bureaucratic perspective on helping Matthew, the medical officers, prison guards, and warden look forward to Poncelet's impending death. In the film, Warden Hartman's (Nesbitt Blaisdell's) condolences to Matthew after the condemned man has been denied a stay of execution is anything but sincere. Perhaps the most telling symbol of the indifference to Poncelet's life occurs when people eat at the buffet table as they await Matthew's execution, as if the killing of Poncelet is a spectator sport, mere entertainment like tailgating before a football game. The woman who injects Matthew defends her role in his death, telling Prejean that she is simply performing her job; she does not consider the implications or the spiritual or moral ramifications of her actions. And Poncelet informs Sister Helen that the guards have been placing bets on which prisoner will be executed next. The guards in the film manifest not only vengeful hearts but also a disregard for the sanctity of human life. As Poncelet says just before he dies, "I just want to say I think killing is wrong, no matter who does it, whether it's me or y'all or your government" (Robbins 1995). Although his words could be dismissed as the egoistic, self-righteous ranting of a heartless murderer as he is being punished for his crime, they should resonate with the audience. Faced with the loss of his own life, Matthew realizes how precious life is and how devastating his murders have been to the Delacroix and Percy families. If Poncelet is killed to punish him for taking human life, which is precious, is not his life worth something as well?

Angry that Sister Helen comforts and advises Poncelet, the man who murdered his beloved daughter, Clyde Percy (R. Lee Ermey) says to her, "This is not a person. This is an animal" (Robbins 1995). Although Percy compares Poncelet to a beast, Matthew is a human being, capable of warmth and sensitivity, just like the murder victims. And he is capable of remorse and redemption, as the film demonstrates. Prejean identifies to some extent with Poncelet regarding his crime because she remembers with shame, disgust, and remorse a horrible deed in which she participated – the killing of an opossum. Although she was a nine-year-old child at the time and although opossums are obviously not human beings, she still remembers the act vividly and experiences nightmarish flashbacks. She realizes that all human beings are capable of committing terrible deeds. When Clyde Percy asks her how she could stand to spend time with Poncelet, she replies, "Mr. Percy, I'm just trying to follow the example of Jesus, who said that a person is not as bad as his worst deed"

(Robbins 1995). Thus, she tells him that despite Matthew's heinous crime, the man is still a human being whose life has meaning and is precious and who is also capable of good deeds.

The guards, Warden Hartman, and the politicians who want to show constituents that they are tough on crime fail to realize that Matthew's life has value. Prejean says to a prison guard who looks forward to Matthew's death, "What he [Poncelet] was involved with was evil. I don't condone it. I just don't see the sense of killing people to say that killing people is wrong" (Robbins 1995). The people who condemn his slaying of two people, ironically, want him killed. This irony resembles the incident when school children show their disapproval of Poncelet's violence by beating up his younger brothers. Ironically, the state-sponsored execution of Matthew Poncelet is premeditated, yet the murders of Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy are not. The killing of Matthew Poncelet does nothing to restore the lives of Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy, and seems hypocritical to Prejean and Poncelet because it is a violent and cruel act intended to prevent further violence and cruelty. Dwight Conquergood says, "Executions are awesome rituals of human sacrifice through which the state dramatizes its absolute power and monopoly on violence" (Conquergood 2002, 342). Although the state does not monopolize violence, it manifests through capital punishment that it is no better than the killers it punishes. J. Stephen Fountain says that "*Dead Man Walking*, especially the film, with its haunting juxtaposition of the scenes of the crime and the execution, clearly associates the victimization of both Poncelet's victims and Poncelet himself" (Fountain 2004, 51). Initially, Poncelet commits a heinous act, but at the end of the film, he himself becomes the victim of a violent, senseless, and vengeful killing.

In the film *Dead Man Walking*, the taking of Matthew Poncelet's life seems, according to Tim Robbins, to demonstrate that capital punishment cannot be a viable deterrent because of its secretive nature: "The death penalty is very secretive. . . . I find it very strange, for example, that it's carried out at midnight deep in the recesses of the prison. One of the main reasons the death penalty is supported is that it's supposed to be a deterrent. . . . But if this fiction were true, why are executions performed in such a secretive manner?" (Grundmann 1996, 4). If witnessing the punishment of murderers truly inhibits others from killing, it would be logical to make a public spectacle of the execution rather than hiding it. Capital punishment offers little solace to the families of the victims. Sister Helen reports that even after the execution of Robert Lee Willie (one of two men upon whose life the fictional character of Poncelet is based), Vernon Harvey, whose stepdaughter Faith Hathaway was stabbed seventeen times and murdered, said, "They should've strapped him [Willie] in that chair, counted to ten, then at the count of nine taken him out of the chair and let him sit in his cell for a day or two and then strapped him in the chair again. It was too easy for him. He went too quick [....] [We should] fry the bastards on prime-time TV [...]" (Prejean 1993, 235). Harvey has literally and metaphorically lost "Faith" just as his film counterpart Clyde Percy has lost "Hope." Detective Michael L. Varnado, who worked on the Hathaway murder, believes that "the family and friends of Faith Hathaway deserve some small portion of peace – a peace that can only be found in having Robert Willie [Matthew Poncelet in the film] pass forever from the public arena where in

death, in the eyes of some, he has attained the status of victim" (Varnado 2003, 14). Varnado laments that when Susan Sarandon accepted her Academy Award in 1995 for playing Sister Helen and praised the nun in her speech, the actress never mentioned the victim Faith Hathaway nor said anything "of the lives of her parents [the Harveys] who were decimated by the crimes" (Varnado 2003, 15). Harvey, the model for Clyde Percy in Robbins's film, expresses bitterness toward Willie, which is certainly understandable, for anyone would feel very angry when his or her daughter is raped and brutally murdered; yet the comment manifests a bitter desire for revenge, which cannot bring back his beloved daughter. Viewers empathize with Percy for the death of his beloved daughter but recognize that the killing of Poncelet would not provide him with the release of his bitterness and the solace he craves.

In the film, Robbins juxtaposes Clyde Percy's hard-hearted attitude toward Poncelet with the forgiving and begrudgingly charitable feelings of Earl Delacroix. Both men lose a child, yet Percy refuses to forgive Matthew and expresses anger toward him and Prejean, while Delacroix gradually loses his hatred for the killer. Perhaps the distinction is logical, for Delacroix's son was murdered, yet Percy's daughter was both brutally raped and slain. Robbins gives this grieving parent the name "Delacroix," which is French for "of the cross" – signifying his eventual Christian and forgiving attitude toward Poncelet. Delacroix overcomes his bitter hatred toward Ponecelet, attends a grief support group, and manages to feel compassion toward him, which serves as a double sacrifice. Delacroix has already lost his son, and now his forgiveness, by which he removes from himself the right to retribution (which might have healed his wound emotionally through revenge), results in a second sacrifice. Because of his willingness to forgive Matthew for his crimes, Delacroix is redeemed. Delacroix distinguishes himself from unforgiving people like Clyde Percy, Warden Hartman, and the merciless prison guards. Delacroix's forgiveness of Poncelet is pivotal to the film, for it manifests his nobility of spirit and generosity by taking away his desire for retribution, so Robbins chooses to end the movie with him praying with Sister Helen. Delacroix's bitterness is lifted, and he achieves a nobility of spirit through his love and forgiveness.

Paul Lauritzen concedes that "some supporters of capital punishment have insisted that anger and rage are the appropriate moral responses to crimes like those committed by [Patrick] Sonnier and Robert Willie [the historical models for Poncelet], and that to reject the anger and rage would be to betray the victims, just as Prejean worried that it might. But Prejean does not deny that anger is appropriate; rather, her view is that love and forgiveness are possible, and that capital punishment is incompatible with these" (Lauritzen 1998, 232). Sister Helen understands the pain endured by the victims' families as they attempt to come to terms with the painful loss of a loved one. She tries to redirect the anger and bitterness into a more positive, forgiving, and spiritual response that will ultimately help diminish the pain felt by the families. In the book *Dead Man Walking*, Sister Helen admits:

> If someone I love should be killed, I know I would feel rage, loss, grief, helplessness, perhaps for the rest of my life. But Jesus Christ, whose way of life I try to follow, refused to meet hate with hate and violence with violence. I pray for the strength to be like him. I cannot believe in a God who metes out hurt for hurt,

> pain for pain, torture for torture. Nor do I believe that God invests human representatives with such power to torture and kill. The paths of history are stained with the blood of those who have fallen victim to "God's Avengers." Kings and Popes and military generals and heads of state have killed, claiming God's authority and God's blessing. I do not believe in such a God. (Prejean 1993, 21)

By seeking vengeance against Poncelet for his crime, the governor, the courts, and the victims' families (despite the terrible pain they must feel) usurp God's role as the dispenser of justice and the One who decides when people should die. God says: "Vengeance is mine and recompense, for the time they lose their footing; . . . Surely, the LORD will do justice for his people; on his servants he will have pity" (Deuteronomy 32: 35-36) (*The Catholic Study Bible* 2011). By deciding to kill Poncelet and actively working toward taking his life, they play God and usurp His role as judge of their fellow human beings.

The attempts to use Scripture to justify the killing of Matthew appear misguided. The following exchange occurs in the film between a prison guard and Sister Helen shortly before Poncelet's execution:

> *Prison guard*: Tell me something, sister: what is a nun doing in a place like this? Shouldn't you be teaching children? Do you know what this man has done? How he killed them kids?. . . You know what the Bible says, "An eye for an eye."
> *Sister Helen*: You know what else the Bible asks for? Death is a punishment for adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, trespassing on sacred ground, profaning the Sabbath, and contempt for parents. (*The Catholic Study Bible* 2011)

The prison guard relinquishes his argument, claiming that he cannot win a Scripture-quoting debate with a nun. He loses this argument with Prejean, not because she is a nun, but rather because he mindlessly cites one passage from the Bible, without thinking about it carefully or considering other passages of Scripture. The passage regarding "[a]n eye for an eye" that the guard quotes, which appears three times in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21), is perhaps meant to be taken figuratively, not literally.

Furthermore, in her book, Sister Prejean notes that "no person with common sense would dream of appropriating such a moral code today [...]" (Prejean 1993, 195). Christ clearly disapproved of vengeance and the passage to which the guard refers. Jesus claimed, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well" (Matthew 5:38-39). People can cite the Old Testament to justify capital punishment, but they don't quote Christ to support it.

Many Biblical passages in the New Testament deal with forgiveness and mercy, yet the prison guard fails to consider them. The guard thinks from an Old Testament philosophy while Prejean considers the forgiveness and charity that Jesus Christ preached in the New Testament. The guard, for instance, does not think of the parable (Matthew 18: 23-35) that Jesus mentioned to Peter in which the

king of a country (the nation serves as a microcosm for God and His kingdom) decides to forgive an enormous debt incurred by one of his servants; the servant then demands the payment of a debt from a fellow servant and has the man thrown in jail for not repaying it. The king, upon hearing about the lack of mercy and forgiveness exhibited by the servant he just forgave, orders the servant punished. Christ tells Peter and others, "So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart" (Matthew 18:35). The inhumanity of capital punishment relates directly to remorse and redemption because the murderer must have the opportunity to recognize the sin and its painful effect upon the victim and victim's family. Capital punishment dehumanizes the perpetrator, while Sister Helen's love for the humanity of Poncelet raises him from the degradation of being relegated to the animal kingdom and restores him to his rightful status as a "Son of God."

It is noteworthy that many passages regarding mercy and forgiveness appear in the Gospel of Matthew because that is the name that Robbins selected for the dead man walking. Robbins based his film on the experiences of two men on death row, neither of them named "Matthew." Robbins could have chosen any name for the protagonist; he selected "Matthew," indicating that the name possesses some meaning in regard to the film, perhaps relating to mercy, forgiveness, and the settlement of accounts. The Book of Matthew is the only Gospel that discusses the aforementioned king who wants to settle accounts with his servants (Matthew 18: 23-35). This section of Matthew, which has no counterpart in Mark, Luke, or John, focuses on how forgiveness can settle accounts between people who are engaged in a bitter or estranged relationship. Matthew must feel merciful and compassionate toward the Delacroix and Percy families for the suffering he has caused them, ridding himself of his hatred for them. Prejean realizes that in order for Poncelet to be spiritually redeemed, he must settle accounts and forgive those who seek his death: he must stop thinking solely of himself and must understand how much suffering he has made the two families endure. If Poncelet experiences a spiritual awakening, when he is executed, he will, according to Sister Helen Prejean, walk with Christ. Janelle Reinelt says, "The symbols and signs of the passion of Christ overlap with the action of state executions (something *Dead Man Walking* certainly exploited visually in the crucifixion iconography of both the film and the opera)" (Reinelt 2005, 107).

In the film, Robbins works hard to demonstrate a contrast between Matthew Poncelet's state of mind at the beginning of the film and at the conclusion to manifest to the audience that all people can change their behavior and are thus deserving of forgiveness and mercy. Upon witnessing how Sister Helen works altruistically on his behalf and empathizes with him, Matthew changes his behavior and his outlook on life and faith. Initially, he exploits Sister Helen and tries to ensure her aid by making her feel guilty: in a phone call, he pleads to her, "You're all I've got. You're not fading on me, are you?" (Robbins 1995). He even tries to make her feel uncomfortable by talking about sex. She chastises him, saying, "Death is breathing down your neck and here you are, playing your little Matt-on-the-make games." When she demands his respect, he asks sarcastically, "Why? Because you're a nun?" Sister Helen responds firmly, "Because I'm a person" (Robbins 1995). At the

conclusion, Poncelet points out that capital punishment is wrongful because he is a person and thus is worthy of life, despite his past misdeeds.

Sister Helen teaches him to treat others respectfully and to care about people other than himself; she shows him that all human beings have feelings and that the lives of all people – including him – have meaning. With Prejean's spiritual guidance, he transforms from a self-absorbed, self-pitying murderer into a caring individual who accepts Christ as his savior. He becomes empathetic and polite, and he expresses genuine concern for Sister Helen's welfare, such as when the nun faints. He also reads his Bible. He learns from Prejean that he must go far beyond seeking a loophole in the Bible: Sister Helen advises him, "Redemption isn't some kind of free admission ticket that you get because Jesus paid a price. You have to participate in your own redemption. You have work to do" (Robbins 1995). Sister Helen becomes his role model and then his spiritual advisor. He thanks her for loving him because he needs love and acceptance from others before he can love and accept himself. Love has "an intrinsic connection with God, who is, according to Scripture, Love. As such, Love is understood to be a divinely infused habit orienting the person towards the divine and inclining him or her toward others for God's sake" (Wright 2009, 202). Prejean tells Matthew, "I want the last face you see in this world to be the face of love, so you look at me when they do this thing. I'll be the face of love for you" (Robbins 1995). He then realizes that despite his terrible misdeeds, God loves him. Before receiving Sister Helen's spiritual guidance, Matthew considered God a vengeful and cruel deity. He informs Sister Helen that he dreamed that he was about to be fried when "God came into my cell with a chef's hat on and started to roll me around in bread" (Robbins 1995). Later, when Prejean tells him, "You are a son of God," Matthew replies, "Thank you. I've never been called a son of God before. I've been called a son of a you-know-what plenty of times, but I've never been called a son of God" (Robbins 1995). Despite his joke, he is clearly moved by his realization that God loves him. This love allows him to believe in redemption and forgiveness: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

The transformation of Matthew Poncelet is significant in the film because it allows the audience to discern the capacity for redemption and thus the cruelty and inhumanity of capital punishment. Robbins humanizes Matthew, allowing the writer and director to emphasize effectively the brutality of state-sponsored executions. Audiences might not sympathize, and thus find the punishment cruel, if they consider the doomed man to be evil and beyond redemption. Robbins said in an interview, "I wanted to take the extreme, present the guilty person, the contemptible person, the awful crime. If you're against the death penalty only because sometimes innocent people die, then you're not really against the death penalty. The real moral question here is whether we have the right to kill anyone" (Grundmann 1996, 7). Robbins's moral question resonates more with the audience when they witness Poncelet's suffering at his execution.

However, Robbins might not be describing his protagonist accurately. Poncelet, as portrayed by actor Sean Penn, is far from despicable and evil, and his guilt as a murderer is not established until the film is almost over; even the lie detector test that he insists upon taking is inconclusive because

of his anxiety over his impending execution. Despite the flashbacks of the brutal crime, Matthew's neo-Nazi diatribe, and Clyde Percy's vivid description of his daughter's horrific death, Poncelet is portrayed, to some extent, as a sympathetic character. He loves his mother, loves Sister Helen, and jokes with his brothers hours before his execution. Poncelet had a terrible father who took him to bars starting when he was only twelve years old and an incompetent defense lawyer (actually a tax lawyer who never tried a capital case before and who raised only one objection throughout the entire trial). His warmth and extenuating circumstances allow the audience to sympathize with him when he is executed. In an interview, Robbins mentions that a Southern radio shock jock, who supported capital punishment, viewed the film. The film changed his mind about capital punishment because of the scene in which Matthew is denied the opportunity to hug his mother before he is led to his execution (Grundmann 1996, 6). The scene evokes pathos for Matthew and his mother, making viewers ponder why people who are punishing Poncelet for being cruel are themselves behaving so inhumanely that they do not allow a final hug between the doomed man and his own mother. Matthew expresses concern for his mother's health as she leaves the room. He does not lose his temper or complain, but rather patiently accepts the denial of a final hug, rendering him with more dignity and humanity than the people who are executing him. The same holds true when the prison guards deny Poncelet the last ten minutes he is entitled to spend with his family before his execution, showing their disrespect for him and their urgent desire to kill him. Again, Matthew simply accepts the insult and remains poised. Poncelet also apologizes to the Delacroix and Percy families before he dies and takes responsibility for his crime, further humanizing himself. He confesses to Mr. Delacroix, "I ask you for forgiveness. It's a terrible thing I've done" (Robbins 1995). He tells the Percies sincerely, "I hope my death gives you some relief" (Robbins 1995). The final image that Poncelet envisions as he dies is telling: he thinks of the forest where the bodies of Hope Percy and Walter Delacroix lie, indicating that he is reliving his sin in his mind and feeling remorseful for the murders. His final thought, a vision that serves as a form of settling accounts by taking responsibility, manifests his redemption. Thus, Matthew is not a monster but rather a human being with some decent, redemptive qualities; consequently, many audience members might disapprove of his execution.

Matthew's new lawyer, Hilton Barber (Robert Prosky), tells people at a hearing that lethal injection – and any form of capital punishment – is cruel and inhuman punishment. There is an illusion that the victim experiences no pain because his face becomes paralyzed, and thus he cannot express anguish. Barber remarks that lethal injection, like the electric chair, leads to a horrendous and painful death. The lawyer notes that there are actually three injections, which stop the heart and implode the lungs: the "face just goes to sleep while inside his organs are going through Armageddon" (Robbins 1995). John R. Hamilton observes that "Robbins forces his viewers, via tight close-up, to observe the annihilating chemical conduit needle being slid into Sean Penn's vein, to watch the robotic face of the nurse who swabs his arm, the slow progress of the liquids through the tubes, and a full frame view of Poncelet's [Penn's] unhooded face as he looks out at the witnesses through the glass window" (Hamilton 2002, 121). Sister Helen remarks in her book that people share the

misconception that lethal injection is humane: "one dimension of suffering that can never be eliminated when death is imposed on a conscious human being: the horror of being put to death against your will and the agony of anticipation [....] [A]s if you feel the terror of death any less because chemicals are being used to kill you instead of electricity or bullets or rope?" (Prejean 1993, 217). Prejean's words concerning the physical horrors involved in capital punishment are very powerful not only because of her reasoning, but also because of the intensity of her emotional feelings.

Viewers of the film can readily discern the pain that Matthew Poncelet endures. His fingers wiggle and shake but are then still. Although Matthew made Walter Delacroix and Hope Percy suffer a great deal, people who consider it shameful that they had to endure such an abomination should realize that a similar atrocity is being inflicted upon Poncelet. That is also shameful.

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The Tambora – Frankenstein Myth: The Monster Inspired

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Abstract:

The link between the volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815 and Mary Shelley's composition of Frankenstein has attained mythic status. The myth uses a scientific frame to promote the idea that the Tambora event led to Mary Shelley's invention of the Frankenstein story because the eruption so altered the climate of Europe (lowering the temperatures, creating rainy electrical storms, producing frosts and floods, and generally darkening the landscape) that Shelley dreamt up the idea for her monstrous horror tale as a result. She was then imprisoned indoors by the volcanically-induced bad summer weather of 1816 and thus encouraged to craft the story into a full length gothic novel. This paper outlines the structure of this Tambora – Frankenstein myth and then attempts to investigate its roles, goals, and meanings as ascribed by various (mostly 'pop science' scholars) and journalists. An attempt is then made to elucidate the problems, failings, and miscalculations of the Myth.

Keywords: Frankenstein volcano; scientific myth; science fiction; gothic literature.

Introduction

In April 1815, on the island of Sumbawa in the East Indies, the 14,000 foot Tambora volcano underwent a massive eruption. Geologists now believe it was the biggest eruptive event in recorded history, thousands of times stronger than the eruptions of Mt St Helens (1980) or Vesuvius (79AD) and some ten to twenty times stronger than the famous Krakatoa eruption of 1883.[1] The Tambora eruption was so loud that many hundreds of miles away the British Governor of Java, Stamford Raffles, thought that an enemy fleet might have started a cannon battle somewhere off the coast.[2]

The eruption spewed up to 175 cubic kilometers of hot dusty ashy material into the sky to a height of some 40 kilometers. Some of it fell back to ground, pretty quickish, as huge molten lava boulders or pumice rocks but much of it entered the atmosphere as particulate ash and dust. This massive eruption also rapidly and drastically altered the appearance of Mount Tambora. For 5000 years, Tambora had stood upon a peninsula of Sumbawa as a stereotypical strato-volcano. However, after the explosion, Tambora lost a third of its height to become shield-shaped; a giant gentle mound instead of a towering cone.

The 1815 Tambora eruption was catastrophic for the East Indies[3]; wiping away the Kingdom

of Tambora and also impacting harshly upon Lombok, Bali, Java, and some other populated islands as well; firstly by causing the death of some 10,000 locals during the initial eruption, and then via the decimation of the agricultural and fishing capacity upon and around Sumbawa. Soon, there was large scale disease, hunger, and displacement. These impacts are estimated to have caused some 30,000 – 50,000 more deaths upon Sumbawa and the nearby islands within a few years of the initial eruption.

In the months following the eruption, the dust and ash particles spread high and wide across the northern hemisphere[4], lowering the amount of sunlight hitting the world's surface and forcing an average drop in temperature of about half – a – degree centigrade from seasonal norms. By 1816, the year after the initial eruption, parts of central Europe and parts of the Atlantic states and territories of the US and Canada were affected, perhaps severely. In these regions, the climate cooling and extreme cold weather events caused by the filtering-out of incidental sunlight had seemingly so impacted the 1816 harvests that famine, disease and displacement are thought to have caused an equal amount of death and disturbance in these regions as in the East Indies. In these affected regions, 1816 thence became known as the 'Year Without a Summer'.

Some scientists[5] have also suggested that Europe's most important geo-political event of 1815 was also partly determined by Tambora; this being Napoleon's defeat in the Battle of Waterloo. The argument goes that some of the electrically-charged ash dispersed high into the atmosphere would have 'short-circuited' the ionospheric environment in such a way so as to cause an unseasonal downpour upon the fields of Waterloo. Since all the fields of Waterloo were clogged up with mud, Napoleon couldn't readily put his favored tactical advantages into early affect against the British forces. Most notably, in fear of getting his cannon stuck in the wet morning mud, the French commander started the battle too late in the day to ensure victory. As history records, the fight was very close but ended with Napoleon scuttling away back to Paris just as his army was finally overcome. This defeat finally put to rest Napoleon's domination of Europe.[6]

Outside of geo-political arena, and into the post-Napoleonic era, the devastating Eurasian cholera outbreak of the 1820s has also been blamed on Tambora[7], since the epidemic is thought to have started as a result of Tambora-induced climate change in and around the Bay of Bengal in 1816. Like Europe and the Atlantic region of northern North America, the 1816 weather in Bengal was extreme: excessive rain, unusual flooding, and then agricultural degradation and starvation; all making a major disease outbreak more than likely.

As well as global politics and global health, the Tambora eruption is said to have impacted upon the world of art.[8] Weird red skies were supposedly produced by the volcanic dust in the atmosphere over Europe during 1816 and are said to have been captured in the paintings of William Turner in England and Caspar David Friedrich in Germany.[9]

The art story we are most interested here, though, is the Tambora - Frankenstein link.[10] In 1816, Mary Shelley, daughter of the famous proto-feminist thinker Mary Wollstonecraft, was sojourning around Europe with her longterm lover, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. (At the time of conceiving *Frankenstein*, Mary was going by her maiden name, Mary Godwin, taken from her well-

known philosopher father, William Godwin). Before year's end, Mary and Percy would be married but in the meantime, they were travelling about Europe rather scandalously as unwed lovers to and from the Swiss chalet of the (even more scandalous) poet Lord Byron. Though Byron was celebrated and adored by many literary fans in his English homeland, in the summer of 1816 he was living in self-imposed exile near Geneva, Switzerland (with his physician-writer friend John Polidori) in order to avoid the many scandals and debt problems he had made for himself back in England. Altogether Byron, Polidori, and the Shelleys all fancied a summer of excessive exploratory leisure and pleasure upon the shores of Lake Geneva.[11] The Shelleys were keen, also, to explore the region surrounding the lake, too, and planned many walks through the nearby mountains and valleys but because the weather was often inclement – with frequent rainstorms plus many bitter days and icy nights – they spent more time indoors than they had originally intended: "It proved a wet, ungenial summer and incessant rain often confined us for days to the house".[12] In Byron's chalet, the group of writers gossiped about, and argued over, many of the important intellectual and political issues of the time. Yet, so dismal was the cold and wet weather, they eventually exhausted these topics by mid-summer and then started reading scary ghost tales to each other. However, they quickly exhausted this resource as well; after which Byron issued a challenge to see who amongst them could to write the scariest story.

In the wake of this, Byron and Percy Shelley soon got bored and returned to their poetry but Polidori ended up penning *The Vampyre*, now celebrated as the first modern vampire novel, whilst Mary Shelley had written down the framework of her *Frankenstein* novel.

Frankenstein was eventually published a few years later; featuring lots of icy landscapes, both glacial and polar; which advocates of the Tambora – Frankenstein myth say is a direct reflection of the icy weather of 1816.

The disastrous weather had also impacted upon the farmlands of central Europe, ruining harvests and dramatically increasing the price of rural produce. This precipitated a food crisis along with an unemployment and displacement crisis plus also high rates of hunger and disease. So outstanding were these impacts, according to the Tambora – Frankenstein myth, that the Shelley's must surely have been emotionally affected by the poverty-stricken peasant families lying and dying on the rural roadways of Switzerland and France as they travelled to and from Geneva. Indeed, it's been noted by some[13] that the Frankenstein monster is a metaphor for these poor wretched abandoned castaways with their horrific appearance and forlorn faces. Because of these various links, the weather of 1816 has been advanced by some Tambora – Frankenstein mythmakers as the single most important influence upon *Frankenstein*'s creation.

The Problems with the Tambora Explanation

The Tambora – Frankenstein myth has appeared across the spectrum of popular science media from science blogs to science magazine articles and into radio broadcasts and TV shows dealing with either science or the history of science.[14] In a moment, we shall explore why the myth is a problem – if you take it seriously. Just before that, let's explain how the Tambora eruption, as a

historic event, might have been oversold before even dragging *Frankenstein* into the debate since many of the claims are more controversial and speculative than the claimants imply.

To start with, it is not at all clear from either historical studies or climatic studies that 1816 was too much colder or rainier or icier than the years preceding it or following it. The decades of the late 18th and early 19th century were possibly all a little colder than earlier decades anyhow; part of what's now known as the Dalton Minimum solar cycle set between 1790 and 1820 (and even this proposed 'spell of cold decades' was set within the little Ice Age that ran from about 1700 to 1850).[15] These chronic colder years (colder by fractions of a degree, that is) may have done far more to induce slow speed continuous hardship and disaster across Europe's farming hinterlands than any one outstanding cold season (such as the summer of 1816).[16]

With regards to Switzerland, where Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein*, the 1816 cooling is sometimes said to be greater than anywhere else; up to and around 2.5 degrees centigrade. However, perhaps only a little bit of this, around 0.7 degrees can be attributed directly or indirectly to the 1815 Tambora volcanic event. The rest comes from other climate effects (such as the Dalton Minimum or the Little Ice Age) and the unpredictable internal variability of the European climate system. At least this is what's suggested in a special report on Tambora's impacts written by Swiss experts.[17] The same report also goes on to state Tambora's impact on poverty and hunger in 1816 was arguably minor.

Furthermore, the fixation with the volcanically-determined poverty in 1816 Europe forgets or negates the impact of social and political events. Here we must refer to the Napoleonic Wars, first and foremost. From 1897 to 1815, France and much of Europe was on a war footing with the economy devoted to support for, or defense against, Napoleon Bonaparte's French imperialism.[18] By 1815, the calamitous state of European trade (with banks and businesses routinely collapsing, with trade routes blocked and broken, and with inflation soaring) made it difficult for the petit bourgeoisie to make a good living and also for the commercial elite and the landed gentry to conduct their standard business practices. This would've then greatly impacted upon the peasantry and laborers in turn. These impacts had hardly abated by 1816 because millions of returning soldiers competed with civilian jobless for scant employment opportunities. Many involved in Napoleon's war economy found it nigh-on impossible to resettle into the decimated agricultural and manufacturing sectors; especially with a bankrupt government at the helm.[19]

Those who support the Tambora – Frankenstein myth sometimes indicate that, maybe, it was the Napoleonic Wars working *in tandem* with the cooled weather[20] that explains all the famine and disease and general social and environmental darkness in 1816 Europe. But even if some conjunction between the two ideas, 'war impact vs climate impact' is worked out by saying they interacted to produce high poverty, this does not mean that Tambora should be uncritically accepted as a prime weather-maker for 1816 (for the reasons suggested in the above paragraphs).

And in Mary Shelley's home nation, England (where she finished composing the *Frankenstein* novel during 1816 and 1817), it was not so much the weather that made life harder than usual during

1816. It was more to do with the introduction of the Corn Laws the year before[21] whereby the UK parliament heavily taxed the import of cheap foodstuffs in order to protect British grain growers -- even when harvests were poor and the price of domestic food was very high.

We might also question the idea that the inclement weather of 1816 was the direct cause of the poverty that Mary Shelley might have witnessed travelling through continental Europe that year. For the early decades of the 19th Century, a waxing and waning background level of poverty would have been extant.[22] This is true even if we take into account the economic effects of the Napoleonic Wars, and especially so if we note that social welfare was chronically haphazard and inadequate whilst also acknowledging the episodic 'boom and bust' cycles that involved vacillating periods of over-production and under-consumption, and also the disrupting and dislocating effects of the burgeoning Industrial Revolution.[23]

If it seems too much to blame Tambora for the bad weather of 1816, and thence to also blame Tambora for European poverty and misery, then you might rightly balk at the way the eruption supposedly led to the creation of a piece of literary art that is the *Frankenstein* novel. (If you want to hear a primal reaction from the 21st century literati at first encounter with the myth, you can try listening to Melvyn Bragg's reaction in one of his 'In Our Time' BBC radio features.)[24]

If the Tambora eruption was a factor in the creation of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley herself was, of course, completely unaware of it whilst writing the novel since the scale of the eruption was little explored until 20th century volcanology came along. So any 'cause and effect' relationship between Tambora and Frankenstein was from beyond Shelley's own agency. As for the weather, it's true that the *Frankenstein* novel at times broods with stormy and frosty scenery[25] and it's also true that Mary Shelley was occasionally affected by the inclement weather of Lake Geneva during her 1816 summer residence:

> We watch them [the thunderstorms] as they approach from the opposite side of the lake, observing the lightning play among the clouds in various parts of the heavens, and dart in jagged figures upon the piney heights of the Jura mountains, dark with the shadow of the overhanging cloud, while perhaps the sun is shining cheerily upon us. One night we enjoyed a finer storm than I had ever before beheld. The lake was lit up – the pines on Jura made visible, and all the scene illuminated for an instant, when a pitchy blackness succeeded, and the thunder came in frightful bursts over our heads amid the darkness.[26, 27]

However, even if there were more than the usual number of storms crashing over Lake Geneva for Mary Shelley to be awed by, anybody that's spent a full summer in central Europe will know summer rainstorms as a common, sometimes daily, phenomenon. During a typical summer in Switzerland, for instance, most of the rain falls in this exact way; in the form of sometimes very heavy thunderstorms. These storms can also sometimes bring heavy hail and snowfall to the alpine zones nearby. So, if stormy weather plus ice and snow were essential factors in pushing the ambience of *Frankenstein* toward darkness and frigidity, Shelley would have been exposed to such weather on any given (non-volcanic affected) summer on the shores of Lake Geneva. As an example of this,

consider that during the summer of 2019, a violent storm hit Lake Geneva so hard that a few boat-going tourists were drowned.[28] This tragic event occurred on almost the same corresponding June day that Shelley conceived the Frankenstein story – and of course without any initiating volcanic eruption.

Incidentally, it was a violent summer storm in which Percy Bysshe Shelley met his death. A few years after their Geneva experience, the Shelleys again toured to Europe to visit Lord Byron, this time in Italy. In July 1822, in the Gulf of Livorna, Byron and Percy set sail in their respective yachts to race each other across coastal waters whence a great storm hit them. Though Byron made it through safe and well, Shelley's boat was lost at sea, his body washing ashore a few days later.[29] Again, just in case you are wondering, no huge East Indies volcano had erupted the year before.

Whilst in Geneva during the 'Year Without a Summer', the Shelley's also enjoyed sojourns to the icy glaciers in the mountains nearby.[30] But the fact that they could travel to the mountains to view the icy scenes meant the summer wasn't one continuous dark and dismal episode but instead a mixture or cold days and warm days, stormy and fine. The sun keeps making an appearance at least periodically. And although there were record floods in and around Lake Geneva late in the summer[31] which might have given *Frankenstein* an even more tempestuous resonance, the Shelley's had left Switzerland by then.

In any case, we might reasonably ask 'how many lightning storms did Shelley have to witness in Geneva during the summer of 1816 before it sparked *Frankenstein* into her thoughts'? Did she require an above-average number – as is implied by the Tambora – Frankenstein myth? Or maybe just the average number due for any typical Geneva summer? Or just one?

Or maybe none since surely a big part of the writing craft is to utilize imagination and memory to provoke new scenes and events into words that the writer may never have witnessed personally. If we assert that Mary Shelley somehow didn't have the imagination to conjure up a brooding, dark and icy ambience – without witnessing them first hand – then we might be left wondering how many dead human bodies she had to witness being dug up, chopped to bits, and stitched back together in order to come up with her idea of the monster. Conversely, if we are to give Tambora credit for *Frankenstein*, then we might wonder which massive geological catastrophe deserves credit for Shelley's next half-a-dozen major works; most of which were also infused with dark fantasy.[32]

The Tambora – Frankenstein myth also claims that Tambora is responsible another recurring subtheme in the novel; its fixations with human misery.[33] According to the myth, Shelley inflects so much misery and dislocation into the novel only because Tambora created such misery and dislocation right there in Europe right in front of her face as she wrote. However, it's probable that Shelley would have had enough opportunity to observe misery and destitution and dislocation either in central Europe or in her English homeland without having endured the Year Without a Summer. After all, human misery was a common theme of study for most politically-inclined writers of the times, most especially with respect to the works of Mary Shelley's famous philosopher parents, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, and also with respect to Percy Bysshe Shelley's ideas as well.[34] And also, Mary Shelley had had the chance to witness European poverty with her own eyes

on her first pre-Tambora trip to Europe in 2014 whence she said: "The distress of the inhabitants, whose houses had been burned, their cattle killed and all their wealth destroyed, has given a sting to my detestation of war."[35]

Those convinced of the Tambora – Frankenstein myth often cite the effect that the eruption had on the other arts to bolster their idea that culture could, theoretically, be 'volcanically-determined'. For instance, the red-sky paintings of Turner and Caspar mentioned above.[36] However, unlike Mary Shelley, who was imagining and constructing her own narratives of a complicated social and natural environment, Turner and Caspar were merely recording the environment as they saw it. And if Tambora is thought to be so significant so as to cast a shadow over the artistic mind of Europe; pushing writers and artists into dark romanticism; we should note that the moody gothic genre epitomized by *Frankenstein* started well before Tambora with the likes of late 18th century literature by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe and William Thomas Beckford.[37]

As well as this, we should probably also point out that European history is replete with many "Years Without a Summer", including 1529, 1588, 1601, 1618, 1628, 1675 and 1813[38] and so the foreboding and horrific climatic/artistic uniqueness of 1816 might be called into question.

What really made Frankenstein?

Apart from Mary Shelley's fertile and active imagination, a whole host of commonly external causative factors have been acknowledged to have inspired the creation and character of the *Frankenstein* novel. We'll briefly outline these below, so that you might note how all of these seem far better candidates for inspiring the story than the faraway Tambora event.

It's long been thought that *Frankenstein* is a comment upon the French Revolution in some manner. For instance, the dreaded monster is thought to emote the horror felt by the French aristocracy (and the Church as well) as the unrefined and unholy peasantry revolted against them. The novel could also be read as a comment on the way Napoleon Bonaparte transformed the French Revolution to meet his own horrific imperialist ambitions since what began as a social movement with high minded goals soon turned into civic terror and expansionist war on a scale maybe hitherto unknown.[39]

Other literary critics have suggested that *Frankenstein* is a fractured reflection of a rebellion much closer to Shelley's English homeland than the French Revolution – that of the Luddite uprising. The Luddites were textile worker communities rebelling against the introduction of textile machines into their industry which were threatening them with unemployment – and thusly impoverishment and destitution. During the years 1811-1816, some Luddites chose to smash the offending machines. In response, the British parliament introduced the death penalty for such acts. Lord Byron -- before he moved to Geneva -- criticized this draconian measure in an eloquent speech to the House of Lords and, years later, he crafted a poem that brazenly defended Luddism. If Mary Shelley were fashioning *Frankenstein* to empathize with the Luddite movement[40], it would certainly add to the reading of the novel as a prescient warning against the invention of repugnant and irresponsible technologies.

A further contributory factor in the making of the Frankenstein story was the Shelley's European travels. As indicated above, their 1816 trip to Geneva wasn't their first or last sojourn through Europe. In 1814, the two had run away together in a scandalous elopement across the English Channel to France and up the Rhine all the way to mountain-straddled Lucerne. One locale they stopped off at was near Darmstadt, not far away from a decaying castle going by the name of 'Frankenstein'. Within this castle, there once lived an alchemist called Conrad Dippel who is commonly thought to have engaged in experiments on dead bodies in order to find the elixir of life. It's long been asserted that Mary Shelley's scientist in *Frankenstein* owed something to the life and works of Conrad Dippel.[41]

Beyond Dippel, another experimentalist that has been noted as inspiring Shelley's *Frankenstein* was Luigi Galvani, who in the late 18th century often zapped dead frogs with electricity during public lectures so as to surprise and entertain his audience as the legs of the frogs spasmed and twitched, as though the frog was somehow coming to life.[42]

Mary Shelley's fondness for travel[43] is itself a likely contributory factor in the development of *Frankenstein*. The novel certainly has a road movie feel to it, stressing the emotional turmoil of an expedition, of voyage, of discovery, of dislocation, of transgression of social and legal norms, and of abandonment – all set against the backdrop of ever-changing towns and cities and landscapes. Since Geneva was one of Mary Shelley's 'bases' in her travels, it logically became the hometown of the scientist Frankenstein.

Further to the theme of geography, and also in regard to the cold icy gloom of the novel, some literary experts believe Shelley was actively critiquing the Arctic explorations of the British Admiralty as she wrote about how both Frankenstein, the scientist, and Frankenstein, the monster, met again and again in such environs.[44] Of course, according to the Tambora - Frankenstein myth, the icy environs so prevalent in *Frankenstein* were forced upon Shelley's mind because of the 'Year Without a Summer', yet the icy/snowy misadventures and landscapes that abound in *Frankenstein* were familiar to readers of early 19th Century British newspapers which were avidly following the exploits of British explorers as they attempted to conquer many regions of the world, including the Arctic Ocean.

Another inspiration for *Frankenstein* was Mary Shelley's experiences with childbirth.[45] By the time she had completed the novel, Shelley had already been pregnant twice; the first ending in with the death of a baby born premature. *Frankenstein* might well have been a reaction to the desire to bring her dead baby back to life as well as a reaction to the background emotional worries about giving birth to a sick or malformed infant.[46]

Further to the theme of parenting and family; some literary critics have suggested that Frankenstein was somehow inspired by the personality of Mary Shelley's fiancé / husband Percy.[47] Percy Bysshe Shelley was an ambitious 'libertine' genius who took pride in stretching the limits of creativity and of personal freedom -- including sexual freedom. As with the scientist in *Frankenstein*, this occasionally meant riding roughshod over the feelings of others and digressing from social convention. Also, the way that the scientist Frankenstein so readily abandoned his creature after he'd

brought it into existence might be Mary Shelley's reflection on the way Percy so quickly and easily recovered from the death of their first child.

As well as this, the *Frankenstein* novel was probably equally inspired by Mary Shelley's other family troubles.[48] Firstly, Mary Shelley may have felt responsible regarding the death of her celebrated writer mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died of childbed fever days after Mary's birth.

Secondly, when Mary Shelley had run away to elope in Europe with Percy in 1814; it was only just after Percy had abandoned his pregnant wife in England. Mary might well have been expressing her own guilt about this situation as she wrote about of the Frankenstein monster complaining about being the abandoned son of a careless creator.

Thirdly, during one of their sojourns around Europe, Percy Bysshe Shelley may have also fathered a child with Mary Shelley's half-sister Claire Clairmont. Though, when the baby was born, Byron was named the father and the Shelleys migrated all the way to Venice to deliver it to him. (Alas, he left it at a convent where it would die within a few years). If *Frankenstein*'s monster is somehow the representation of an innocent child left forsaken without fatherly care, Mary Shelley would've hadmore than the average number of emotional experiences to draw upon.

If we accept that *Frankenstein*'s monster is an 'abandoned child' character, it can readily be noted how Mary Shelley writes into the creature her appreciation of the great Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacque Rousseau[49], who she'd avidly read during her time in Switzerland. Most traditionalists of the time believed that all children were 'born evil' or else born totally selfish and uncivilized. They could only be 'made good' by learning the manners and norms of polite society. Mary Shelley, in contrast, was trying to convey the spirit of Rousseau (and one might add, of the French Revolution) in advancing the belief that all children are born good and kind and are only turned bad through neglect or by a harsh social environment. Given this, then, one moral of the story seems to be that Frankenstein's creature could easily have been a 'good monster' instead of a 'bad monster' if only someone, his scientist/creator/father most notably, had shown him some care and guidance.

Given these multifarious and interlocking inspirations for the *Frankenstein* novel, it seems the Tambora link is but one factor with negligible (or likely nil) influence on the creation of either the *Frankenstein* the novel or the Frankenstein characters. One problem with the Tambora – Frankenstein myth is the attention it takes away from these other inspirations and origins. In many films and articles given over to the history of *Frankenstein*, the Tambora – Frankenstein myth takes up an underserved percentage of the story; often leaving little or no explication of these other factors. Readers and viewers around the world, especially those of 'popular science', are thusly either short-changed or thoroughly led astray when they hear about the intellectual and social background of the culturally significant Frankenstein story.

Lessons of the Tambora – Frankenstein link

Why has the Tambora – Frankenstein link reached mythic status? The answer lies with the perceived moral messages that the myth propagates, combined with its potential role to rescue and

elevate science from the very failings so astutely identified by Mary Shelley.

A primary message of the Tambora – Frankenstein myth (according to those who hold to it) is its illustrative lesson about the impact of climate change. If humans do as Tambora did, i.e.: emit vast amounts of pollution into the atmosphere, then they are going to force upon the world a myriad of 1816-esque disasters: floods and storms, agricultural collapse; economic stagnation, plus human misery, poverty and disruption. For those who believe that Mount Tambora forced climate change upon parts of early 19th century Europe, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is artistic witness to a global environmental crisis.[50] Or as reported by a Smithsonian magazine writer:

> For Mary Shelley, Frankenstein was primarily an entertainment to "quicken the beatings of the heart," she wrote, but it has also long served as a warning not to overlook the consequences of humanity's tampering with nature. Fittingly, perhaps, the eruption that probably influenced the invention of that morality tale has, nearly two centuries later, taught me a similar lesson about the dangers of humanity's fouling our own atmosphere.[51]

Yet there is an obvious disconnect between the Tambora - Frankenstein myth and 21st century climate change. The Tambora eruption forced temporary climate cooling for a period of about a year in select parts of the Northern Hemisphere. The climate crisis of global warming, in contrast, is indisputably long-term and it also directs the thermometer in the opposite direction. As well, when we compare Tambora to global warming, there is a staggering dissonance between their respective causes such that any mode of response must be completely different. Dealing with an erupting tropical volcano is not the same as dealing with a global climate emergency with world-changing implications.

In a way though, the misapplication of the Tambora eruption as a warning against climate change is at least an improvement over previous scapegoating strategies that proposed volcanoes were the cause of global warming.[52]

Here, we can't go on without making a comment upon the 'unaware'-ness within the Tambora – Frankenstein myth. The fact that Shelley was unaware of the Tambora eruption and ignorant of its global atmospheric impact is forgiven by the Tambora – Frankenstein mythmakers since she lived in a time before modern science had uncovered the truth of global volcanic influence. This attempt to wrestle away the writerly agency from Shelley is, in effect, an attempt to explode a veil of scientific dust and ash over *Frankenstein*'s fine critique of scientific hubris. Thusly, the Tambora – Frankenstein myth has a social role within the scientific community to rescue science from Shelley's poignant criticism of that exact community.

From a feminist perspective[53], the Tambora - Frankenstein myth also works to devalue Shelley's skills as a speculative writer by insisting she was affected by forces only more recently successfully revealed my masculinist science. Yet, in contrast to the Tambora – Frankenstein myth, we might rightly assert that Shelley ably revealed and predicted the dangers of masculinist science via the characters of *Frankenstein*.

We can also find that the Tambora – Frankenstein mythmakers rely just about entirely on scientific disciplines to tell their story, relegating art and history in the process. In effect, they advocate that 21st century science is better at describing 19th Century nature and landscapes (and 19th Century society and politics) than 19th Century literature. Yet, Mary Shelley might riposte via the themes of the Frankenstein story that we shouldn't over-estimate the understanding proffered by modern scientific explorers since to do so confers upon intellectual pursuits a profound tendency toward dehumanization. Such a critique might quite aptly apply to the Tambora – Mythmakers, who've managed to reduce the act of literary creation to measurements of sulfurous dust in the Geneva air.

This same process of volcanic determinism also devalues all the other events that caused human misery in the years around 1816: most especially (but not only) the Napoleonic Wars. To help get things into perspective, and in fear that Tambora might overshadow the tragedy of the Napoleonic Wars in Romantic-era Europe, we could ask here which one was worse for humanity? Well, Tambora's eruption caused an estimated 100,000 or so deaths worldwide.[54] Yet the Napoleonic wars caused around 5,000,000 deaths – that's some 50 times more.[55]

Even restricting the misery to the Indonesian islands where Tambora blew its top, we can note that Napoleon-era European colonialism might have caused as much human death in early 19th Century as did the volcano. For instance, during Napoleon's rampages over Europe, the Netherlands was invaded by the French. This meant that on the other side of the world, the Dutch East Indies lost control of the populous state of Java to an opportunistic British force led by Stamford Raffles (the same Raffles who heard Tambora's explosions and thought they were cannon fire).

In his time as Governor of Java, Stamford Raffles had to crack down on various acts of Javanese resistance to British take-over. In the process, his troops shot and looted their way through various Javanese kingdoms. Whilst deaths at the hands of Raffles' troops may have stayed under the ten thousand mark, his heavy-handed intrusions probably prompted the onset of the Java Wars a few years later between the returning Dutch rulers and the local leaders. These wars ended up killing some 230,000 East Indies natives; surpassing the death toll of the Tambora eruption.[56] Thus, if the Tambora – Frankenstein myth is somehow supposed to underscore the influence, power and awesomeness of nature over humans, we might, in contrast, assert that humans, during the first decades of the early 1800s, did unto themselves much much worse.

Conclusions

One of the reasons to reject the Tambora - Frankenstein myth outright is to shoot down the anti-environmental idea that nature is somehow more menacing and dangerous to humans than humans are themselves. Fortunately, most of the myth's advocates do not seem to be operating to do this – at least on the surface. Instead their moral reasoning revolves around the way the Tambora – Frankenstein myth serves as a cautionary tale against catastrophic climate change; whether it be natural or anthropogenic. We, the authors, are very sympathetic to the idea that climate change is

impacting upon the Earth in a catastrophic manner but we hold little store in the idea that a short-term climate cooling event like Tambora is a suitable analogy to global warming. In fact, Tambora just does not seem like an analogy to climate change at all: the causes are different, the changes effected are different, the gases involved are different, the timescale and geographic scale is different, the repercussions and remediation strategies are different, the potential socio-technical solutions are different. The analogy is so tenuous, in fact, that perhaps the myth is being offered up in the world of public science to do something else entirely -- for instance, to promote the intellectual standing of climate science in the study of history[57] or in an effort to link volcano science with a contemporary social concern (i.e. climate change). Since every profession, be it scientific or non-scientific, battles for territory in both the intellectual world and in the contemporary political/cultural environment, so the Tambora – Frankenstein myth may be retold primarily as such weapon in these battles.

Endnotes:

1. For a detailed description of the Tambora eruption, see: Oppenheimer (2011) or Cavendish (2015) or Behringer (2019).
2. As recorded by Raffles (1830) in his memoirs and also reiterated by the likes of Evans (2002), Wood (2014), Klingaman & Klingaman (2016), and Mcnamara (2019).
3. About the magnitude of the Tambora eruption see for example: Self *et al* (1984), Harrington, ed. (1992), Klemetti (2015), Klingaman & Klingaman (2016), Behringer (2019) and Mcnamara (2019).
4. As explained by, for instance: Oppenheimer (2011) and Mcnamara (2019).
5. As outlined in Starr (2018), Osbourne (2018) and Bressen (2019).
6. You can review this in, for instance: Cornwell (2014) or Clayton (2014).
7. See, for instance, Wood (2014a).
8. See, for example, the arguments contained within Wood (2014) and Ritchie (2016).
9. As indicated in Zerefos *et al* (2006) and Broad (2014).
10. A short sampler list of articles and books advancing or supporting the Tambora – Frankenstein myth would include the following: Evans (2002), Jacquot (2007), Phillips (2006), Wood (2014), Zielinski (2015), Davis (2015), Cavendish (2015), Wood (2015), Townsend (2016), Gunderman (2016), Wilson (2016), Ritchie (2016), Malathronas (2016), Higgins (2017), Zaleski (2017), Stone (2017), Andrews (2018), Starr (2018), Blakemore (2018), Strickland (2019). Similarly, a short list of broadcasts advancing the Tambora – Frankenstein myth would include the following: Minor (1993), Kushner (1997), Winston (2003), Bartimae (2005), Stewart (2006), Greenfieldboyce (2007), Bragg (2016), Sands, ed. (2016), and Gillespie (2017).
11. See, for example: Perrotet (2011), Buzwell (2014), Gordon (2015), Mercer (2016), Wilson (2016), Laurence (2018) and Blakemore (2018).
12. As explained by Mary Shelley in the introduction of the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1831) and reiterated with Tambora – Frankenstein myth enthusiasm in Phillips (2006) and Wood (2014).
13. As conveyed in various chapters of the following works by Baldick (1987), Perkins (1992), Schor, ed. (2003).
14. See note 10 for a short list of such.
15. These climate effects are explained by writers such as Harrington, ed. (1992), Fagan (2001), Wagner & Zorita (2005), and Brönnimann & Krämer (2016).
16. These ideas have been expressed by the likes of Tann (1980), Luterbacher *et al* (2004) and Veale & Endfield (2016).
17. Which can be found here: Brönnimann & Krämer (2016).

18. As outlined in Grab (2003), O'Rourke (2006), Esdaile (2008), Dwyer (2014), Roberts (2014), and Emsley (2014).
19. As announced by the likes of Smith (2005), Esdaile (2008), Roberts (2014), Emsley (2016) and Veale & Endfield (2016).
20. As expressed in Harrington, ed. (1992), Trigo *et al.* (2009) and Wood (2014).
21. About the Corn Laws, you may review Eastwood (1996) or Barnes (1996).
22. For elucidation, see Woolf (2016) or Grell & Cunningham (2017).
23. See, for example: Landes (2003), Nye (2007), Allen (2009), Perrson & Sharp (2015).
24. See Bragg (2015).
25. The ice theme of Frankenstein is explored by, for instance: Spufford (1997*),* Carroll (2013), and Cavell (2017).
26. A scene explored by Zaleski (2017). Incidentally, though the monster's creation scene is often presented with blasts of lightning on a dark and stormy night, this owes more to its representations on the silver screen than to anything Shelley wrote in the book. Although Shelley wrote that the Frankenstein scientist infused the lifeless thing "with a spark of being" there's nil reference to lightning in this scene. So perhaps we shouldn't get carried away with positing that electrical storms were needed for 'sparking-up' the birth of Frankenstein (either for the characters or the novel as a whole).
27. Having identified all the cold and ice and rain and snow, though, it's also important to point out that the novel covers other seasons and weather scenarios in detail as well. The monster for instance gets all excited about spring during one of his monologues:
    "The pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the aspect of the Earth. Men, who before this change seemed to have been hid in caves, dispersed themselves, and were employed in various arts of cultivation. The birds sang in more cheerful notes, and the leaves began to bud forth on trees. Happy, happy Earth! Fit habitation for gods, which, so short a time before, was bleak, damp, and unwholesome. My spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of Nature; the past was blotted from my memory, the present was tranquil, and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy" (Shelley, 1818: Chapt. 12). Thusly, any purported attempt to characterize *Frankenstein* solely as an icy cold novel is doomed to inaccuracy and misrepresentation either of the novel and probably of Mary Shelley's moods and affectations regarding the Swiss weather.
28. As recorded by Agence-France Presse (2019).
29. As described in, for instance: Seymour (2002), Schor, ed. (2003), Hay (2011), Johnson (2014), Gordon (2016), Sheppard (2019).
30. Recounted in Perrotet (2011) and Buzwell (2014).
31. See, for example, Andrews (2018).
32. Mary Shelley's other novels include: Mathilda (1819), Valperga (1823), The Last Man (1826), The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck (1830), Lodore (1835), and Falkner (1837).
33. As explicated in the likes of Cottom (1980), Dugget (2010), Matus (2017), and Mouna (2018).
34. See, for example: Bertram (1973), Carlson (2007*),* Philp (2013), and Gordon (2015).
35. Obviously Mary Shelley is observing the connection between the Napoleonic Wars and human misery in this passage (which was first published under the Shelleys co-authorship in Shelley & Shelley, 1817).
36. An idea advanced in: Zielinski (2011), Wood (2014), Klimetti (2015), and Fredrickson (2018).
37. As described in Bloom (2007), Davison (2009), Dugget (2010), Matus (2017), and Mouna (2018).
38. As reported in Brönnimann & Krämer (2016).
39. On the connections between Frankenstein and the French Revolution see: Small (1973), Botting, ed. (1991), Randel (2003), or Douthwaite (2012). Another keen contemporary literary reflector of French Revolutionary politics and French imperialist politics was Lord Byron. In fact, when the Shelleys had rolled into Geneva to meet up with Lord Byron, he wasn't there because he, himself,

was travelling to the site of the Battle of Waterloo (eager to feel the ambience of the place where European history had turned). Byron for a long while was a keen Bonapartist since Napoleon seemed to him to stand for social mobility, personal liberty, egalitarianism, as well the end of the European form of slavery known as serfdom. However, as Napoleon co-opted a civic revolution in the name of his autocratic military nationalism, Byron fell out of love with Bonaparte. He came to terms with this often through his poetry (see Clubbe, 1997) just as Mary Shelley had to do the same through *Frankenstein*.

40. On this matter, see Pynchon (1984), Gardner (1994), Jones (2006), ICC (2013), and Eschner (2017).
41. See, for instance: K. Carr (2013), Galloway (2016), Georgievska (2016).
42. As noted, for example, by the following: Small (1973), Fulford *et al* (2004), Sha (2012), Friedman & Kavey (2016), and Harkup (2018). Another British candidate for the real-life figure that inspired the Frankenstein scientist character is written about by Goulding (2002).
43. More about which you can read via a combination of first-hand and reinterpreted accounts in: Shelley & Shelley (1817), Feldman & Scott-Kilvert, eds. (1997), Seymour (2002), Shelley & January (2015).
44. See the details of such a connection contained within: Richard (2010), Craciun (2011), Carroll (2013), and Cavell (2017).
45. As explained in, for example: Botting, ed. (1991), Komisaruk (1999), Seymour (2002), Brown (2003), Franklin (2012), Friedman & Kavey (2016).
46. As identified, for example, by Almond (1998).
47. As explored in the feature film *Mary Shelley* (2017) written by Emma Jenson; as well as in the Frankenpod blogpost titled 'Percy Frankenstein/Viktor Shelley' to be found at: https://thefrankenpod.wordpress.com/2018/03/09/percy-frankenstein-victor-shelley/ (Accessed July 2019).
48. For instance, on this, see: Mellor (1988), Botting, ed. (1991), Geohegan (2011), Seymour (2002), Gordon (2015), Mercer (2016), and Wilson (2016).
49. See, for example, Marshall (1988).
50. As explicitly suggested in works such as Jacquot (2007), Wood (2014), and Tonkin (2016).
51. As reproduced in Evans (2002).
52. For an introduction to this phenomenon, see: Klemetti (2015a).
53. For feminist perspectives on Shelley's *Frankenstein*, see, for example: Mellor (1988), Schor, ed. (2003), or Shelley & Mellor (2017).
54. See various estimates of the Tambora death toll in Stothers (1984), Oppenheimer (2011), Brönnimann & Krämer (2016), Orijanska (2018), or Mcnamara (2019).
55. For various estimates of deaths via the Napoleonic Wars, see Esdaile (2008) or Gates (2011).
56. About the Java Wars see, for example: Carey (1976), Ricklefs (1993), or Kumar (1997).
57. For example, the Tambora – Frankenstein mythmaker G. Wood (2014) declares that it is 'high time' that historians caught up with climatologists regarding the investigation of historic events.

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Spiraling out of Control: Modern Architecture, the Emigration Decade, and the Filming of Lubetkin's Penguin Pool

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Abstract:

In 1936, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York commissioned the Hungarian artist László Moholy-Nagy to make a film, called *The New Architecture of the London Zoo*, about the now-iconic Penguin Pool (1934), with its spiraling concrete forms, and other zoo buildings designed by the Russian architect Berthold Lubetkin. Along with Moholy-Nagy, Lubetkin was part of a large community of Jewish émigré artists and architects living and working in interwar London. Lubetkin, ever argumentative, was apprehensive about the project, concerned that Moholy-Nagy's overriding interest in "pure visual perception" would misguide the film. The finished product enraged the architect, and he responded abruptly and brusquely, that the film offered little reflection on the buildings or their historical and cultural contexts. The remark revealed the core of his concerns – architecture's social principles. Although the penguins were cute, Lubetkin insisted his intention was always "to build socialistically," and Moholy-Nagy's film had missed the point. Through Lubetkin's Penguin Pool and Moholy-Nagy's film, this essay will offer some thoughts on 1930s England, abstract art, modern architecture, and the Jewish émigré, in order to understand why Lubetkin might have responded so abrasively, and to widen our understanding of the Penguin Pool.

Keywords: Berthold Lubetkin, László Moholy-Nagy, Penguin Pool, London Zoological Society, Regent's Park, Tecton, Russian Constructivism, modern architecture, Le Corbusier, Highpoint I.

In 1936, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, Harvard University's Graduate School of Design (founded that year), and the Zoological Society of London jointly commissioned the Hungarian Jewish artist László Moholy-Nagy make a film, subsequently called *The New Architecture of the London Zoo*, about several zoo buildings designed by the Russian Jewish architect Berthold Lubetkin and his firm Tecton. The zoo buildings, located at both the Regents Park Zoo in London and the Whipsnade Zoo in Bedfordshire, about 30 miles north of London, were seen as interesting experiments in modern architecture, worthy of art world and academic attention, and the most well-known of these structures is the Penguin Pool (1934) at Regent's Park. [Figs. 1a-1b] MoMA's focus is especially noteworthy in that its architecture department, the first of its kind in a museum, was only four-years old at that time. The film was intended to be shown at MoMA's 1937 *Modern Architecture in England* exhibition, an important venue because part of the motivation for the show was curator Henry-Russell Hitchcock's aim to correct what he saw as an

earlier oversight, his almost complete omission of Britain from the landmark 1932 *Modern Architecture: International Exhibition*, having allowed only Joseph Emberton's 1931 Royal Corinthian Yacht Club to be included, and to an extent, this new exhibition was meant to bring deserved attention to the burgeoning modernism scene in England. In 1928, Hitchcock had written an article in *Cahiers d'Art* in which he critiqued England's slow acceptance of modernist ideals, but expressed hope that architects who were starting to experiment with modern forms may someday "develop seriously, vigorously, and individually."[1] The Penguin Pool, along with Lubetkin's well-known tower block Highpoint I, have in fact come to be seen as the two most iconic examples of modern architecture in England.[2] [Fig. 2] Lubetkin, though, often argumentative, was apprehensive about the proposed film project, and the finished work absolutely enraged him.

Lubetkin had been an émigré by choice, making his way to London via Paris, in 1931, after witnessing as a teenager the street art protests associated with the Russian revolution and then attending architecture school in Warsaw, leaving Eastern Europe before conditions for Jews deteriorated. Moholy-Nagy had moved from Hungary to Germany to work at the Bauhaus, but as a Jew was forced to flee as European society began to smolder with the rise of Nazi Germany, and in 1934 made his way to London. By 1936, when the film was commissioned, Moholy-Nagy had one foot out the door from London and had already received offers to set up the New Bauhaus in Chicago; he ended up having an important career in the United States at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Lubetkin, on the other hand, was in London to stay; he had founded a firm and had just married an Englishwoman. An émigré, a refugee, and interwar London. Through Lubetkin's Penguin Pool and Moholy-Nagy's film, this essay will offer some thoughts on 1930s England, abstract art, modern architecture, and the Jewish émigré in order to understand why Lubetkin might have responded so abrasively, and to widen our understanding of the Penguin Pool.

While vanguard centers of art and architecture in the first part of the twentieth century flourished on continental Europe, England is of course seen as having remained separate from that history. But when Highpoint I was completed in 1935, Lubetkin's work received favorable press internationally; Le Corbusier, for example, deemed the building revolutionary. It contained the hallmarks of modern architecture – a sleek white exterior, pilotis, a rooftop garden, ribbon windows, lack of ornamentation, flexible interior spaces – and progressive critics and architects saw it as having the potential to change the face of London, providing mass housing and relieving congestion in the city center, social elements that were important components of modernist thinking. Lubetkin had set modern English architecture on a new path.

The Penguin Pool had actually been completed a year earlier. Lubetkin consulted with scientist Julian Huxley (brother to Aldous) and other biologists at the London Zoological Society to create an environment that was conducive to the walking and huddling habits of a particular species of penguin that was to live there. The important engineer Ove Arup developed an innovative structural system to render the overlapping, reinforced concrete curving ramps delicate, thin, and light, yet strong, in what was apparently an enormous feat of engineering.[3] [Fig. 3] In a sense, the

Penguin Pool functions as a sort of mini-manual of some of modern architecture's tenets and essentials: a *fenêtre en longueur* cuts through the smooth, white circular façade, linking inside and outside spaces; the sheer technical virtuosity of Arup's handling of concrete calls to mind the excitement of this new material in manifesto works such as Le Corbusier's Maison Domino (1914); and the entire structure is centered on a *promenade architecturale*, so fundamental to Le Corbusier's vision. In the Penguin Pool, the defining ramp of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye (1928-29) becomes populated by penguins, and the sink that marks the beginning of the user's spiritual ascent through the house is replaced here by the penguins' swimming pool. [Fig. 4] Like Highpoint, the Penguin Pool made an immediate and impressive impact on the international architectural community. In fact, some scholars have suggested that these two works by Lubetkin constitute the entirety of modern architectural culture in England, and suggest that in the aftermath of Highpoint, the initial promise of the field taking hold in the United Kingdom simply faded away.[4]

By the mid-thirties, when Lubektin had started his prolific architectural output in England and Moholy-Nagy had arrived in London, many other émigré architects and artists who had grown up steeped in continental culture and politics and modernist thinking were forced to escape from Nazi Germany. Many settled in London, and so emerged an active community of exile intellectuals; Walter Gropius, Ernö Goldfinger, Oskar Kokoschka, Eric Mendelsohn, Piet Mondrian, Erwin Panofsky, Kurt Schwitters, and Rudolf Wittkower were just some of a lengthy list of crucial figures who played formative roles in twentieth-century thought and who made their way to London. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, the artist's wife, referred to the thirties more generally as the "emigration decade,"[5] and the story of twentieth-century modern architecture does seem to be largely the story of emigration, immigration, and migration. International style modernism is often said to have been codified in 1927 with the houses created for the Deutsche Werkbund's now-canonical Weissenhofsiedlung, and from that moment on the architecture's dissemination and dispersal throughout Europe and beyond insured that its ideals and aesthetic were indeed international in scope. While some thinkers such as art historian Herbert Read, co-founder of the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, described England in the thirties as a "nest of gentle artists" willing to accept the foreigners entering the country,[6] Lubetkin, on the other hand, had strongly contrarian views about émigré culture in spite of his own status as foreigner, declaring that the presence of the refugees hindered the development of modern architecture in England, because indigenous forms were not permitted to develop apart from comparisons with continental ideas.[7] He clearly had tough views about Moholy-Nagy's art as well. In the late twenties, Moholy-Nagy had taken over the foundation arts class at the Bauhaus and was responsible for bringing the school in line with its original stated aims of uniting art with technology. His abstract forms combined with his interests in photography and in kinetic sculpture; he embraced new materials such as plexiglass, and experimented with the interaction of light and shadow, age-old painterly concerns rendered through new technology. [Fig. 5] It would seem that Lubetkin and Moholy-Nagy might be kindred spirits of a sort, but Lubetkin's concern upon hearing of the planned film had been immediate, anticipating

that that Moholy-Nagy's overriding interest in "pure visual perception" would misguide the work.

In the completed film, which is silent, each section begins with an image of a Tecton-designed zoo building distilled into a sketch of its essential geometric forms. [Figs. 6-7] The camera slowly pans over the concrete structures, then documents the animals' use of the structure, then moves over the crowd, focusing on contrasts between light and dark. There is a constant emphasis on shadows – shadows cast by the animals, by the structure, by the setting. Images of people (the zoo-goers) are cropped in ways that emphasize abstract shapes and chiaroscuro more than narrative content or figurative form. Lubetkin responded harshly and dismissively, that the film offered little reflection on the buildings or their historical and cultural contexts. His initial trepidation had been borne out. He wrote: "I doubted the value of a merely descriptive account of what happened, rather than why it happened, or what had to happen;"[8] "[a]s I had been afraid, it was an aggregate of disconnected sense-data, and had very little to say about the buildings or about the world for which they were intended."[9] His apprehension and his subsequent remarks reveal the core of his pursuit: architecture's social principles. The jab at "sense-data" was intended to distance himself from the trend towards empiricism that dominated much cultural thought in England at the time.[10] As John Allan, Lubetkin's biographer, notes, Lubetkin was suspicious that an over-reliance on empirical thought could result in "generalization."[11] Although the penguins were cute and amused audiences, Lubetkin insisted his intention was always "to build socialistically,"[12] and Moholy-Nagy's film, too formalist for Lubetkin, had missed the point of the architect's designs.

Although modern architecture, from its inception in Europe, contained strong social content, the standard narrative in the field is that in 1932, Hitchcock along with Philip Johnson, the curators of MoMA's seminal International Style exhibition, had wiped away the social component of modern architecture and concentrated instead on its aesthetics, for the benefit of its American audience for whom discussions of mass housing in a socialist context would have made little impact. Stylistic concerns had always been important to Hitchcock in his architectural scholarship anyway, and the social angle had had little impact in England either, which was one of Lubetkin's constant frustrations. He frequently wrote that he carried with him for his whole life, and put in all his work, the revolutionary protest spirit that surrounded his youthful years in Russia. He had actually participated in the agitprop street theater of the Constructivists, and a running theme in his notebooks and private papers is that the heroism of modern art and architecture is rooted in that social protest art.[13]

But what could Lubetkin have realistically expected? How could a zoo pavilion meant for penguins contain social content, or at least discernibly so? What did he want the Pool to say "about the world for which [it was] intended?" Lubetkin knew well that modern architecture, in spite of being stripped of ornamentation and historical references, could still contain symbolic elements. In fact, his design for Highpoint I clearly exemplified such a strategy. As his engineer Arup explained:

> Lubetkin welcomed my proposal to do away with columns and beams, and then, typically, as I was to discover, proceeded to make it almost impossible for me to do so....That the block of flats had to be put on columns à la Corbusier was a purely architectural device. It would be difficult to pretend that

> it is useful in this case...And as the vertical forces are taken to the ground through the outer walls, it would have been simpler, if there had to be columns, to place them in the line of the external wall instead of pushing them inwards to a position which pleased the eye rather than the physical facts. Transferring the whole weight to the building horizontally creates considerable moments, necessitating crossbeams which again have to be concealed, etc., this causes a fair amount of trouble and expense. But it could be done fairly easily, and the architects of course wanted it done...[14]

Lubetkin knew that pilotis served a functional purpose in Le Corbusier's Five Points, but inherent in them were urban and social implications as well, hinting at the highrise Highpoint participating in a future skyscraper city modeled on Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* of 1922. [Fig. 8] Lubetkin admitted his "structural dishonesty," but also said "architects do that sort of thing all the time and they only criticize it in buildings they don't like, not in ones they do."[15] In a draft of a letter written in the forties, Lubetkin wrote: "Indeed, if you conceive design exclusively in terms of (functional) utility, if you ignore the energy and power of architecture's symbolic language (and ignore the emotions inherent) you ignore everything."[16] For Lubetkin and Tecton, the message of the pilotis was more important than the constructional reality. The insistence on pilotis and the consequent reworkings of the structural system to accommodate them was no mere morphological addition to Highpoint, but acknowledged the building's discursive place in an inchoate urban system. In Lubetkin's private papers he referred to "architecture as a weapon for social renewal," criticized those who "disliked" theory, and asserted that architecture should be a "thesis of social aims."[17] The theory behind the pilotis offered the possibility of a new social organization, and Lubetkin knew that by "faking" the structural role of the pilotis he was in fact planting "the seed of a vertical garden city."[18]

The Penguin Pool, too, spoke of a radical future, as there was an enormous amount of artistic precedent that linked the forms of the Penguin Pool with an avant-garde sensibility. In the context of revolutionary Russia, spirals were given a precise interpretation of spiraling forward into a new post-Tsarist world. Vladimir Tatlin's Monument to the 3rd International (1921) was among the most famous examples of the meaning of the spiraling forms, a model for a never-built tower that would have been taller than the Eiffel Tower, with rotating rooms and assembly halls. Aleksandre Rodchenko's Spatial Constructions and sculptures by Naum Gabo and El Lissitsky were also part of this dynamic, forward-looking world, and the aesthetic links to the Penguin Pool are evident. Later historians did in fact link the spirals of the Pool to Russian Constructivism; Manfredo Tafuri specifically connects the overlapping ramps to El Lissitzky's designs for the Meyerhold Theater.[19] [Fig. 9] Much earlier, though, Lubetkin in his private papers bluntly tied the energy and activity of post-revolutionary Russia to the "dynamism of spiral architectural forms,"[20] inflecting the Pool and its curves with the political content he was confident they contained anyway.

These are intensely abstract forms, though. Would the revolutionary content of these spiraling shapes would be readily apparent to an untrained viewer? On the one hand, then, Lubetkin was correct that filming the zoo buildings would not bring this content to light. But on the other hand, was he being reasonable to expect the film to convey a social and political component, and if not,

would it really invalidate the whole undertaking? If we go back to Lubetkin's Constructivist days in Russia, perhaps we can think of this split as paralleling a rift among the early twentieth-century Russian avant-garde, when Kazimir Malevich declared that in 1913 he took desperate refuge in the square, finally free from the burdens of representation. His spiritual approach clashed fervently with that of his contemporary, Tatlin, whose embrace of functional, utilitarian materials announced that in the drive to redesign the world in the spirit of the engineer, taking refuge was not an option. Even Wasily Kandinsky, whose radical turn towards abstraction in painting was simply not far-reaching enough for the engineering-based Constructivists, was expelled from the Constructivist movement. Kandinsky's easel paintings were seen as precious not political, embracing abstraction as spiritual and formalist expression at the expense of revolutionary propaganda. Had Moholy-Nagy's film, through a painterly focus on light and dark and dynamic compositional elements, emphasized a similar preciousness? Perhaps Lubetkin's criticism was self-directed, indicative of a sense that architects might grow weary of the language of international style architecture. Tafuri, who in general lauded Lubetkin and his firm's work, seemed to think it was possible that the Penguin Pool, in being so far removed from modernism's social programme, had indeed become "mere spectacle."[21] He wrote:

> The pool is a veritable dictionary of the motifs that had become the stock-in-trade of radical architecture: pillars, subtle projections, continuous apertures...Signs and symbols of the language fused in the crucible of the avant-garde were reproposed here with a didactic clarity, but in a deliberately paradoxical context. A deconsecrating meditation on the disposability of the language, the Penguin Pool definitely canceled out the aura and expectations on which radical architecture had nourished itself. [22]

Since Lubetkin himself declared that art must relate to "the world for which it was intended," we must address what that world – London, 1934 – was. No matter the *content* of thirties art, its *context* was a world on fire, a world that was spiraling out of control into tragedy and horror. The backdrop to London in the thirties is Europe in the thirties – the decimation of Europe's Jewish communities and the aforementioned migration of refugees to England. Lubetkin might have come by choice, but he was foreign and Jewish in a culture that noticed both, and although he became part of that refugee community that absolutely was responsible for bringing much of continental modernism to England, and even though England was described as a "beacon of freedom," it was in fact something of a dichotomy during the interwar years.[23] Even if we just focus for a moment on the architecture community, consider for instance a short piece published in the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* announcing the appointment of a RIBA Refugee Committee.[24] The Committee clinically spoke of the refugees as "problems." The announcement made clear that issues of nationalism and citizenship would affect its decisions, and the underlying message almost seemed to be that while the Committee would help refugee architects find employment, it would do so grudgingly – the "conflict of loyalties is not easily resolved into a policy; there is the natural fellow feeling, amounting even to a definite sense of responsibility, for our fellow architects who through no fault of their own are driven, homeless and workless, from their own countries.[25] RIBA's

statement indicated a terse recognition of the situation, but in practice, a slew of regulations were set up and limits put in place. Refugee architects had to collaborate with established English architects; Gropius, for instance, partnered with Maxwell Fry, and Marcel Breuer partnered with F.R.S. Yorke. RIBA Fellows and Associates had to be born as British subjects. Charlotte Benton has asserted that fear of deportation among foreign architects was so strong that they often were afraid to be associated with, or vouch for the expertise of, other foreign architects.[26]

The welcome doled out to foreigners, then, was hardly a warm one. Many exiles were placed in internment camps merely for not being British, and, as has been well-documented, England was a hotbed of anti-Semitism. Jews were told to keep quiet, to avoid being too loud or too noticeable, and not to draw attention to themselves.[27] We have already encountered Lubetkin's own skepticism about exile culture, but as a Jew – one who hid this identity from his children, no less – it is possible this ornery attitude towards exiles was part of the performance, as he was known for his belligerent personality. Nevertheless, this was the upended, desperate world in which the Penguin Pool was created. Lubetkin worked within that world.

Although Moholy-Nagy's film was literally silent, perhaps Lubetkin felt it was symbolically silent too. Its formal focus on shapes and shadows merely played into the hands of those who demanded quiet from Jews, a retreat into the recondite non-objectivity of Malevich or Kandinsky over and above the protest-minded Constructivist abstraction that had inspired the spiraling ramps. Perhaps Lubetkin saw that Moholy-Nagy had made the Pool into hermetic art, and for Lubetkin, such politesse was inadequate in a time of despair. But was it Moholy-Nagy's responsibility to reveal this social content, or Lubetkin's? Furthermore, the audience was to be the American MoMA, and Moholy-Nagy's film would not have focused on the politics of architecture in such a setting.

Lubetkin's own writings give us some hint how he wanted his architecture to be read. A short piece he wrote for *The Architectural Review* in 1951, focusing on his flats at Spa Green Estate (design begun 1938; built 1943-50) in London, begins with an unsigned introduction that declares the flats "represent but one stage in a process of working out a certain philosophy of exterior design which can only properly be understood in relation to previous and subsequent designs by the same architects."[28] [Fig. 10] Later in the article, Lubetkin acknowledges this idea and concurs; he sees the innovations of the Spa Green scheme as having evolved in relation to his work in 1938, in Highpoint II, a companion tower block built in the aftermath of the aforementioned Highpoint I.[29] By conceiving his work as a series, Lubetkin enables more dynamic interpretations of his work, but also shows his awareness that to construct a self-contained art object is far-removed from his concerns. Thus the curves of the Penguin Pool need to be seen in relation to his ongoing work. One can therefore look back a year to Lubetkin's first English work, the 1933 Gorilla House also at the London Zoo. The reinforced concrete curving structure with revolving roof and walls, also engineered by Arup, was seen as technologically astounding, and in it we see the beginnings of Tecton's collaboration with Arup as well as the idea that radical architecture had a place in England. But we can also then use the Penguin Pool to look ahead, to see where Lubetkin's vision was heading. In addition to the Gorilla

House and the Penguin Pool, the curve as a motif appeared often in Lubetkin's work for the remainder of his career. A closer look at the exterior of Highpoint I reveals arabesque balconies, and curving walls frame a path down to a garden. There are interior curving walls, which also appear in the Finsbury Health Centre (1938); there are grand ceremonial curving entranceways such as those at Spa Green, the library at Dorset Estate (1957-62), and a monumental, spiraling, Constructivist-inspired sculptural stairway in the foyer of Bevin Court (1954), a postwar tower block near King's Cross Station in London. [Fig. 11] The stairwell marks the central core of the building, no mere decorative flourish. Allan has documented in detail Lubetkin's use of the curve.[30] Lubetkin himself called these sculptural features "intellectual" in his notes, where he also made comparisons between Pablo Picasso's collages and the balustrades on Francesco Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (1638-41)**.** Always though, Lubetkin presented detailed drawings and evidence of intense research for his designs, emphasizing to skeptics that these elements were far from mere surface ornamentation; there were reasons and justifications for these so-called flourishes. As Lubetkin's career progressed further into the twentieth century, his work turned increasingly more ornamented; he became interested in patterned facades, for example, but his writings always connected his work to explanations for his designs, such as the vitality of the city, and the building lots' relationship to its surrounding street plans. The curving lot and sloping terrain of his Spa Green Estate grew out of the neighborhood layout and its resulting form in the aftermath of World War II bombings, the winding footpath opening into a vista framed by the sinewy footprint of the Estate's Sadler House. By the late forties, Lubetkin was an important voice in international planning communities and had been closely involved in postwar reconstruction and architectural debates in England after the war. And so in his later work these curving elements are clearly and explicitly connected to work that is focused social housing theories and urban planning discourse.

But the Penguin Pool was a thirties work. What about it, and its revolutionary aims?

The sleek surface of the Penguin Pool was a perfect mirror to the state of being Jewish in thirties London. Somewhat quiet on the outside, the smooth, pure abstract surface masked what was underneath, radical content and the social ruptures of the avant-garde, ideas that had to be searched for and researched, but active and brewing nonetheless. Allan claims the zoo buildings were ways for Lubetkin to experiment with architectural form and to work out ideas that would be applied to other architectural projects. He sees references to Le Corbusier's Bestegui Penthouse in Paris (1929-31) in the jagged Pool staircase, thereby connecting Lubetkin to the modernist master and the main idioms of architectural modernism. In fact, Lubetkin's insertion of sculpturally expressive elements into his overall cubic architectural forms calls to mind Le Corbusier's approach as well, where dramatic volumes emphasize the freedom of the interior from performing structural work, where technocentric language is balanced by an interest in pure, ideal, classical forms, where architecture must be combined with art, and where emotions matter.[31]

Moholy-Nagy suggests, in fact, that he is fully aware of the layers and latent meanings of modern architecture. A caption at the beginning of the Penguin Pool section refers to the setting of

the pool being "not natural, but organic." Of course, with its hard-edged materials and strict rational geometries, it is far from natural, though perhaps declaring it non-naturalistic would be a more accurate term. As Hadas Steiner has eloquently written, the Penguin Pool exemplified the "structural inevitability" associated with modernist architectural theory. The Pool was functionally useful, providing penguins a space to behave as they would do in their native habitat, an organic use of a non-natural[istic] structure, an outgrowth of Viollet-le-Duc's tenet that architecture should directly and honestly express function. But certainly, there are polemics behind modernist architects' drives to pare architecture down to its essentials, and thus the caption indicates that Moholy-Nagy indeed took Lubetkin's work out of the realm of pure formalist art, in spite of Lubetkin's brash and abrupt dismissal. Moholy-Nagy recognized the functionalism inherent in modern architectural theory, and emphasized it in spite of, or even through, the cinematic focus on Lubetkin's ideal, sculpturally-rich forms. A few years before he completed the film of the zoo buildings, Moholy-Nagy also finished his film *Berliner Stilleben*, an eight-minute film that is remarkably similar to *The New Architecture at the London Zoo.* The film captures the bustle of Berliners getting on and off trams, crossing streets, and walking down sidewalks, shot from oblique angles and overhead views. [Figs. 12-13] Side-by-side film stills reveal clear visual echoes. As in the zoo film, emphasis is placed on light, shadows, and abstract angles and forms. We see, then, that Moholy-Nagy treated the Pool like an urban landscape, a modern concrete city for penguins bustling about their concrete world, just as the people of Berlin are visually captured doing their own bustling. Or perhaps, Berliners are treated as penguins, navigating the highways and byways of modernism. Moholy-Nagy has, through the forms of geometry, revealed a social world. Both Moholy-Nagy and Lubetkin have made strong statements about the expressive potential, use, and meaning of abstract forms.

To write off the Penguin Pool as just an aesthetic triumph indeed neglected the less obvious content, and also Lubetkin's entire biography, which boiled beneath the surface. He was a Jew whose ancestors had known the pogroms of Russia and hence he was informed and propelled by the symbols of the Russian Revolution. And yet he was now in a world that was telling him to lower his voice, to hide his Jewish identity in a culture that was deeply anti-Semitic. And so indeed for him, architecture and art, as he wrote, needed to reflect their world, which meant that formalism was inadequate. Moholy-Nagy's approach was subtle but rich, and just as Tatlin's *Corner Counter-Relief* sculptures (1915) used abstraction to draw attention to the useful value of industrial materials, the film highlighted the fullness and expressiveness of modern architecture's forms to Anglo-American society for whom this was new architectural language.

Moholy-Nagy and Lubetkin have each given us a manifesto on modernism.

There is a third émigré that also must enter our discussion. That is, of course, the deracinated penguins for whom the Penguin Pool had been built. Having been forced to migrate from Antarctica, they too were refugees, displaced from their home territory and placed within this curving concrete sculpture. The zoo, we know, had studied the birds' habits and had created spaces for huddling in addition to the ramps for their walks around the pool, and so as foreign as the terrain

was to their homeland, they were able to emulate some of their activities and actions from the motherland. Much diaspora theory focuses in fact on this sort of interaction, between an émigré's host country and his/her country of origin, between the way exiles and refugees retain some customs and traditions from their homeland, and yet allow others to assimilate or be forgotten. The penguins perfectly enact the general plight of the exile as formulated by James Clifford, for instance, who suggests that diaspora communities always remain separate from mainstream culture, never quite fitting in. That is the world for which the Penguin Pool was created. The penguin refugees were simply always on the move, up and down the ramps, never quite settling in, perpetually migrating and being gawked at. At some point, the species of penguin was replaced with a different type, who didn't use the nesting huts and who had trouble walking on the concrete, which led to the closing of the Pool in 2004 and the opening of a replacement habitat, the Penguin Beach, in 2011.

The penguins are a reminder that the 1930s were a heavy, loaded decade. Just as a "nest of gentle artists" is at first a comforting, cozy description, a deeper realization sets in that such words mask a crisis. A nest, gentle or otherwise, was needed because Jews were being forced to flee from continental Europe. Perhaps Lubetkin did not want the focus on serious architectural ideals to be masked by the charm of the penguins, as the nest he created for them grew out of a world that was far from gentle.

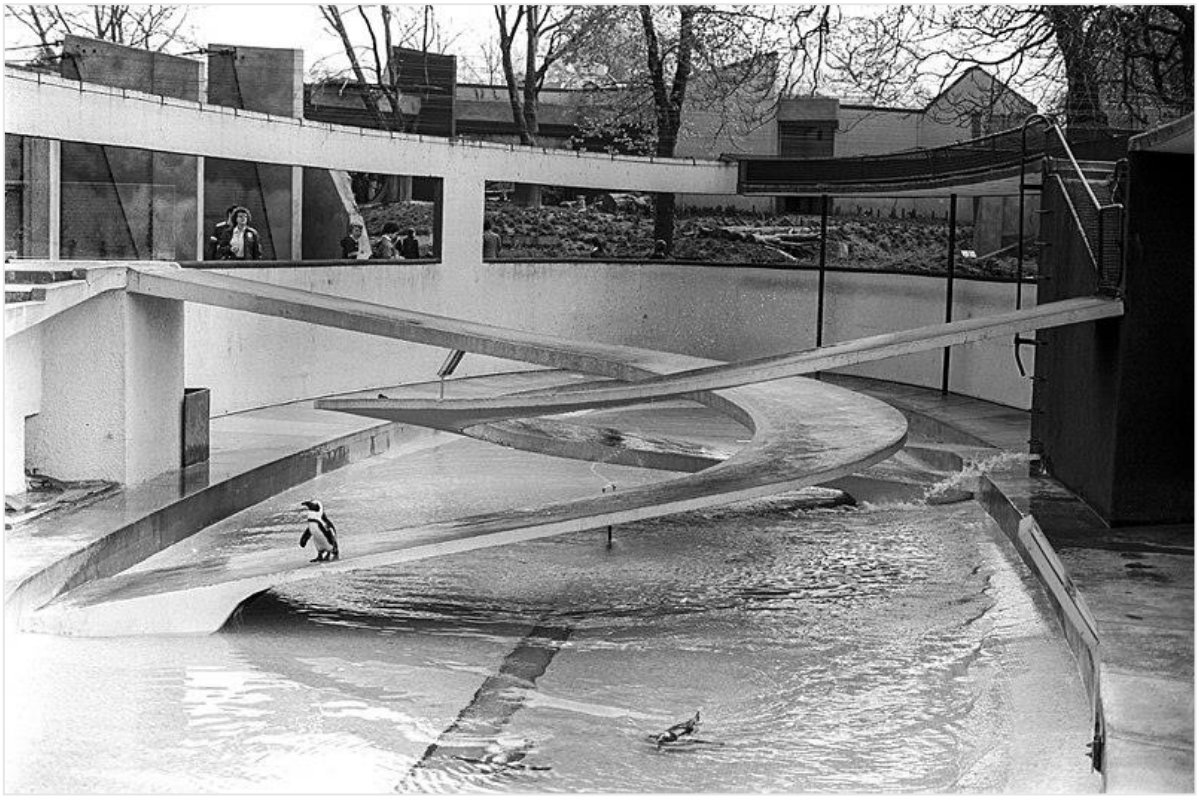
Endnotes:

1. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, "L'architecture contemporaine en Angleterre," *Cahiers d'Art* 3 (1928): 446.
2. The building was originally called Highpoint, and not known as Highpoint I until an adjacent structure, subsequently called Highpoint II, was completed three years later.
3. For details on the construction, see Hadas Steiner, "For the Birds," *Grey Room* 13 (Autumn 2003), 5-31 and John Allan, *Berthold Lubetkin: Architecture and the Tradition of Progress* (London: RIBA, 1992), 208-12.
4. For a summary of some of these ideas as well as a counter to that conclusion, see my *Berthold Lubetkin's Highpoint II and the Jewish Contribution to Modern English Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2018).
5. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, "The Diaspora," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 24 (March 1965): 24-5.
6. Jane Beckett, "Circle: the Theory and Patronage of Constructive Art in the Thirties," in Jeremy Lewison, ed., *Circle: Constructive Art in Britain 1934-40* (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery, 1982), 16.
7. Berthold Lubetkin, "Modern Architecture in England," *American Architect and Architecture* 150 (February 1937): 29.
8. Terence A. Senter, "Moholy-Nagy in England" (MPhil thesis, University of Nottingham, 1977), 102-3.
9. Senter, 166.
10. See for instance A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1946 [1936]). For a general discussion of logical positivism as it relates to the arts in Britain from the thirties to the fifties, see Isabelle Moffatt, "'A Horror of Abstract Thought': Postwar Britain and Hamilton's 1951 *Growth and Form* Exhibition," *October* 94 (Fall 2000): 89-112. Moffatt makes clear that logical positivism was initially closely tied to radical Marxist thought in Germany and Vienna, but its British incarnation drained it of its political incisiveness. For a history of empiricism in England, as well as a critique of it as a methodology, see Gareth Stedman Jones "History: the Poverty of Empiricism," in Robin Blackburn, ed. *Ideology in Social Science: Readings in Critical Social Theory* (London: Fontana, 1972), 96-115. For a discussion of empirical thought in the fifties, see Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*

(Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 114-15; 134-36; 232ff.

11. Allan, 105.
12. Berthold Lubetkin, "Architectural Thought since the Revolution," *The Architectural Review* 71 (May 1932): 201. Also quoted in Anthony Jackson, *The Politics of Architecture: a History of Modern Architecture in Britain* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970), 44.
13. Lubetkin's papers are held by the British Architectural Library (BAL) of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). Archival folders hereafter referred to by the abbreviation BAL followed by the folder number; BAL LuB/20/4.
14. Arup, Ove. "The Engineer Looks Back: Arup Associations." *AR 30s*, special issue of *The Architectural Review* 166 (November 1979) 315-21.
15. Lubetkin, *Allan*, 278.
16. BAL LuB/17/2.
17. *Ibid*.
18. Le Corbusier, "The Vertical Garden City." *The Architectural Review* 19 (January 1936) 9-10.
19. Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* vol. 2, trans. Robert Erich Wolf (London: Faber & Faber, 1980 [1976]), 231.
20. BAL LuB/20/4 contains notes from the sixties on the importance of the Russian Revolution on the development of modern art; BAL LuB/20/5 contains an unpublished draft (c. 1962) of a book on Soviet architecture.
21. Tafuri, p. 231.
22. *Ibid*.
23. On England as a beacon of freedom, see Pierre Vago, *Une vie intense* (Brussels: Editions AAM [Archives d'Architecture Moderne] 2000), 256. For the idea that England's attitude towards the refugees indicated something of a dichotomy, see my article "A Clean Sweep? Contemplating the Ruins of Postwar London," *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, Journal of the Bard Graduate Center published by University of Chicago Press (vol. 37, number 4: 2018), 246-60.
24. "The New R.I.B.A. Refugee Committee," *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* 46 (6 February 1939): 324.
25. *Ibid*.
26. Charlotte Benton, paper delivered at the conference *Exile and Refuge: the Influence of Refugee and Emigré architects on British and International Architecture*, organized by RIBA, at the London Jewish Cultural Centre, June 16, 2002. John Gold tells a related anecdote in which the German architect Peter Moro, who later worked on the design of the Royal Festival Hall in London (1950), recalls that Gropius promised him a job in England if he sought refuge, but that upon Moro's arrival, Gropius claimed he had made no such offer. See Gold, *Modern Architects and the Future City 1928-1933* (New York and London: E&FN Spon, 1997), 91-2).
27. For a case study, see Janet Wolff, "The Impolite Boarder: "Diasporist" Art and its Critical Response," in James Aulich and John Lynch, eds., *Critical Kitaj: A Critical Anthology of Essays on the Work of R.B. Kitaj* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 1-28.
28. Unsigned introduction to Lubetkin, "Flats in Rosebery Avenue, Finsbury." *The Architectural Review* l09 (March 1951) 138.
29. Lubetkin, "Flats in Rosebery Avenue," 140.
30. Allan, 141-46.
31. In 1923 in *Vers une architecture,* Le Corbusier, for instance, writes: "...suddenly you touch my heart, you do me good, I am happy and I say: 'This is beautiful.' That is Architecture. Art enters in...By the use of raw materials and *starting from* conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused my emotions. This is Architecture." Quoted in Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), 29.

Figures:





Figs. 1a and 1b: Penguin Pool (Photo credits: 1a: Gillfoto: Creative Commons; 1b: Fillfein: Creative Commons)



Fig. 2: Highpoint I (Photo credit: Leo Eigen)

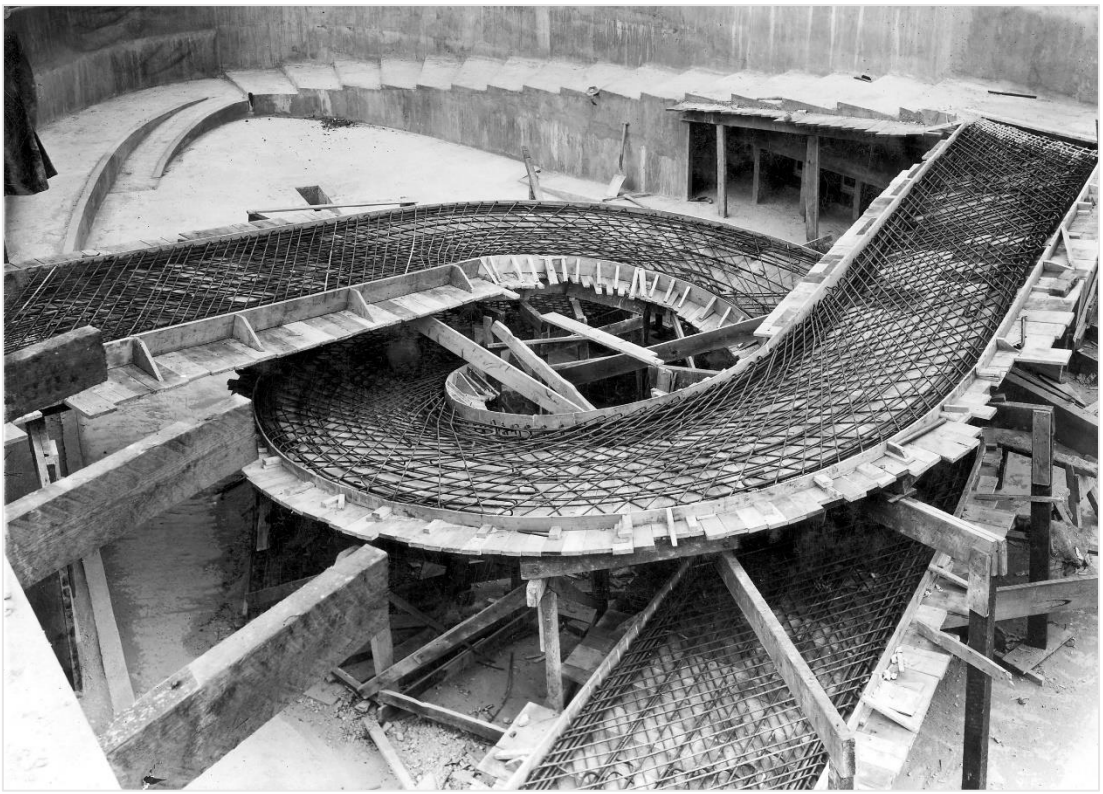


Fig. 3: Penguin Pool, London Zoo, Regent's Park, London: ramps under construction.
(Used with permission from RIBApix.)

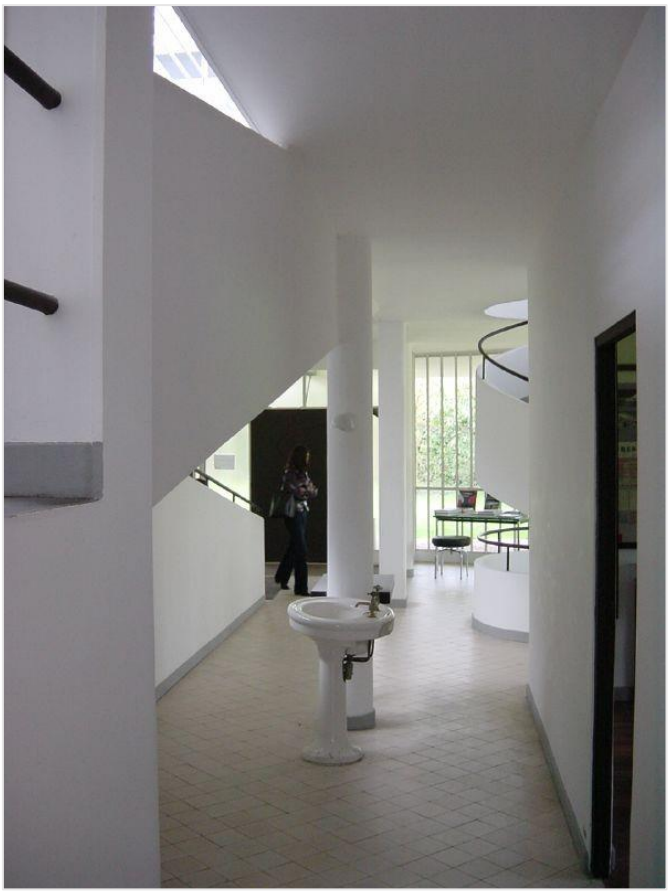


Fig. 4: Villa Savoye ramp and sink
(Photo credit: End User/Iainb/via ArchDaily)

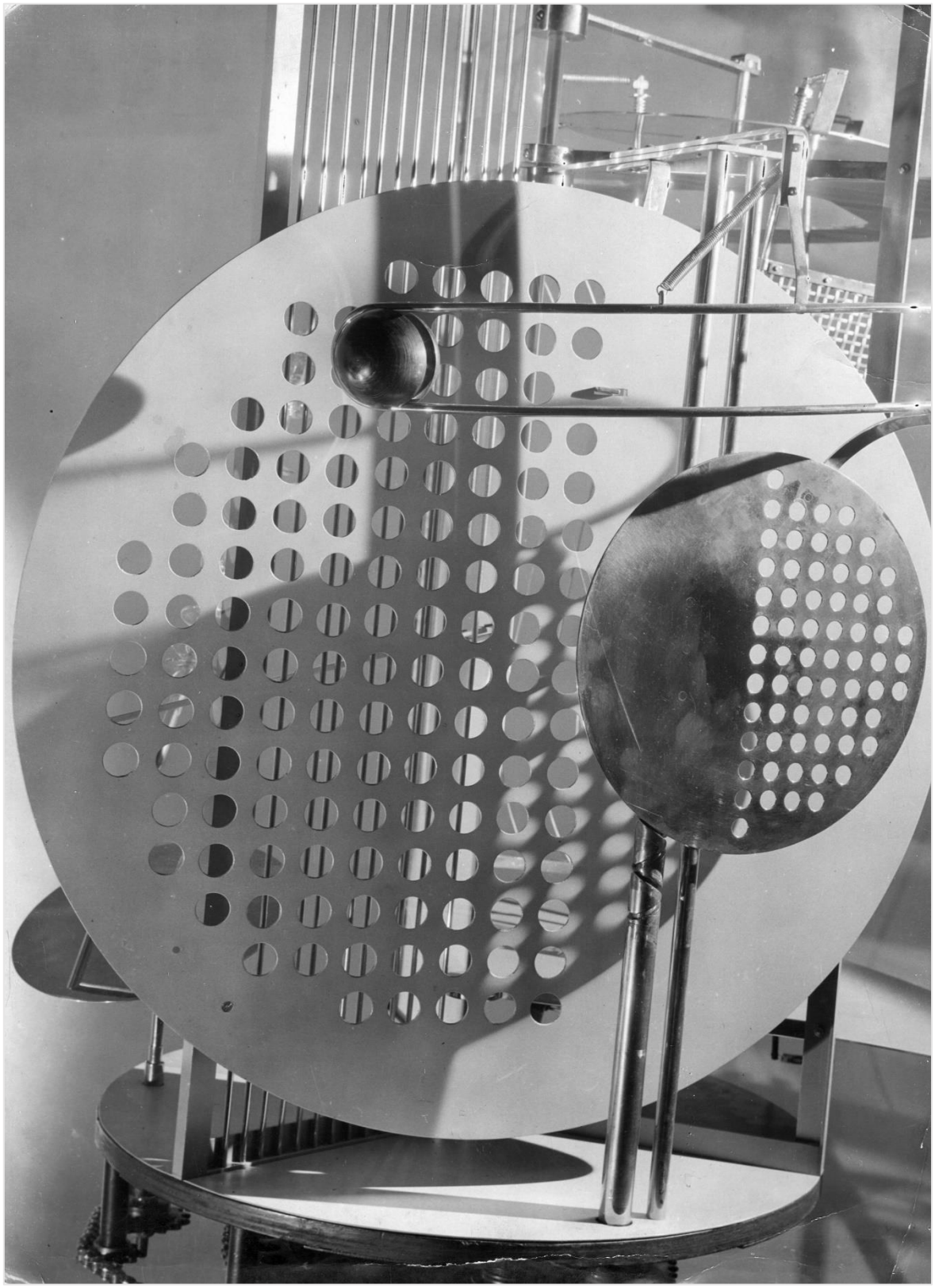
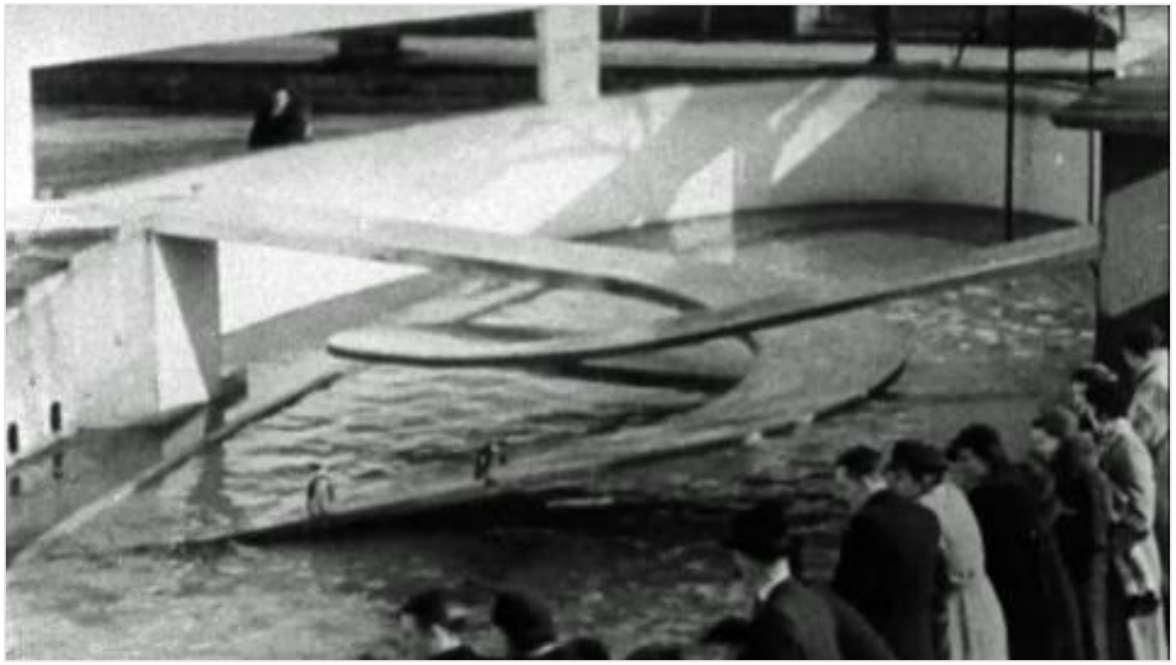


Fig. 5: Light machine designed by Moholy-Nagy (1930).
(Used with permission from RIBApix.)





Figs. 6-7: Film stills from "New Architecture of the London Zoo" (bfi.org.uk)



Fig. 8: Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret), La Cité Radieuse - Plan Voisin (later manifestation of Ville Contemporaine), 1925 (Banque d'Images, ADAGP / Art Resource, NY ©ARS,NY. Used with permission.

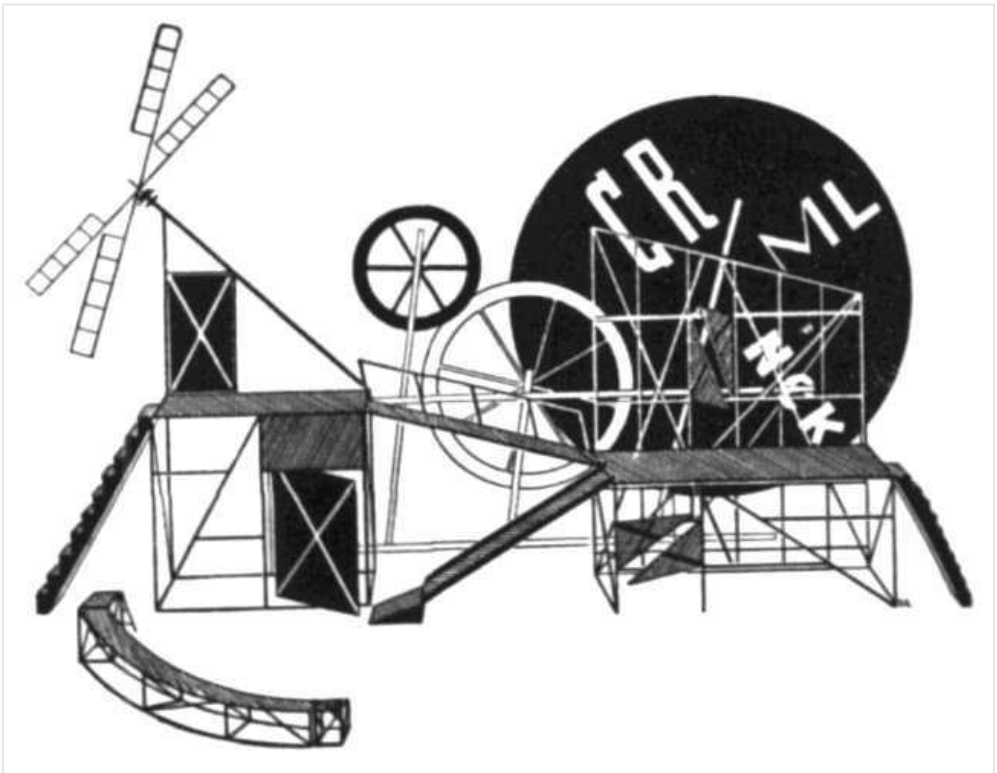


Fig. 9: Stage plan for Meyerhold's The Magnanimous Cuckold (1922) (PD-US)



Fig. 10: Lubetkin and Tecton, Spa Green Estate, Rosebery Avenue, Finsbury, London: Sadler House seen from the roof of Wells House **(**Used with permission from RIBApix.)



Fig. 11: Bevin Court (Photo credit: Leo Eigen)



Figs. 12-13: Film stills, "Berliner Stilleben" (http://www.moma.org; fair use non-commercial copyright laws) and "New Architecture of the London Zoo" (bfi.org.uk)

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Portrait with Landscape

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Abstract:

Discussing the historical commonalities of portrait and landscape, this paper analyses how the cross-cultural and multi-sensory aspects, which Mitchell developed in his nine theses on landscape, applies to the portrait. Suggesting a stronger inclusion of different cultural practices/traditions and artistic positions in the discourse on landscape, I present my own practice-based research on portraiture as a possibility of how landscape could open up new perspectives in the light of other cultural practices and artistic expressions to deepen and expand Mitchell's intercultural and multisensory perspective on landscape. In particular, I argue that the combination of portrait and landscape through the positions of contemporary artists can make a significant contribution to the discourse on landscape. I therefore conclude my contribution by presenting the work of other contemporary artists who have combined aspects of portrait and landscape in their work, providing opportunities for both reflection and social change.

Keywords: Art Practice-Based Research, Landscape, Portrait, Multi-sensory, Social Change.

Introduction

In his work *Imperial Landscape* (2002[1994]), art historian William John Thomas Mitchell interrogated and redefined "landscape", a multi-facetted term which, according to cultural geographer Denis Edmund Cosgrove, "emerged in the Renaissance" denoting "a new relationship between humans and their environment" (Cosgrove 1989, 122). The advent of the "inception of 'landscape' in the world of art" was attributed to the appearance of window in Jan van Eyck's and Robert Campin's paintings, connected to both the linear perspective and the principles of modern geometry as a result of "the distinction between the world of subject and the world of object", brought forth by "the changes in the western worldviews" (Alehashemi and Mansouri 2018, 35, 34).[1] Whereas for the art historian Sir Kenneth Clark landscape painting represented "the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century" (Clark 1961, xvii), Cosgrove understood it as a "way of seeing" (Cosgrove 1989, 121), referring to art critic John Berger's seminal book and TV-series *Ways of Seeing* (2008[1972]), which he created in response to Clark's book (1970) and 1969 TV-series *Civilization*. Berger's perspective contrasted Clark's traditionalist view of the dominant artistic and cultural canon.

In this text, I will counterpose Mitchell's extended theory of landscape with my own art practice-based research entitled *Portrait as Dialogue*, a work consisting of nine art projects

conducted for more than a decade across diverse cultural contexts, with which I sought to subvert the Western gaze to bolster alternative modes of perception and representation, together with a critical reflection of the ocularcentric approach of the representations of "otherness", as argued in my PhD thesis (2019). Specifically, I will discuss how the cross-cultural and multi-sensory aspects, which Mitchell developed in his nine theses on landscape, applies to the portrait.

Just as Mitchell holds in terms of landscape, I view portrait as a culture specific form of representation, but not an exclusively European one. Like Mitchell, for whom landscape is a "multisensory medium" inscribed with "cultural meanings and values" (2002[1994], 14), I regard portrait as a cultural practice which resorts "to a multitude of human senses" (Boeck 2019, 18). Where for Mitchell landscape, a "visual term" (Cosgrove 1985, 46) enables "communication between persons" (2002[1994], 15), I mobilised portrait, a visual cultural technique, as a "vehicle for communication between people", as suggested by Howard Morphy (2008, 104). This provided an opportunity to foreground non-Western and indigenous multi-sensory and relational ways of addressing, thereby contributing to and expanding on the visual practice of the Western portrait. Cross-fertilising and mediating "attitudes and transitions from the self to the other" (Boeck 2013, 507), this coincided with what Mitchell holds in regard to landscape, stressing that "is not a genre of art but a medium" (Mitchell 2002[1994], 5).

After briefly discussing the historical commonalities of portrait and landscape with regard to the power relations associated with both concepts, I describe two projects of my many years of practical art research. Subsequently, I give an outlook on how I could imagine a stronger inclusion of different cultural practices/traditions and artistic positions in the discourse on landscape. Specifically, I present my own work on portraiture as a possibility of how landscape could open up new perspectives in the light of other cultural practices and artistic expressions to deepen and expand Mitchell's intercultural and multisensory perspective on landscape. In particular, I argue that the combination of portrait and landscape through the positions of contemporary artists can make a significant contribution to the discourse on landscape. I therefore conclude my contribution by presenting the work of other contemporary artists who have combined aspects of portrait and landscape in their work, providing opportunities for both reflection and social change. The examples relate directly to my exploration of the cultural practices of the indigenous Sami (Yoik, combining the sense of seeing with hearing) and of Aboriginal Australians (track-reading, concentrating on seeing in connection with the feeling of vibration).

Common Ground

In terms of "landscape" Mitchell (2002[1994]) noted the central role of the viewer, whose body becomes the medium of perception and interpretation. This, Cosgrove previously argued, is connected to linear perspective invented during the Renaissance. The importance given to the visible world through linear perspective, "the guarantor of pictorial realism" (Cosgrove 1985, 49), resulted in the "distinction between viewing and painting" (Mitchell 2002 [1994], 8) connected to the

subject-object divide. Closely linked to the ideas of modern Western consciousness, this new approach was related to optical projections known as *camera obscura* as precursor of photography (Hockney 2001), as much as it depended on a "gridded square placed on the ground when viewed along the horizontal axis", allowing the painter to "reproduce in pictorial form its appearance to the eye" (Cosgrove 1985, 48).

Located in the spatial center of linear perspective, was the "distant", "commanding" and "uninvolved" (male European) "human body", created "in the image and likeness of God" (ibid., 51); the ideal viewer's gaze originating from outside the picture. Placed in a "predatory" situation, he was oblivious of other perspectives, such as "the observer as woman" (ibid., 16), or the cultural other. The "individual-who-watches-and-creates-the-landscape", Claudio Minca explained, "disappears from landscape painting" as well as from "the scientific understanding of landscape" (Minca 2013, 56), as did the (male and superior) European subject, which remained hidden behind the camera in colonial photography. In this respect portrait in "its employment as a technique of colonial representation" (Mitchell 2002[1994], 3) is as much as landscape "a particular formation associated with European imperialism" (ibid., 5).

Realistic scenic paintings were often commissioned to enjoy aesthetic and material control (Rose 2008 [1993]) serving as symbolic tools for the legitimization of a capitalist land market through which landowners made their ownership "visible to themselves as well as to others" and classed themselves "among those who enjoyed social status", as John Tagg (1988) remarked in relation to portrait. In accordance with Cosgrove, who stated that "the visual power given by the landscape way of seeing complements the real power humans exert over land as property" (Cosgrove 1985, 45) and Mitchell, who stressed that "the gazing eye" is "inextricably connected with imperialism and nationalism" (Mitchell 2002[1994], 29-30), as Donna Haraway (1988), John Tagg (1988) and Christopher Pinney (2007), among others, argued in regard to the representation of alterity, that visuality led to a hierarchical understanding of race, gender, sexuality, etc; the "gaze" postulating social power relations in Western Europe and in colonialist cultures (Tagg 2009).

Like the landscape, the portrait is also connected with the undertakings of geography and anthropology in the colonial project. Both genres can be traced back to the objectification of European and American women by male (artistic) subjects (Berger 2008 [1972]; Rosler 2006). Like in regard to the depictions of women, in landscape painting the viewer was positioned as a spectator and nature as a spectacle (Czesrniak 1997). Women can be considered the "first victims of Western colonization and industrialization" (Nader 2018, 71) according to whose pattern the cultural other was conceived and depicted as "passive" or "feminized" object of knowledge (Tagg 1988, 11).Thus, the act of power that gave control to the country it gazed upon also subjected people to a scrutinizing male Western gaze, neglecting that the anthropological gaze has "generally travelled in only one direction" (from the West to the East) (Bandyopadhyay and Ganguly 2015, 598) and that this could depend on a human spectrum of senses that exceeds attention given to the five senses going back to Aristotle (Howes 2017).

Just as there is a connection in the way landscape is seen and how society is structured, as Cosgrove argued in his groundbreaking work *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984), namely a correlation "how we depict space" and "how we behave in space" (Hockney cited in Saloojee 2010, 216), John Berger, aware of a comparative approach, remarked that "we always look at the relationship between things and ourselves" (Berger 2008[1972]). At the examples of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) and the portrait of Admiral de Ruyter by Elmina de Witte (1617), he noted an emerging trend of representing individuality by postulating an inequality in the relationship of conqueror and colonized. Following Berger's perspective, a significant number of feminist and postcolonial scholars observed that colonial photography was constructing an image of the conquerable subaltern as much as it was shaping European identity (Fabian 1983; Spivak 1985; Clifford 1986; Lydon and Rizvi 2016 [2010]).

Both photography and the metrological grid used by artists and geographers alike for the "projection of the globe and its regions onto map graticules by cosmographers and chorographers" (Cosgrove 1985, 46) are interrelated with the 19th century anthropological project of racial comparison and regional body morphology. The goal of this comparative project was to portray members of various groups of people in the newly discovered and appropriated regions of the world naked and in full length in frontal and profile poses. Often individuals were placed in front of a wooden frame in which horizontal and vertical silk threads formed two-inch squares (Brown 2005), accompanied by a measurement scale placed at a fixed distance from the camera. Stripped of the effects of civilisation, the cultural other served as a contrasting foil in a cultural process of "self-fashioning" (Edwards 2015, 242). While in the nineteenth century these photographs symbolized "truth", as painting did in the past, today they are seen as "central and complicitous" in the "articulation of race and racial differences" (Green 1984, 31) and stand for the "insidious unequal relationships which permeated all facets of cultural confrontation" (Edwards 1992, 6).

Portrait and Landscape

My dialogical art practice, which defines the portrait as one of many culturally specific forms of representation, coincided with Mitchell's conception of landscape as "medium of exchange" (Mitchell 2002 [1994], 2). As Mitchell suggests in terms of landscape, my research is a critical exploration of the historical "visual appropriation" (ibid.) of non-Western people with a "focus for the formation of identity", considering the historical praxis as a "phenomenon" concerned with "'the natural histories' of its own beholders" (ibid.). Like Mitchell, who, given the "overwhelming richness, complexity, and antiquity of Chinese landscape painting" (ibid, 9), rejects the Eurocentric tendency to claim that landscape is a "uniquely Western European art" (ibid.), refuting the "claim that "we moderns" are somehow "different from and essentially superior to everything that preceded us" (ibid., 13), I have dealt, in regard to the portrait, with my own cultural conditioning and historical sensory distortion (vision) to foreground alternative ways of relating and addressing. I argued that there are non-Western and indigenous practices which have the potential "to contribute to and expand upon the Western view of what constitutes a portrait" (Boeck 2013; 2019), even though these practices have

not always be "seen as a method of 'portraying' a human being" (Boeck 2013, 498) – neither by practitioners themselves or by anthropologists who studied their cultures. I am well aware that my perspective – based on identification and memory as a central concern of Western portraits – can be considered an inappropriate attribution and "misinterpretation" (ibid., 507). I, nevertheless, have experienced alternative modes of perception and aesthetic forms of presentation, with the aim to mediate the experience of myself being assessed by different cultural perspectives and modes of perception, arguably inaccessible for Westerners, to a Western audience.

To explore how we are embedded in the representations of others, I have invited a number of participants, "who have been historically overtly constructed as 'other' to my Western 'self'" (ibid., 491), to direct their "gaze" on me. To do so I developed an innovative methodology which overturned the "role of the artist as the sole performer and the status of the researcher as an outside observer" (Boeck 2015, 1; 2019), positioning both sides similarly as subject and object, as researcher and researched at the same time. By positioning my own vulnerable self at the center of research (Lather 2004; Behar 1996), I challenged the historical refusal of mutuality (Pinney 2007) represented by this gaze, aiming to reverse the "political axis of representation" (Tagg 1988, 7), further addressing the position of the observer who has been historically "disembodied" and reduced to a single "point of view" (Jay 1988, 7). By turning my own white female body into the subject of comparision for the revaluation of non-Western people and their practices as opposed to the historical anthropological project of racial comparision, I also challenged the historical hegemony of the colonial gaze from a gendered positionality.

However, I not only invited the other to reverse the historical anthropological gaze, but also "to pose before the lens of my camera, thereby invoking and problematising anthropological surveys of the past", as noted earlier (Boeck 2019, 109). Whatever our intentions may be, as researchers we are often "entangled in layers of returns and reversals" (Lather 2015, 7). In my own research I did exactly what I originally set out to criticize – I controlled representation of the Other, thereby confirming Patti Lather's perspective that practices which seek to "give voice to the voiceless" cannot be considered an "innocent counter-practice" (ibid.). In selecting, reinterpreting and recombining the material co-produced in the field during post-production in my studio in Munich (Germany), I adopted of a sole artistic decision-making position, something which I had sought to avoid by inviting participants to assess and represent me. At the same time, I had only little influence on how the participants interpreted me during the intersubjective encounters in the field. Thus, the works resulting from the intersubjective encounters simultaneously reinforce and undermine the dominant regime of the representation of otherness. Although it could be argued that my "instrumentalization of the dominant perspective" is a clear weakness of my art practice, "placing myself in the frame (together with the Western gaze)" constitutes a relevant provocation, "enabling a productive critical discourse surrounding the entanglements of 'self' and 'other'" (Boeck 2019, 112).

My use of the term "dialogue" occurred in sympathy with Grant Kester's understanding of a "dialogical aesthetic" (Kester 1999) and responds to a "relational art" (Bourriaud et al 2002)

approach. It highlights the crucial aspect of my methodology: the co-creative, intercultural and interpersonal relationships in which "we perceived each other and expressed these momentary perceptions in different ways, defining ourselves by interpreting the other" (Boeck 2019, 45). Negotiated through my vulnerable research position, my artworks enable a dialogue between various culture-specifically favored multi-sensory methods of perception and related representation systems (e.g. the Sámi's yoik) with vision-based forms (photography/video). Moreover, as they are presented at controversial sites of representation (e.g. the Anthropological Museum) they show a white, European woman who is not typically represented in European anthropological collections, especially not as "seen" from a non-Western perspective. This is in line with the endeavor of "mental decolonization" as it is increasingly demanded by theorists and curators such as Kebede (2004) and Hansen and Nielsen (2011).

Seek Me – the Sami's yoik

The project *Seek Me* (2005) explored yoik, one of the oldest musical styles in Europe (Plantenga 2004), a kind of yodelling practiced exclusively by the Sámi, an indigenous population of circumpolar Fennoscandia (Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula) in both spiritual and everyday life (Moore 2004). The cultural technique acts as an instrument of "identity-ascription", the "referenced object" being "focused through this referencing function" (Ola Graff, cited in Hanssen 2011). As a textless, mnemonic technique for recognizing and remembering people, certain places (landscape) and special animals, yoik is characterized by improvisation, usually in solo performances. Moreover, a yoik recalling a person, a so-called "person-yoik" (Hanssen 2011), can be used as a form of "introduction" (Sara, cited in Boeck 2013).

In 2005 I spent a week each week with five Sámi singers (Ole Larsen Gaino, Lars Henrik Blind, Anna Berit Peltopera, Åsá Margget Anti Holm and Johan Sara, Jr), in Arctic Norway (Maze, Kautokeino) and Finland (Utsjoki). While, in reference to anthropological surveys of the past, I depicted participants photographically, each in front of a white backdrop (Figures 1.1, 1.3 – 1.6), participants "captured" my persona by focusing on my sound and rhythm related expressions (for example, sound of voice, laughter, speed of talking and walking), resulting in five individual yoiks (Figures 1.2, 1.7 – 1.10). Compared to the Sámi's yoik, which was created in a reciprocal and co-productive process, expressing invisible aspects of me within a melodic and rhythmic organization (Hämäläinen et al. 2017), my counterportraits in the resulting sound installation *Seek Me* (2005), showed only participants outward appearance.



Fig. 1.1: Ole Larsen Gaino, *Seek Me* (2005). Photograph: Angelika Boeck.



Fig. 1.2: Sound diagram Ole Larsen Gaino, *Seek Me* (2005).



Fig. 1.3: Lars Henrik Blind



Fig. 1.4: Anna Berit Peltopera



Fig. 1.5: Åsá Margget Anti Holm.



Fig. 1.6: Johan Sara Jr. Seek Me (2005). Photographs: Angelika Boeck.



Fig. 1.7: Sound diagram Lars Henrik Blind, *Seek Me* (2005).



Fig. 1.8: Sound diagram Anna Berit Peltopera, *Seek Me* (2005).



Fig. 1.9: Sound diagram Åsá Márgget Anti Holm, *Seek Me* (2005).

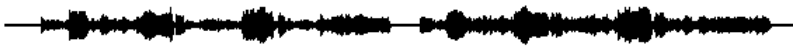


Fig. 1.10: Sound diagram Johan Sara Jr., *Seek Me* (2005).

Besides the yoik of the Sami, in my eyes, I explored the Aboriginal Australian track reading practice for its potential to contribute to and expand upon the Western notion of the portrait. In his work *Voices of the First Day* (1993), Robert Lawlor described the ability of indigenous Australians to recognize the footprints of a large number of clan members. According to Lawlor (interview, 22 May 2016), this particular ability, based on the capacity to sense the imprint that every

event left in the earth, including the vibrations emitted by footprints, is linked to the complicated protocol of Aboriginal traditional life. This required recognising what is going on in one's own territory at all times, especially who is there with what kind of intention. Lawlor's description of the extraordinary abilities of the Australian Aborigines in reading tracks has been confirmed by several other reports, such as by Alice Monkton Duncan-Kemp (1901–88, who grew up as the daughter of a cattle station manager) in her memoir *Where Strange Paths Go Down* (1964), and Pat Lowe (British wife of Aboriginal artist Jimmy Pike) in *Hunters and Trackers of the Australian Desert* (2002).

Vibrations, which are also responsible for the production of words, sounds or songs, are of enormous importance in the culture of the Australian Aborigines (Berndt 1974; Munn 1986). Whereas in the West vibrational phenomena "normally escape consciousness", including "light, heat, electricity, X-rays and nerve impulses in the body" (Trower 2012, 4), in Warlpiri conceptualization, "the object world" is both "verbally" and "visually" constituted. Visual marks are believed to contain sonic "information"– the same word meaning "marks", "names", or "songs" (Watson 1999). The connection between vibration (as an expression of creative energy) and it's physical result (such as natural phenomena, earth formations or the existence of plants, animals and humans), which is also expressed in Aboriginal Australian dot paintings (similar to Chladni figures that visualize sound), is exemplified by the ban on using human names after the death of their bearers, including all other words with a similar sound (Kendon 1989). It is also worth noting that human traces in Aboriginal culture could stand in for the person, just as a signifier can in contemporary artists' "faceless" portraits (Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Hans-Peter Feldmann). Ronald and Catherine Berndt, for example, observed that a naughty child can be punished by beating his footprints with a branch (Lawlor 1993); footprints were wiped off the ground after a person died (Musharbash 2008) and Kaidatcha slippers, made from emu feathers and strands of hair, were used to hide the wearers identity (Akerman 2005).

Like many other indigenous cultures, Australians, in the past, have not portrayed individuals visually, but identified them through several interconnected forms. In addition to her own footprints (*Track Me)* and name (Lawlor 1993), a person could be represented by a totem (eg, the rainbow snake, bush tomatoe, wallaby or water), and associated design. The individual totem, in a larger framework, connected all members of a group of people according to a matrilineal or patrilinear system (Morphy 2008). The totem, which was believed to reside in a person's chest (Howitt 1996[1904]), was applied in the form of body painting to the upper body of a person during initiation or in the event of death (Berndt 1974; Lawlor 1993). It marked the person with the power of this particular mythological ancestor, connecting him/her with a particular area (Morphy 2008).

The relationship between individual, totem, and land, so important in Australian culture, is linked to the belief that children were not conceived through sexual intercourse alone, but also because the spirit of the man "found" the spirit of a child and directed it to his wife (Stanner 2009). The place where the mother perceived her pregnancy for the first time was understood as the place of spiritual conception, creating an inseparable connection between child, land and the

ancestor/totem. If the conception totem differed from the totem of a child's homeland, it became associated with both (Munn 1986) and assumed the ritual responsibilities that these areas entailed. Aboriginal Australian painting, originally a purely ephemeral and ceremonial act, must therefore be understood as a meditation on the aspects of ancestral creativity, presenting mythological maps associated with a particular place (Morphy 2008). In such paintings, land is not represented as landscape (as in Euro-American paintings), but as a series of circles and lines depicting the traces of the ancestors who shaped the country (Jones 1985). In fact, the entire phenomenon of "Aboriginal Australian Art" exists only because of the demand for it on the part of a white audience (Butler 2002).

Track Me

The project *Track Me* (2006) was developed over a period of six weeks in and around Alice Springs (Northern Territories, Central Australia) in collaboration with four female Aboriginal (Pintupi and Walpiri) track-reading experts: Mitjili Napanangka Gibson, Judy Nampijinpa Granites, Ida Nangala Granites, Noreen Nampijinpa Robertson, and Peter Bartlett, a non-Aboriginal Australian and of Mitjili's son-in-law, who worked as my mediator and translator during this project. Unlike the project *Seek Me*, where all parties were aware of the process of mutual perception and interpretation, participants were not informed that the spoor they were investigating was my own. The day before the joint interview, in which the experts could demonstrate their tracking skills by expressing how they perceived the person who had left the track, I was walking barefoot in the desert sands, informing Peter where to find my trail (Figures 1.11 – 1.13). While I appeared to participants in the position of a researcher (operating the video camera and instructing the research assistant), Peter, replacing the abstract expressions in the questionnaire I had given him (such as "portrait" or "character") asked the women about perceivable physical aspects, characteristic features and actions. He later transcribed and translated the participant's responses, which I had recorded on video. The women had expressed themselves both through spoken language and gestures, as still used by many Australian groups, in their most detailed form, by the Walpiri (Kendon 2015).

In my journal contribution "Track Me – A Portrait as Dialogue" (2013a), I described this encounter:

> Mitjili, Ida, Judy and Noreen were asked to follow and read a track I laid out by walking barefoot in the Central Australian desert. The field interviewer, Peter Bartlet[t], challenged the respondents to say what they perceived through the traces while I portrayed them on video. (Boeck 2013a, 4)

While the Samis had direct access to me for the process of evaluation and representation of my person, this was communicated to the experts in Australia via my footprint. In addition, the research assistant was positioned as a mediator between us, adding another level of interpretation and mediation.



Fig. 1.11: Angelika's track, *Track Me* (2006). Video still: Angelika Boeck.



Fig. 1.12: Noreen Nampijinpa Robertson, Judy Nampijinpa Granites and Ida Nangala Granites discussing Angelika's track, *Track Me* (2006). Video still: Angelika Boeck.



Fig. 1.13: Ida Nangala Granites, Mitjili Napanangka Gibson, Judy Nampijinpa Granites and Noreen Nampijinpa Robertson during the collective interview, *Track Me* (2006). Video still: Angelika Boeck.

On several other days I documented how participants hunted/collected food and drew tracks in the sand so as to teach their children (Figures 1.14 – 1.15).



Fig. 1.14: Judy Nampijinpa Granites digging for a lizard, *Track Me* (2006).
Video still: Angelika Boeck.



Fig. 1.15: Ida Nangala Granites drawing an emu's track into the sand, *Track Me* (2006).
Video still: Angelika Boeck.

In consent, the four women named the exact day and time I had been walking around the desert and agreed that the "strange" and "unmotivated" footprints probably came from a "woman without evil intentions". They agreed that she was neither familiar with the area nor of Aboriginal origin, explaining that "real people", as they call themselves, "press their heels harder" (Boeck 2019, 62). They correctly concluded that the footprints came from a thin European woman whose breasts had not yet sagged, meaning that she had not born a child.

Just as *Track Me* presented me with a personal problem (my childlessness) at the age of 38, the previous project, *Seek Me*, brought me into contact with my childhood memories. This enabled me to understand a central aspect of Yoik formulated by Doris Stockmann: "To sing yoik means deeply identifying yourself with someone or something" (Plantenga 2004, 103). I experienced this resonance when I heard one of the singers singing my Yoik for the first time in the studio, which immediately made me so sad that my tears came. When I later asked the singer (although I already knew it) what aspect of me he was singing about, he replied that he had perceived in me something he profoundly knew himself, adding that the composition of my yoik had been the hardest work he

had ever done. My disabled twin sister must have completely absorbed my mother's attention, he said, as much as his drowned little brother had occupied his own mother's. I concluded that his Yoik about me was his expression of our shared experience of "not being seen" (Boeck 2019, 54). Together, these events led me to assign more relational potential to the cultural practices I was investigating than the visual practice (photography/video) I employed in the process of mutual portrayal.

For a long time, the concept of modern individualism has been situated by traditional Renaissance research in "portraiture and biography and, even more strongly, in self-portraiture and autobiography" (Martin 2004, 10). John Jeffries Martin, who admits that it was possible to reflect in a new way on the "self" in the Renaissance, believes that the birth of the individual at the end of the European Middle Ages must be regarded as a myth. Therefore, he proposed the notion of the "relational self" (Martin 2004).[2] His view corresponds to that of many indigenous peoples, for whom individual identity is inextricably linked to the community to which they belong (United Nations 2017). While Western individuality, one of the central concepts of modern thought, is only one of three basic components of self-representation, other components (the relational self and the collective self), which together form the self-concept (Sedikides and Brewer 2016) remaing relatively unconsidered. In contrast, indigenous and non-Western cultures seem to prefer these components of fundamental self-representation while suppressing the individual self. This, I suspect, finds expression in aesthetic forms of representation. The emphasis on the Western autonomous individual and not on relations between individuals (i.e. kinship, as in so-called traditional societies) could be associated with "the separation of the senses" rather than their "conjunction or interaction" (Howes 2017, 163), as previously argued (Boeck 2019).



Fig. 1.16: *Track Me* (2006), Exhibition view Schafthof Freising (2017).
Photograph: Eike Berg.

Unlike the juxtaposition of photography and sound in *Seek Me*, the three-channel video installation *Track Me* (Figure 1.16) combined both perspectives on one and the same plane, the video interview. To the left and right of the central screen, on two separate monitors, the additional

material I had spontaneously recorded, is being shown. Although this material is unrelated to the process of mutual representation, central to my research, I had recorded these sequences to reinforce participants' assessment of my persona. Since I wanted to bring into representation what the woman's attention had been directed at in their analysis, I had also filmed my own footprints (Figure 1.11), thereby integrating an element of self-representation, an element which I realized I had also included in *Seek Me* in a different way, using depictions of the singers in their everyday attires instead of in their traditional costumes as they had suggested. In doing so, I worked against the musicians' expectations of me as a researcher, which would portray them as typically Sami, and the associated control of their self-representations.

Together, the projects of my comparative cross-cultural art practice, *Portrait as Dialogue*, draw attention to the circumstance that the Western gaze results in a mere physiognomic representation, especially as it is counterposed with "a rich trove of cultural practices existent outside the Western tradition of 'portrayal' – a 'potential resource', previously 'largely unperceived and therefore unexplored and theorized" (Boeck 2019, 74). By focusing on different aspects of sensory perception, connected to alternative modes of aesthetic representation, each project provided an ever more complete portrait of myself. Moreover, "participants" interpretations of myself were "constructed in dialogue and conjunction with me, much more so than my visual representations of them were" (ibid., 74). This directly points to what was at stake: a provocation directed at an "unsettling" and "piercing [of] the gaze", as Margaret Kovach demanded from research with decolonising aspirations (Kovach 2018, 217).

Combining Landscape and Portrait

A Similar intention can be, for example, observed in Jorma Puranen's landscape installation *Imaginary Homecoming* (1991-1996), which is related to the artists discovery of a large number of depictions of Sámi individuals (taken by the photographer G. Roche, who had accompanied a French expedition led by Prince Roland Bonaparte in 1882) in the Musee de L'Homme in Paris. Critically addressing the common history of anthropology and colonial photography, Puranen first photographed the portraits of the Sámi individuals in the anthropological museum; he then developed them on graphic film, mounted each portrait on a clear acrylic plate and brought all to Finnmark. After returning and installing the images in the landscape where they were originally taken, he photographed them again for his picture series. As motivation for *Imaginary Homecoming*, he said:

> ...[T]he idea was to metaphorically return people who had been buried in archives back to the landscape from which they had been separated. (Puranen, quoted in Mercer 2006, 3).

Similarily, to Puranen, Kathleen Petyarre (1935-2018), like many other Australian Aboriginal artists, combines in her work what, from a Western point of view, could be interpreted as landscape and portrait. Petyarre's paintings revolve around the "epic journeys of her dreaming ancestor", the "Thorny Devil Lizard", a tiny desert creature "believed to have created the area where the people of

East Anmatjerre lived" (Indigenous Fine Art Gallery, 2001). In demonstrating connection to land with her paintings, Petyarre played "an instrumental role in winning the 1980 land claim that returned the land around Utopia to its traditional owners" (ibid.) as a result of the 1976 federal parliament Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, which enabled Indigenous people to claim land rights for country where traditional ownership could be proven (Wildburger 2014, 75).[3] A comparable, even more spectacular earlier case is related to the Ngurrara Canvas II (1996), a 8x10 meter large painting, which the Ngurrara used as evidence of their claim in 1997. Forty applicants, artists and non-artists jointly created a "politically and culturally charged map of their traditional land" (Smith 2017), with the help of which they established the claim to property from the delegates who had to decide on the case through their respective segments of the painting. The canvas became the central success factor of the Ngurrara claim, which was officially recognized ten years later (ibid.).

Conclusion

Using my own work on portrait as an example, I have shown how valuable it can be to look at portrait in the light of other cultural practices and traditions, taking into account the entire spectrum of our human senses (Howes 1991; Stoller 1997; Pink 2009; Ingold 2011; Arantes and Rieger 2014), with a particular emphasis on indigenous theories of perception, which David Howes described as "the most elucidating cultural studies of the senses" (Howes 2005, 6). I argued that, by adopting a vulnerable position as a researcher, I was able to explore alternative visual and multisensory methodological and analytical frameworks for the representation of otherness. I further argued that the simultaneously reinforcing and challenging dominant Western regimes of representation provided me with the opportunity to foreground indigenous and non-Western practices, while at the same time mediating to a Western audience what it feels like to be evaluated and represented according to different cultural modalities and criteria. This has enabled me to achieve in the field of "art as anthropology", a "form of art" in which artists engage "with ideas and questions that anthropology has also been interested in" (Sansi 2015: 20), what anthropologists Stoller (1997, 1989), Schneider and Wright (2006) and Pink (2009) demand of anthropological research, namely to question our own sensual prejudices and systems of representation more critically, thus contributing to a better understanding of cultural practices and human experiences in general.

Hanna Mcpherson suggested moving "beyond landscape's ocular-centrism" (Mcpherson 2006, 95) since the "relationship between perception, the senses and landscape is not fixed, but geographically, historically and culturally contingent" (ibid., 97). An exploration of landscape as "a site on which we project different ideas, fantasies, and perspectives" (Brown 2014, 110) and as *Ways of Sensing* (Howes and Classen 2013) which takes into account alternative systems of representation in contrast to the "primarily visual construct" (ibid.) and product of Western thought could be a valuable approach and a way to continue Mitchell's cause. Just as I have taken an intercultural and multisensory perspective on the portrait, I suggest that a juxtaposition of a scientific approach to landscape with other cultural practices and different cultural perspectives by taking into consideration contemporary landscape-related artistic positions, can contribute to and expand on the notion of landscape.

For example, in their summary overview of the development of the term "landscape" as a changing concept from the Renaissance, Ayda Alehasehmi and Sayedamir Mansouri (2018) explain the phenomenon of landscape as an aesthetic reference to nature with the distinction between the world of the subject and the world of the object. With the introduction of Augustin Berque's work, who proposed the landscape as "a series of relations between human and land" that refer to our "memories" and our "historical, cultural and biological mentality" (ibid., 39) and with reference to Alain Rogers, they stress that the mediation between inside and outside can only be mediated through art (ibid., 40). By welcoming landscape as a new discipline for the 21st century, they hope to overcome the traditional dualism between object and subject that has dominated science for centuries (ibid., 42). In my opinion, the Aboriginal Australians achieved this a long time ago.

Corresponding with the concerns of "relational art" or "relational aesthetics", which "takes as [its] theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context", rather than an "independent and private space" (Bourriaud et al. 2002, 113), the works of Puranen and Peytarre seem to take Cosgrove's observation of "a new relationship between humans and their environment" (Cosgrove 1989, 122) literally, formulating, from a contemporary point of view, a new consciousness through the joint contemplation of portrait and landscape, as opposed to the practices developed during the Renaissance. While Puranens work appears as a symbolic gesture of healing past injustices, Petyarre and her colleagues showed how landscape can counteract the effects of colonial power. The combination of portrait and landscape can provide an opportunity to reflect on past and present things and bring about change. As these artists have shown, Mitchell's assessment that landscape is "an exhausted medium, no longer viable as a mode of artistic expression" (Mitchell 2002[1994], 5) is untenable.

Endnotes:

1. Ayda Alehashemi and Sayedamir Mansouri give a detailed report of the changes of the "landscape" concept from the Renaissance until today in their paper *Landscape; a Shifting Concept. The Evolution of the Concept of Landscape from Renaissance*. However, to go into this in more detail would exceed the scope of my contribution.
2. Peter Chametzky argued that this is due to the fact that the influential art and cultural historian Jakob Burckhardt projected romantic notions of individualism onto Italian Renaissance artists, thus creating a paradigm for art historical studies (Chametzky 2014).
3. Information on the Aboriginal Land Rights Act is available at: https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/aboriginal-land-rights-act.

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A Suggested Reform in the Syllabuses of Philology and Philosophy

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Abstract:

As happened in the conflict between von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Nietzsche, even today there are philologists who do not believe that philosophy is a respectable science. One of them is Tom Shippey, a scholar of English and Germanic philology. In this paper I want to argue two things: 1) that in the golden age of philology, the major philologists were directly influenced by the philosophers; 2) that in a reform of the faculty of Arts and Humanities it would be possible to improve the syllabus of Philology linking it to philosophical texts, and to improve the syllabus of Philosophy by immersing it in the history of philosophy and its texts.

Keywords: von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Nietzsche, Tom Shippey, philosophy, philology, Latin Medieval texts.

An Allegation

Is it true that comparative philology is both at odds with philosophy and is scientifically superior to it? This question could sound weird, irrelevant and forgettable to most, like if someone asked: do archangels go on strike more frequently than cherubim?

However, the debate did exist, as Sheldon Pollock, a renowned scholar of Sanskrit, reminds us:

> In 1872 a now-obscure pamphlet was published by a young – and, for non-classicists, now equally obscure – philologist. The philologist was Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, and the pamphlet was *Zukunftsphilologie!* (Future Philology!), an attack on Friedrich Nietzsche's just published *The Birth of Tragedy*. Philology in Europe was at its zenith, one of the hardest sciences on offer, the center piece of education, the sharpest exponent if not the originator of the idea of "critical" thinking, and the paradigm of other sciences such as evolutionary biology. The dispute between the two authors was (...) about the method and meaning of classical studies. For Wilamowitz, true knowledge of any social or cultural phenomenon of the past could only be acquired by examining every feature of its historical context, and by doing so completely abstracting it from present-day perspectives. For Nietzsche, the approach of the newly professionalized (and only recently named) discipline of philology had completely deadened antiquity and perverted the true aim of its study; the philologists them. (Pollock 2009, 931-932)

Moreover, this debate still exists. In 2010 the worldwide renowned scholar of Germanic philology Tom Shippey claims:

> Many years ago I was interviewing candidates for an important university scholarship, and one candidate was said to be the best philosopher of his year at the University of Oxford. He told us that he was studying the concept of "God" in Augustine, and that he was focusing on the difference in Augustine's writings between "a god" and "the god" and "God". I thought about this for a minute or two, and then asked curiously – for I thought I must have misunderstood and be asking a silly question – "but Augustine wrote in Latin, which has neither a definite nor an indefinite article. So how can you tell what he meant when he wrote deus?" The brilliant young philosopher gaped at me. He had not thought of that. He did not get the scholarship, and all the philosophers were very angry with me, but what could I say? I am a philologist. These things are important to me. I know very little of concepts of god, but something about concepts of grammar.
>
> And there is here a difference of temperament as well. It was the philosopher William James who pointed this out. We all, he wrote, have two impulses in us, but we have them in different proportions. One is the impulse to generalise, to organise facts into systems and patterns, to see how things are connected. The other is to look at details, at specifics, to see how things are different. They should of course be balanced, but I would suggest that philosophers are the generalisers, the ones with the telescope. Philologists are the scrutinisers, the ones with the microscope.
>
> (...) Philosophy is too important to be left to philosophers. Philosophy deals with the great questions of human life, and anyone who has lived for very long is at least aware of them. Why must we die? Why are our lives so different from each other? Is there no justice in the world? Are we merely the victims of chance? (...)
>
> Now, in our time, academic philosophers have ceased to have much to do with ordinary people. They do not talk the same language, and the language of academic philosophers is more and more impenetrable. (Shippey 2014, 22 sq.)

As a philosopher (or, more modestly, a philosophy scholar) myself, I know that sometimes philosophers reciprocated and opposed the exaggerated claims of some philologists: "our digging out and collecting of erudite details is sufficient to build the history of any human matter". The silliness of such claims was well described, for example, by philosopher Benedetto Croce (who highly prized philology and was a philologist himself). (Croce 1921, 12-26)

Also, when Shippey says that philosophers generalise, whereas philologists care about details, this seems to me too simplistic. On one hand many philosophers immerse themselves in a veritable forest of detailed distinctions (for example Aristotle's writings on logic, such as *Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics* etc.); on the other hand, philologists too generalise, speculate and theorise, both in textual criticism and linguistics, as I will show below.

Finally, Shippey seems to suggest that there is just one kind of knowledge, a sort of epistemological reductionism! But to me it appears obvious that philosophy of language *does not* substitute phonetics, and Aristotle's or Rawls's ethical reflections on justice *do not* substitute the government's calculations of house taxes and Hegel's dialectics *do not* substitute S. J. Gould's analysis of the genetic variation of Caribbean molluscs (even though Gould reflected on and admired Hegelian dialectics). And when Shippey insinuates that philosophy is too important to be left to

philosophers, I agree with him that many "philosophers" are narrow-minded and have little influence on thought in general (nevertheless most politicians are not Cromwell, and most chemists are not Lavoisier!).

Is it really possible that a lone individual, reflecting on the events of his life, has the capacity to conceive ideas such as human rights, the evolution of species, the separation of powers, the objections to Manichaeism, the free market, the development of sexuality, and so on? I think that – although it is certainly not necessary to have read original philosophical texts – in order to philosophize *well* one needs ideas that derive from (great) philosophers.

I agree that that 'young philosopher' mentioned by Shippey really failed while approaching an ancient text without knowing the language. But this does not make Shippey win the day. I rather agree with Giambattista Vico and Benedetto Croce who famously said: philology is blind without philosophy, and philosophy is empty without philology. Both are incapable of becoming History, if each one of them stays alone.

Philologia et Philosophia Geminae Hortae[1]

Stimulated by Shippey's intellectual pugnacity, I produced an original research (since there were no others around) to contrast this alleged superior autonomy of philology, and, also, to provide new evidence to support Vico' and Croce's fundamental idea. My research suits the following (non-fallacious) *ad hominem* argument: almost all the best philologists during philology golden age were in fact influenced by philosophers.

The Classical philologist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff wrote that Vico and the ideas of the philosopher Herder inspired his interest in the history of peoples and unconscious, collective artistic creation, and that only after this was he able to understand legends: without these philosophers comparative linguistics would have been impossible. In particular, von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff cites the influence of Kant on the philologist G. Hermann and of the philosopher Scheiermacher on the philologist Bekker's textual criticism (von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1982, 109, 115).

The philologist S. Timpanaro writes that the Swiss philologist J.C. Orelli was influenced by the philosopher Pestalozzi. (Timpanaro 2006, 90)

The Danish philologist N. F. S. Grundtvig (held in high regard by Tolkien because of his clever critical edition of *Beowulf*) after reading the German philosopher Schelling's essay *Bruno* about the noted 16th century Italian philosopher, wrote "I dared to acknowledge the truth: reality holds no joy for me...I looked for life in his *Bruno*". He also wrote a poem, *Gottlieb Fichte*, addressed to Schelling: "your gigantic voice ... wakened me from my false tranquillity, wakened me to doubt and belief, reminded me of the light of truth and the blossoms of love". Grundtvig's interest for Nordic mythology arose from reading the works of the philosopher F. Schlegel[2].

Benedetto Croce thought that philosophers and historians came together for the first time in the Romantic movement, giving birth to a new philological school and to works like *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* and *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. (*cf.* Croce 1921, 278)

The philologist W.P. Lehmann writes that the philosopher Leibniz studied historical linguistics and helped the philologist J.C. Adelung to find material for his *Mithridates*. Lehmann also writes that in 1808 the philosopher F. Schlegel published *Über die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indien* in which – using comparative anatomy as a model – he sought evidence regarding the genealogy of languages in comparative grammar. Four years after this work, the anatomist G. Cuvier published his popular treatise on comparative anatomy *Recherches sur des ossemens fossils de quadrupeds*. Philologist Franz Bopp's 1816 work on the system of conjugation in Sanskrit compared to those of Greek, Latin, Persian and German, *Über das Conjugationssytem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache*, had no need of further models. Three years after Bopp's book, Jacob Grimm published the first volume of *Deutsche Grammatik* and – after having read the book *Undersøgelse om det gamle Nordiske eller Islandske Sprogs Oprindelse* by philologist R. Rask (1818) – rewrote it, formulating the basic rules of what became historical phonology[3].

Jacob Grimm would certainly have known Vico through Savigny, who appreciated him and recommended his works to Niebuhr (another of the Grimm brothers' intellectual forebears), and through Herder in Germany, who knew Vico's writings well[4]. The influence of Kant on Grimm's mentor Savigny was also important (see studies by Wieacker, Kiefner and Meder). (*cf.* Toews 2004) His reception of post-Kantian idealism (Fichte, Fries, Schlegel, Höerderlin) is documented by Rückert (1984, 232-300) and Nörr (1994). In 1841 Jacob Grimm admitted that his cultural interests had been shaped not so much by the Romantic notion of culture that developed in successive stages, as by the experience of "shame and humiliation' he underwent when his homeland was occupied by a foreign power. In response to this threat to his national identity, he put the historical principle to use not so much to grasp the present as to sum up the past, so as to construct a past that could function as an 'invisible umbrella against the enemy's arrogance'". (Toews 2004, 320) To assert one's own identity, one had to recreate the world in which one's own tongue had attained its first meanings. Jacob dedicated his *Deutsche Grammatik* to Savigny, because, when his father had died in 1796, he had been taken in as an orphan by Savigny, together with his four brothers and sister, entering into a new world of friendships and family connections. (Toews 2004, 294, 319, 320, 330) Nevertheless, in 1850 Grimm wrote a theoretical essay influenced by philosophers Schelling, Schlegel, Herder, Hegel and Von Humboldt. (Meli 1992, 49-50)

Franz Bopp, a German linguist known for extensive work on the origins of Indo-European languages, at Aschaffenburg was attracted to oriental languages by the lectures of Karl J Windischmann – a philosopher influenced by Schelling who was full of enthusiasm for Indian philosophy – and further stimulated by F. Schlegel's book, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indien* (Heidelberg, 1808).

Concerning the great philologist Karl Lachmann, Germanic, Classical and Biblical scholar, Timpanaro writes that there is a parallel between the *stemmata codicum* of textual criticism and the "genealogical tree" of languages introduced by Schleicher in comparative linguistics.

(*cf.* Timpanaro 2006, 121-122) Schleicher thought that phonological changes were corruptions of an original "perfection", analogous to the textual errors that accumulate along the *stemma codicum* of a manuscript-archetype. (*Ibid.*) Lachmann exaggerated in his under-valuation of the *codices recentiores*, much as contemporary scholars under-valued the more recent tongues, believing that Sanskrit (being the oldest known tongue) preserved the most ancient and original form of all languages, and was thus the most "perfect". (Timpanaro 2006, 125-126)

One might have thought that textual critics such as Lachmann perhaps took their ideas from comparative linguistics, but the converse is more likely (from textual criticism to comparative linguistics). According to Timpanaro, though, neither hypothesis is correct: Schleicher was inspired by the natural sciences model and not that of classical philology, holding that comparative linguistics was not historical, but rather a *Naturorganismus*. Timpanaro sees a common origin for textual criticism, comparative anatomy in a sort of "comparative mentality" that was widespread in the early19th century. (Timpanaro 2006, 128)

The philologist Fiesoli narrates that in the Berlin *Dreiftaltigkeitsfriedhof* Lachmann's tomb may be seen next to that of the philosopher Schleiermacher, since before he died Lachmann asked to be buried beside the friend who had been "always close to him during mortal life". (Fiesoli 2000, 109, 127, 129, 130, 133, 135) Frequent epistolary exchanges between the two scholars and the laudatory dedication to Schleiermacher in the *Incipit* of Lachmann's *Rechenschaft* are sufficient proofs of their reciprocal esteem. Moreover, Lutz-Hensel noted the similarity of the words both used when comparing "good conjectures" with respect to "bad manuscripts".

Philosopher Schleiermacher in his *Vorlesungen* wrote that "philological" criticism coincides with the "historical", because it is necessary first to reconstruct the "fact" (the original document): there are two kinds of philological criticism, and only the second of these is suitable for evaluating a document's level of reliability. He shared Lachmann's diffidence towards *codices recentiores* and rare variants. (*Ibid.*) According to the philosopher, Lachmann had only one final step to take: that of adding critical analysis to hermeneutic analysis. And it was precisely this that Lachmann began to do in his *editio maior* of the New Testament. Here when defining "*recensio*" and "*emendatio*", Lachmann uses a "philosophical" – rather than "philological" – style; he theorizes and shapes "universals". Thus Lachmann closes the hermeneutic circle inspired by Schleiermacher, with a famous distinction between "*verum*" and "*veri simile*". (*Ibid.*)

Philologist M. Olender writes that the Semitic language philologist J.-E. Renan read philosopher Herder's works at Saint-Sulpice and felt as though he were "entering a temple(...) It was exactly what I was looking for, the combination of a highly religious with a critical spirit [...] so that I might be more a philosopher without ceasing to be a Christian".(Olender 2008, 86, 88, 90, 93-94) He also writes that the Indo-European philologist Adolphe Pictet in 1820 in Paris became interested in the philosopher V. Cousin and dreamed of founding with him a "*Revue Philosophique"*. During the winter of 1821-2 Pictet made a philosophical pilgrimage to Germany and met Goethe, Schelling, Schleiermacher and Hegel. (*Ibid.*)

A. Schleicher – influenced by Positivist philosophy – tried to shape a Darwinian model for linguistics as a "natural science", but Steinberg (1897, 360 sq.) wrote that this idea of linguistics as *Naturorganismus* derived from Hegel, the philosophy of whom Schleicher had studied in Bonn and espoused when at Tübingen. Schleicher knew the Darwinian model only indirectly, from the writings of the philosopher H. Spencer, who had in fact published his idea of the evolution of species before Darwin and Wallace, but Spencer at that time – as Lamarck – believed in the inheritance of acquired characteristics rather than natural selection.

The Germanic philologist W. P. Ker in his *Epic and Romance* (1896) discussed at length (for dozens of pages) the *Poetics* of the philosopher Aristotle.

H. U. Gumbrecht writes that philologist von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was under the influence of the philosopher Herder's writings, and that his disciple, philologist W. Jaeger, "saw a decisive potential for the renovation of Classical philology in the writings of Nietzsche and Dilthey". (Gumbrecht 2003, 51)

Lachmann's method suffered a crisis in the late 19th century when von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff realized that it could not be applied mechanically: tradition is complex, the scholar needs to know the "culture" of Antiquity and the Middle Ages and pay attention to "internal" criteria (*lectio difficilior, usus scribendi*). Even the most suspect *codex* might harbour a correct variant. Meanwhile, comparative linguistics also experienced a crisis: J. Schmidt and P. Kretschener (Germanic philologists) and H. Schuchardt (a Romance philologist) proposed a "horizontal theory": kinship between tongues occurs through reciprocal influences and not genealogical descent. Much as in the 1850s and 60s scholars of languages and textual critics had breathed a common evolutionist and comparative air, so at the end of the 19th century they both began to breathe a different air: the reaction against Positivist philosophy. This gave more importance to the study of the origins of Romance – and even living – languages and modified the proposed kinship relations between the Indo-European tongues. (Timpanaro 2006, 127 sq.)

The philologist G. Nencioni (1989, 65-67) writes that this reaction against Positivism by the philosophers Rickert, Dilthey, Windelband, Bergson, Simmel and Bradley influenced linguistics as well; more importance came to be given to individual linguistic creativity and logical faculties – as may be seen in the work of Schuchardt and Gillieron. They argue against the concept of "regularity" in phonetic change and the "collectivity" of linguistic inspiration; for them each word has its own life, both semantic and phonetic; they criticize the concept of "idiomatic unity" and emèphasize the individuality of each linguistic datum. For Gillieron the word is the focus of linguistic investigation (see e.g. his *'Scier' dans la Gaule Romane*).

In 1922 philosopher Benedetto Croce – in a review of work by one of his followers, German philologist Karl Vossler – spoke of a crisis in linguistics: in the mid-19th century the "phonological law" had been considered a "natural law", whereas it had come to be understood by scholars in the field as "scientific" and "abstract", revealing its limits in the field of etymology, that is in the face of real "historical" problems. (Nencioni 1989, 72)

In his *Individualismus* (1923, *Festschrift für W. Streitberg*) H. Schuchardt referred to himself

as “an idealist” like Vossler, agreeing with Croce's theory that language is an “aesthetic expression”, but adding that it is above all “communication” (Nencioni 1989, 17). Schuchardt saw these two views not as contradicting one other, but as being complementary: “expression” comes first, but we have language only if there is “communication”. If there were just “expression” – as Vossler and Croce said – all grammatical changes would be due to individual speakers, whereas they are almost always produced by the linguistic community. (Nencioni 1989, 36)

Philologist W. von Wartburg in *Einführung in Problematik und Methodik der Sprachhwissenschaft* (Halle, 1943) wrote that Vossler always tended to treat language as “expression”, that is as Saussure’s “parole”, seeing only what is new, without being able to determine the relationships between the new and the old. (Nencioni 1989, 37)

Cultural Changes and Educational Issues

I said ‘the golden age of philology’, because, after WWII, it started declining and its decline is accelerating in our time. The already mentioned Pollock says:

> [for some scholars] philology has ceased to be. It is a “now defunct field,” a “protohumanistic empirical science” that “no longer exists as such,” its decline “a conspicuous and puzzling fact.” To some degree, we philologists have brought this crisis upon ourselves and have permitted such breath-taking ignorance to persist through our failure to make a strong case for our discipline either explicitly or by our practices. (...) there are striking variations in the state of philology across the world. In India, it is perilously close to the point of no return, and whether coming generations will even be able to read the texts of their traditions is now all too real a question. (Pollock 2009, 934 -935)

Not just Sanskrit. I asked Tom Shippey whether today there are young researchers able to prepare "critical editions" of ancient or medieval texts in Germanic languages, and Shippey replied that no, there are not, at least in the English-speaking world. A reply which at first amazed me. But then I asked a similar question to Saverio Cannistra, who was a researcher in Romance philology at Scuola Normale in Pisa under a professor considered at the time the foremost scholar in the field, Gianfranco Contini. I asked him about the current state of Romance philology and he told me that critical editions are no longer made, at least in Italy. I don't want to exaggerate this point since I don't know how much or in what way Romance philology is pursued in France or Spain, and I didn't ask Shippey how and to what extent Germanic philology is studied in Germany or Norway. However, these two pieces of evidence made me reflect a little on the cultural history of the 20th century.

If Athens cries, Sparta does not laugh, as the Italian proverb says. I mean, although it seems that students, departments, conferences and books of philosophy are many more than the correspondents of philology, this can be an illusion.

In fact, as Shippey remarked, the dialogue between the academic ‘philosophers’ has become increasingly impenetrable and often unable to meet the existential needs of the common man; precisely those needs – mentioned by Shippey - that gave birth to philosophy and sustained its

development throughout the centuries. The themes that today circulate in books and conferences of philosophy too often seem a sterile mimicking of the extreme specialization of the natural sciences. With a seriously problematic difference though: while the biologist finds his research objects in nature, too often the philosopher can find them in the transient cultural fashions adopted by his/her colleagues. This struggle for catching up with the academic fashions is an activity that drains time and energies, so that the scholar might be absorbed by minutiae, neglect the basics and therefore be vulnerable to Shippey's other objection, the anecdote of the brilliant philosopher of Augustine who did not know Latin.

A new perspective could come from a deep reform of the philosophy syllabus that prevails in the universities of our time. History of philosophy should be the new basis: mandatory comprehensive courses of Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary philosophy. It should be also the new central methodological criteria: every particular philosophical discipline, for example philosophy of politics, should be a course of "history of" philosophy of politics. In this way both the students and the teachers would repeatedly, continually focus on the texts of the great (and also not so great) authors, inevitably having to cope with historical details and language expertise.

At the same time the philology syllabus could be reformed: the traditional focus on poetry, literary prose and political history made philologists focus on very minor texts, while neglecting the philosophical ones. There are hundreds of handwritten texts of medieval philosophy (both in Latin and Greek) that have never been translated in modern languages, let alone bestowed with a critical edition, and they include classics like John Duns Scotus, Albert the Great and Bernard de Clairvaux. Good for the classicists, you could object, but what about Germanists and Romanists? Although it is true that the most important printed vernacular works of the Early Modern era philosophers have been critically edited, there are still hundreds of works of followers of Descartes, Locke and Hegel that have not. In this way, new generations of philologists could become closely acquainted with themes and methods of the philosophical tradition and overcome that mixture of suspicion and hauteur we have seen at the beginning of this paper.

Endnotes:

1. Philology and philosophy share a common birth; cf. B. Croce, *The Philosophy of G. B. Vico*, London: Howard Latimer Ltd., 1913, pp. 29- 33.
2. For quotations in this section, see *N.F.S. Grundtvig: a Life Recalled. An Anthology of Biographical Source-Texts*, ed. S. A. J. Bradley, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008, pp. 377, 416, 543.
3. W.P. Lehmann*, Historical Linguistics: an Introduction*, New York: Routledge, 2003. The philologist W. D. Whitney, *La vie du langage*, Paris: Librairie Germer, 1875, p. 261, also thought that the birth of linguistics was brought about by the speculations of philosophers such as Leibniz and Herder.
4. Cf. G. Marini, *Jacob Grimm e Vico*, "Bollettino di Studi Vichiani" 1974. The only philosophy Grimm accepted was that useful for understanding history, not the systematic philosophy of Christian Wolff. For thoughts on philosophy in Grimm's works, see: J. Grimm, *Kleiner Schriften*, Bd. 8, Berlin: Dümmler, 1864-1884, pp. 32-33; Grimm's letter to Savigny, after the latter had published *Vom Beruf unsrer Zeit für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft* (in *Briefe der Bruder Grimm an Savigny*, Berlin 1953, pp. 171-178, in particular p. 173); Grimm's review of Wilhelm Muller's *Geschichte und System*

der altdeutschen Religion, which says: "If you want to call this speculative attitude 'philosophical spirit', I would rather philosophize outside of things and not within them" (cf. G. Marini, *Jacob Grimm e Vico*) .

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"You Have Forever Changed My Life": The Need for Academic Rigor in Teaching Humanities in a Global Society

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Abstract:

Teaching Humanities to an increasingly globalized, diverse and non-traditional student body needs to inculcate and develop what Kysilka has called thinking skills, to equip students to approach material and concepts that may seem challenging and unfamiliar. Educators may benefit from employing the approaches Gardner has developed in his theory of Multiple Intelligences, to maximally engage students with widely differing academic exposures and skills. Reader Response journaling allows students to explore and engage with unfamiliar texts. Twenty-first-century educators need to be prepared to assess student success less by testing content acquisition and theory repetition than by evaluating student development of analytical strengths and mastery of the skills of analytical performance.

Keywords: African American Literature, African Literature, andragogy, Howard Gardner, journaling, Marcella Kysilka, Multiple Intelligences, Reader Response, thinking skills, World Literature

Education in the United States faces an andragogical crisis. The breadth and depth of learning expected of American children a century ago challenges today's adult American educators. A popular reference in discussions about current American education is using early twentieth-century middle and high school end-of-year exams that cannot be passed by not only American college students today but their professors, as well. As an associate professor of literature newly arrived at an historically African American university in the twenty-first century's first decade, when students repeatedly told me that I had "taught them to think," I took the statement as a self-denigrating assessment of native capacity and argued vociferously against it. I thought my ethnic minority students were calling themselves stupid. But I was mistaken, both in my interpretation of my students' assessment of what I was teaching them and in my assumption that there was no need to teach it. It is with good reason that Marcella Kysilka argues that educators must be trained to

incorporate the teaching of what she summarizes as thinking skills in basic education: "Individuals need to know how to learn and how to think and should not be receptacles for facts" (Kysilka 1998, 198). This need was identified in the 1980s when standardized testing revealed that American students had little to no analytical or abstract reasoning ability in comparison to students from other countries. Kysilka's breakdown of trends in American education per decade from the 1960s through the 1980s calls for packaging the teaching of thinking skills in the transmission of basic educational content.

Ethnic minorities in the United States may have been taught to equate education with Anglicization, as described by Carter G. Woodson in *The Mis-education of the Negro*. Sensitive about this potential equating of scholarly achievement with whitewashing, throughout my first half decade teaching at an HBCU, when students stated in my classes that I had "taught them to think," it took several unappreciative responses on my part and patient rejoinders on theirs to clarify that they were actually telling me that they had learned to self-analyze, self-criticize, self-observe, and self-instruct. They were articulating to me that they were observing themselves becoming lifelong self-educators, a commonly held goal that we had not expressed to each other. My students were right to call what I was teaching them, along with the literature I expected them to read, the skillset necessary to understand, analyze and apply it.

Well analyzed Humanities material develops the capacity for real-world application of abstract literary, psychosocial, philosophical, and historical concepts. For example, a traumatized nineteen-year-old with a newborn baby who had watched her father die of a heart attack on a cot in a shelter during escape from Hurricane Katrina's flooding of New Orleans left a letter on my office door, defending her absences and her defensive responses to my corrections. In her letter, she described her Katrina ordeal and its impact on her adjustment to both the strange city where her family sought shelter and the unfamiliar university she was presently attending, by quoting the imprisoned and castrated Chinese historian Sima Quian in her effort to, as she stated, help me "understand her ways": I too have ventured not to be modest but have entrusted myself to my useless writings [....] though I should suffer a thousand mutilations, what regret should I have? (Sima Quian 1958, 67)

An ex-felon who later became a wealthy young entrepreneur read to his class about his self-inflicted self-discipline, regularly subjecting himself to solitary confinement in a closet in his apartment where he recited passages from *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* until he overcame each bout of depression and discouragement. Another young professional read aloud about combating her depression following date rape by comparing her terror to that of abducted child soldiers' brides in Uganda, as recounted in Els De Temmerman's *Aboke Girls*. This student went on to marry across racial barriers, a practice formerly condemned in her family, and to raise two well-educated, socially adjusted and broad-minded sons with her husband's and broader family's support. A six-foot-four former child soldier and political refugee from West Africa, who was learning English in college as a third language after his tribal language and French, stood before his class with his hands, voice and body trembling to read one carefully crafted page with painfully selected quotes from the assigned texts, describing his mother's rescue of him from his kidnappers and her sending him to asylum in

the United States. A father who had been cursed by his own mother, community and traditional nation and exiled from his West African homeland because he refused to have his daughters circumcised wept upon hearing his classmates' sustained applause for his decision to protect them from female genital cutting. This breakthrough and appreciation of the power of their support spontaneously occurred to the class after they had all read Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower* or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* and listened to their fellow student's confessional journal entry, describing the personal cost of his choice to break tradition on behalf of his daughters. An Iranian Muslim asked permission to stand and read before her class her essay apologizing to its Baha'i guest speaker for her country's religious persecution of him, his family and his entire Baha'i community. A young woman resistant to reading anything beyond the Bible wrote about her renewed religious conviction after reading Ben Okri's vision of Nigeria as seen through the eyes of a spirit-child in *The Famished Road*. A young woman's Master's Thesis vented her shock at losing her stillborn newborn and her unfaithful fiancé in the span of a few months, quoting multiple volumes of men's African and Diaspora Literature to vindicate her uncompromising new high standards. She eventually married a faithful man, and together they gave birth to a live daughter.

I share these vignettes from my literature classes to demonstrate that my global ethnic minority student body has chosen to use literature as a tool with which to grasp an often hostile, frequently threatening twenty-first-century world and to define the roles they choose to develop for themselves in it. A formerly sullen single mother, upon determining to become a top student, slipped a note under my office door saying she wanted me to know that learning to analyze texts had taught her academic self-confidence. Her note concluded with, "You have forever changed my life."

The wide range of these skill acquisitions illustrates potential outcomes of the admittedly hard work that goes into adopting Kysilka's and Howard Gardner's theories about thinking skills and Multiple Intelligences, toward the widespread (re)development of analytical reading, writing and oratory skills in diverse adult student populations. In order to embrace Kysilka's teaching of thinking skills, and to struggle toward mastering how to teach toward Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, educators need to be granted a certain non-abusive range of pedagogical freedoms.

In 1983, Gardner officially proposed teaching to multiple intelligences. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, MI, assumes that all learners have specific capacities and potential strengths that may not be targeted by standard curricula. Gardner argues that thorough but fluid teaching and individualized learning of basic content and skills will of itself initiate and encourage the development of thinking skills. Since students thrive in different ways, it is not only crucial to differentiate instruction to reach and teach them, but it is equally important to differentiate methods of assessment to evaluate what each student has successfully learned.

While teaching African, African American, and multiethnic women's literatures in the early twenty-first century at a private women's college in the Midwest with very few ethnic minority women students, I developed a policy that my predominantly Anglo-American women students were not going to be allowed to hide behind the term "interesting." I had quickly discovered that the

young women I was teaching seemed to rely upon this popular euphemism instead of exposing their sincere assessments of a problem with more precise, declarative words that risked sounding authoritative or critical. The words these women students were avoiding using by euphemistically labelling controversial statements "interesting" were such position-taking evaluations as "hypocritical," "self-contradictory," "ironic," "judgmental," "condemnatory," or "superficial."

As it will, word soon got around about my impatience with the false neutrality that the non-committal term "interesting" afforded young women who might have been raised to avoid appearing assertive, and my predilection for interrupting a student on her third or fourth iteration of "interesting" to insist that she clarify what she wanted her listeners to understand. If the banned "interesting" was then closely followed by, "You know what I mean?" the inevitable answer had to be, "No, I don't, and I won't until you tell me." Eventually, each semester, students who came to my classes despite my demanding reputation would begin to comment on what they were learning by working hard to self-correct and sidestep use of the forbidden word "interesting" and the phrase "You know what I mean." Not only were their vocabularies forced to grow, but so were their capacities for dynamic self-evaluation as active group contributors to social and historical analysis. Young women who perhaps had never previously been in multiethnic interactive arenas learned and began to examine their realizations that euphemisms, verbal avoidance, silence, and self-conscious refusal to comment are in themselves definitive position statements. Perhaps, for example, everyone but the speaker is aware that she has taken a position of extreme conservatism or even of social cowardice by labeling assault on ethnic minority women's voting, salary, immigration, bodies, or reproductive rights "interesting." One young woman decided that, if she were going to be corrected, anyway, she might as well have said what she really meant, in the first place.

These young women who were predominantly diligent readers but unused to writing down, reading aloud and vigorously exploring independently-derived opinions – the work of Reader Response literary analysis – thereby adjusted to observing their impact on discussions by their selection of precisely the words that aptly described their experiences of texts, presentations and arguments. When no one else was going to speak up for them, before them, or louder than they would, these young women leaders-in-training articulated the challenges and rewards of learning to form, write, deliver, and articulately *ad lib* in ongoing discussions their potentially controversial stances. They correspondingly discovered the profundity of the impact of their carefully chosen words and the reality that their opinions always – without fail – matter. In learning to articulate scholarly presentations, they learned social leadership.

Reflecting on the women's college as a teaching experience, I particularly remember a group of students studying African American Women's Autobiographies. Each student chose a different text from my list of twentieth-century classics such as Rosemary Bray's *Unafraid of the Dark*, Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, asha bandele's *The Prisoner's Wife*, Waris Dirie's *Desert Flower*, Audre Lorde's *Zami,* and Anita Hill's *Speaking Truth to Power*. As the semester progressed, students took these sessions far beyond my intended teaching of literary analysis to initiate cathartic healing encounters.

After the first few class sessions spent reading aloud their journal entries with quotes from their selected texts that helped them explore self-silencing and self-empowerment, students began to encourage each other to increasingly reveal in their journals some significant personal tragedy: one had been raped by a brother, one verbally abused by an abandoning father who then became the only close relation supportive of her being in college; one smiling young woman had been institutionalized for self-cutting; and another came late to the last class on a stormy afternoon to read her journal entry about resenting the father whose alcoholism reduced her family's financial standing from wealth to relative penury. They wrote with candor and read with tears on their faces and catches in their voices. My efforts as professor-turned-facilitator to remind them that they were under no obligation to read such private material aloud – indeed, my strenuous efforts to dissuade them from doing so – were doggedly ignored as they helped each other confront and banish by sharing and airing their personal demons, just as each of the autobiographers had done. Though this was not my intended lesson, it became my andragogical lesson-to-self: when a philosophically Idealist educator meets with a practically Existentialist dilemma – to allow my students to self-teach what it is that they wish to learn upon exposure to material I have provided them, or fail them utterly by teaching only what I wish them to know – the Existentialist must be permitted to appropriate the course and facilitate students' self-directed learning. When my adult students take my lessons and run with them far beyond where I intend that they go, do I have the right to tell them where to stop? I must argue with myself that, in today's world, if they are not harming themselves or others, I do not have the right to dictate to them their learning acquisition limits. Today's adult students are facing world crises, even in the formerly safe havens of wealthy and powerful nations, that former generations may have had to travel or read newspapers to learn about. *Exeunt* professor to become silent facilitator.

As educators, we hope to empower adults to situate themselves in a world that has changed while we sought to survive the competitive environment of our ivory towers. A young biology major returned to her class at the women's college from her medical school interviews to announce in some astonishment to her classmates that she had not been asked about her science classes but about the issues that arose in discussing multiethnic women's literature. Could she speak to women patients from different cultures? How might she approach them? She had received specific praise from her interviewers about the sensitivity, thoughtfulness and promptness of her responses to challenging intercultural awareness questions, an aspect of my literature courses that she had, until her medical school interviews, resented and resisted.

Not all the women's college students had mistrusted intercultural exposure or cross-cultural vulnerability. After reading Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower,* one large Freshman Composition class learned that I possessed a copy of the sequel, *Parable of the Talents,* and organized a dormitory lending system so that each student who wanted to read *Talents* had two hours with my copy before the group returned the book to me in class the following morning. That same year, a senior class wanted an extra session discussing Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Midwest icy winter weather notwithstanding. Therefore, we rose at dawn to meet before the day's final exams began, to further

analyze this text which they found historically and artistically complex. These anecdotes serve to illustrate that the goal of simply teaching bright students to become somewhat familiar with elements of a literature that was foreign to their own cultures and antithetic to everything they had previously read or known about their worlds simultaneously taught them abstract reasoning, debate, intercultural sensitivity, and social and academic self-confidence.

However, one of the difficulties in advancing teaching and learning to suit individual learners' unique intelligences while meeting standardized expectations is dealing with the overwhelming responsibility and accountability that accompany the freedoms instructors and institutions need to put such ideas into practice. The threat of accusations of perceived dereliction of institutional responsibilities toward students or infringement on students' rights may inhibit an institutional effort to adopt Gardner's MI or project-based learning systems. Simultaneous pressure on instructors to maintain a level of constant self-assessment and revision may prove overwhelming and deter even the most useful experimentation. For implementation of such individualized learning systems to work, instructors, like institutional administrators, will need to be sufficiently trained to assess performance data collected in their own classrooms in progress, as their methods of instruction shift.

Twenty-first century educators may need to personally resolve to believe that learned incompetency is not intellectual incapacity. In the Humanities, traditional canons have been overturned, and traditional teaching methods are being dismantled. While the disruption of exclusionary canons bodes well for student learning outcomes in that a more diverse range of material may appeal to a broader demographic of students, the loss of traditional teaching methods may prove somewhat problematic for them. Students may no longer read certain books by a certain age. Penmanship, timed writing exercises, formal debates, and other exercises in rigor and discipline that supported habits of learning may no longer be taught. For this reason, even motivated students may find themselves lacking necessary skills and perspectives that would have enabled them to increase both content recall and skill mastery. As canons and curricula in the Humanities change, educators should prepare themselves to experiment with previously untried material and approaches but also revisit subjects and best teaching practices of the rapidly fading past. In allowing educators to share the excitement and challenges that make up the foundations of their own ability to continually self-educate, and to experiment with new and innovative methodologies without fear of censorship, instructors may maintain and share with their students the enthusiasm and energy of their own discovery of lifelong learning.

During my first year teaching at an historically African American university (HBCU, meaning Historically Black Colleges and Universities) established to facilitate the continuance of and mitigate the damage done by *de jure* educational segregation, I discovered that none of my 120 Freshman Composition students knew any of the fairytales that I had thought informed basic American preschool and kindergarten story time. One well-planned lesson was completely stymied; how could we explore Louise Gluck's poem "Gretel in Darkness" if I was teaching the poem to 120 non-traditional adult students who had no idea what had happened in the original "Hansel and Gretel"

fairytale? That day's lesson was altered: approximately thirty predominantly African American adult faces per each of my four classes stared thoughtfully up at me well into their break between class periods rather than leaving the room because they wanted to know how the misadventures of Hansel and Gretel were going to end. Each time I concluded, groups of students left shaking their heads and moralizing: about the willful blindness of the widower who married again, supposedly for the benefit of his motherless children; about the egoistic selfishness of the stepmother; about Gretel's childish adoration of her helpless brother; and about Hansel's willingness to abandon the sister whose courage saved his life. Lesson-to-self about andragogy: it is crucial that the educator does not confuse a possible history of educational deprivation with intellectual incapacity or lack of scholarly curiosity.

For, upon becoming informed about the missing fundamentals in their approach to Louise Gluck's poem, these same students then brought their wealth of real-world knowledge to bear upon presentations of their acquired information, hurling efficacious quotes at each other not only from Gluck but from Aphra Behn, William Blake, John Donne, Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Brooks as they debated volatile aspects of the topics of love and gender. My HBCU students are, in their passionately invested and emotionally raw academic environment, ready and compelling literary analysts, writing engaging essays about their encounters with such diverse texts as ancient Egyptian love poems, twentieth-century African and African American fiction, and medieval Asian histories and mythologies. They tackle *The Bhagavad-Gita*, *The Inferno*, *Clotel,* and *Chaka*, changing their own, each other's and my life with fresh perspectives and unblushingly blunt philosophical excavations. The son of Mexican immigrants wrote for his final presentation that he had decided he could accomplish any goal because he learned from *Gilgamesh* that human beings were descended from the gods. A large man in his forties approached me in the parking lot and hugged me. When he released me, he asked if I remembered him because he had dropped out of my general education class for personal reasons. But he wanted me to know that he had read *Our Nig* cover-to-cover and needed to thank me for showing him what his orphaned mother had probably gone through when her Anglo-American mother abandoned her because of her father's African American race, as a child. He said that, now that he felt he understood his mother, they were able to be close without her opening up about experiences she had always refused to disclose. Thanks to their conversations, he was once again back in college, close to completing his bachelor's degree.

This student was referring to the complete and unabridged version of a short creative nonfictional text that other classes were reading in abridged form, if at all. For many reasons, twenty-first-century educators need to return to the teaching of whole texts and contexts. In an American curriculum that, in the mid-1950s, expected a middle or junior high school student to read complete and unabridged nineteenth-century novels and take part in discussions about the meanings of memorized poetry and speeches, that student would have mastered current college-level reading, analytical and abstract reasoning skills well before graduating from high school. Kysilka reminds educators that the back-to-basic-skills acquisition push of the 1970s, emphasizing reading, writing and arithmetic (the three Rs), resulted in elimination of exploratory and experimental – meaning

abstract and analytical – approaches to the humanities, social sciences and literature. Tragically for intellectual development, today, even college students majoring in English may find themselves assigned the reading of excerpts and abridgments, in which a textbook's editor has done the bulk of critical thinking and analysis for the student, before the student has even had a chance to attempt to do so. An excerpt or abridgment has lost material that the student will probably not have another opportunity to encounter, contextualize and evaluate in dynamic discussion with other scholars. The college student majoring in English or other humanities may find that s/he is deprived of the tools to begin to experiment with critical thinking skills until entering upper division college courses and encountering complete texts, perhaps for the first time, in debate with a professor over a graded essay.

However, even upper division college English courses may not utilize complete texts or require students' research and reading of primary texts. Some college and university educators and institutions are beginning to require of upper division and graduate Literature students extensive secondary resource research rather than the close reading of primary texts. Worse, compiling secondary source lists may involve no reading whatsoever beyond the author, title and citation information of published essays about primary texts the student has never read and, at this point, has been given no reason to read. How can a student who has not subjected the primary text to analytical scrutiny, and who may never have developed the skills to do so, possibly assess the applicability of the secondary resources s/he is listing?

On an even more troubling note, American students' basic reading and literacy skills have continued to decline. In college and university classes in the early twenty-first century, students may struggle to read aloud. Interpretation, a skill that implies not only ease of reading but familiarity and confidence with the tools of analysis, including a grasp of intercultural contexts and symbolisms, is not a reasonable requirement for students who cannot sound out words. Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa note that the twenty-first-century United States college student accomplishes little more than an hour of independent study per day, pursuing courses that require insubstantial amounts of reading and composition; therefore, Arum and Roksa call for educators to agree on professionally realistic preparatory curricula and standards, toward a positive performative change. According to Arum and Roksa, the developmental path from learned incompetency to preparation for continual skill and content development is the implementation of the disciplined learning of basics.

As an example of a country with progressive learning goals, Finland grants pedagogical freedom to its instructors to reach students of varying classes, ethnicities and experiences. Finland prides itself on an educational system that neither caters to the affluent nor alienates the immigrant. A public-school education is universally expected of all Finnish students, regardless of financial or ethnic background. There is no private school safe-haven in which the affluent may escape the education offered the less wealthy. As a result, Finland enjoys some of the fastest-growing measurable student achievement, globally. Finland's universal success illuminates Gardner's statement that respecting and serving the multiple intelligences of a diverse student population can

result in measurable success and deep learning, assessable even through use of debated standardized exams such as are currently relied upon in the United States.

Gardner advises a spiral approach to learning, exposing students to a specific rudimentary framework of concepts which they will encounter again and again in increasingly sophisticated settings, rather than learning facts in the isolation of a semester or school year. Each stage of learning theoretically lays the groundwork for future learning and accomplishment. This spiraling educational approach seems to have been in use in some systems such as the Los Angeles Unified School District in the late 1960s where and when I attended elementary school, when Kysilka identifies the United States' push to improve learning through encouraging analytical, abstract and creative thought, to compete with Russian innovations.

Another approach that uses some of the same repetitive application of basic skills in increasingly sophisticated scenarios would be project-based learning. Once students are equipped with the basic skills and information necessary to accomplish tasks, they are left to figure out for themselves how to begin to critically and selectively apply those skills, to accomplish desired outcomes. This is how project-based learning achieves higher scores in standardized tests: students are prepared to address end-of-year exams because independent and selective application of learned material and skills is the purpose of the year's curriculum. By embracing students as individualized learners with multiple and unique intelligences, school systems see marked improvement in standardized test results. In an environment such as that in the United States that relies heavily on standardized evaluation, it is nevertheless possible to modify standards of pedagogical practice and learning evaluation.

To arrive at such rewarding results, many andragogical adaptations must be made. Recalling that each Freshman Composition course at the racially exclusive and financially elite women's college was accompanied by corresponding laboratory time, I alternated literary discussion sessions with writing intensives when I arrived at the HBCU. With hands-on supervision, HBCU students who had initially found college-level writing too daunting to tackle learned within one semester to write eloquently, quote appropriately and cite accurately. Upon discovering that my Ancient and Medieval World Literature classes full of thirty to forty undergraduate students each had no background knowledge or working definition of a quest – rendering relatively pointless introducing them to translations of *Gilgamesh, The Papyrus of Ani, The Aeneid, The Metamorphoses, The Thunder: Perfect Mind,* and *Sundiata*, for example – my students have been sent from the classroom and dispersed campus-wide in cross-cultural, multi-gendered groups to experience the quest via episodes of *Haunted Planet* on their group leaders' cell phones.

Students return to class with journals describing group quests. One previously disengaged future leader began his essay, "Today was a terrible day to be a student at my University, which my World Lit class has discovered is haunted." One group's quest into a dark, dusty maintenance facility read like the Sumerian goddess Inanna's descent through the Seven Hells; a student whose Gulf War-traumatized father avoids suicide by rereading *The Inferno* made her analysis of his lifesaving annual trek through Hell her final essay; another whose semester was blighted by strep throat and prolonged

absence from class wrote a final essay describing her self-assigned quests to rebuild her self-confidence by undergoing increasingly challenging episodes of *Haunted Planet*.

Foreshadowing this supra-modular method of strengthening student learning experiences, twenty to thirty years ago, Mexican children in grade school studied Greek and Latin etymology, and high school Mexican students undertook interdisciplinary science and craft activities that supported concepts of sustainability, such as the slaughter, anatomical study and use of all parts of a whole pig. Gardner favors some forms of "core knowledge" in the form of an educational consensus on what constitutes foundational concepts and informative processes of learning. Not only were Mexican students trusted to learn fundamental but complex information to be applied throughout their educational careers, but they were granted the opportunity to develop specialized skills that could serve them well into their professional futures. In the same way, my predominantly African American HBCU students discovered and defined their global citizenship by taking ownership of literature from all over the world and all periods of history when they independently tackled and wrested meaning from every international work of literature put before them.

Upon leaving the women's college and becoming a professor at an historically African American university in the South that had been instituted to both maintain and compensate for *de jure* racial segregation, I was appalled to discover not only that my most advanced African American students were being taught literature in predigested bits from anthologies, but that they were neither expected to quote the assigned material nor to argue their own opinions. In rebellion against this systematic institutionalized under-education and academic disadvantaging, my literature courses at the HBCU were taught from the same syllabi and curricula I had developed at the private women's college: from eight to ten texts per course, per semester, at every level of instruction, expecting written journal entries prepared before or developed in class, that students were expected to read aloud to each other to jumpstart discussion. My students were African Americans, immigrants, refugees, and scholarly visitors from around the world. Significantly, I soon discovered that, among this group, I had no need to ban reliance upon the word "interesting." Instead, my task was to forbid the researching of secondary sources and critical opinions about the assigned literature, which threatened to lead to parroting or pirating of such material. In my classes, students are called upon to articulate first in writing, next in reading aloud, and then in class discussions about their Reader Responses to the texts. Only then are the most advanced students allowed to conduct secondary-source research toward the completion of more extensive essays, theses or dissertations.

In today's United States educational environment with a disrupted and thereby expanded canon, the concept of text similarly needs to be expanded. Disaffected students fall into engagement like a line of tapped dominoes upon exposure to historically recorded Blues, Jazz or music taped during a Pokot or Kikuyu rite of exorcism, or when shown historically creative films such as *The Journey of August King* and *The Desert Ark*. Even more eye-opening and mind-expanding may be the out-of-classroom, campus-wide class field trips to the university's Museum, its library's Arts exhibits, its historic murals, current event lectures, literary readings, town halls, and archives. To get

the most out of them, such events should be followed up with class readings of reflective journal entries that encourage finding a quotable line from the assigned readings, to begin making personally relevant links from experience to literature. As Gardner has explained, "Sometimes it is possible to use an area of strength as a bridge to an area that has posed difficulties" (Gardner 2008, 144).

Assigned overcrowded basic writing courses for interdepartmental graduate students, I have increasingly opted to get them out of the classroom and into the university's artistic and political milieus as soon and as often as possible, awarding extra credit for good questions and comments offered at public events. During in-class discussion about the potential interpretive meanings of individually selected African texts in relation to these students' graduate degrees, one student lectured his Education colleagues on their resistance to learning what he took to be the most pedagogically obvious and fundamentally impacting of the lessons available in my course: get to know students' varied learning styles, he argued, by taking them on field trips and having them return to tell each other what they have learned. Then the educator will know how and what to help them write. So authoritatively persuasive were this student's arguments for his educational leadership in sharing his insights with his peers and convincing them to adopt experimental techniques that he successfully passed the graduate writing course he had previously repeatedly failed.

I had a similarly overpowering experience teaching composition to a body of over forty graduate students from multiple disciplines. A group of these students were from Nigeria and, pursuing personal interests, chose *en masse* to read books by Igbo writers, including *Arrow of God, The Joys of Motherhood* and *Efuru,* which inevitably led to intense end-of-the-semester final essays and presentations that debated biases against and among the Igbo, about which I had previously known nothing. While each of these writers had come beforehand to my office to make sure they were following the rules of composition that would earn them passing grades, the theme and content of their essays was, as always, their own. I sat in wonder at the depth and intensity of the learning experience they afforded not only themselves but their African American, Latinx, Asian, and Yoruba classmates as one after another of these Igbo essayists took the floor to expand the group's unselfconscious exploration of issues of self-perception, history, power, and identity.

That same evening, African American men and women who had read *Finding Fish, Black Like Me* and *The Prisoner's Wife* stood to read aloud their essays that addressed abuse, abandonment, social injustice, and the empowerment of self-definition. A Saudi woman in a chador who had read *Speaking Truth to Power* decried the U. S. Congress's refusal to believe a woman who had come to them, trusting them with her account of how she had been sexually harassed, and stated that such humiliation by men in power would not have happened in her country. A Latino star athlete, the first-generation son of immigrants, who had read *Myth, Literature and the African World*, overlaid the struggles of the suicidal god-king Shango upon his own triumphs and frustrations as the perfect son who is supposed to rescue his community but fears he has failed them. It is my hope that students leave such end-of-the-semester class conferences with their thoughts expanded and their minds opened

to see themselves in a workable global context. Kysilka summarizes that, "Subject matter is a means, not a goal" (Kysilka, 1998, 198), and these courageous academic explorers demonstrate that truth.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the chronic exhaustion, frustration, disillusionment, and disgust with administrative obstructionism that accompany andragogic experimentation as described in this essay. However, this is the lesson my students have taught me and that I wish to share with educators and educational administrators worldwide: the twenty-first-century classroom must become an arena wherein moral vigilance and innovative rigor are daily requirements that each educational facilitator demands of herself, toward successfully introducing students to the dynamic arts of identifying who and what they wish to be, studying the world they have inherited via active exposure to its written traces, and maintaining unrelentingly high expectations of students' potential to describe and apply perceptions and perspectives. For, from where our fractured and mistrustful academic community is entering the new millennium, the rebuilding of the love of acquiring the tools of critical thinking and the capacity to confront and enjoy scholarly challenge is the only way forward.

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VOLUME 2, NUMBER 2. NOVEMBER 2019

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ISSN 2517-4266