

7.2

John George Hansen

the quint

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Antonio Sanna

Simon Samuel

Shashi Yadav

Alden Wood

Jeff Carr

Lydia Craig



Clara Samuel

Medhi Kochbati

Virginia Konchan

Haidar Eid

Martin Kuester

the quint

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EDITORIAL

This issue is designed for anyone with cabin fever, that claustrophobic uneasiness that accumulates over the long, dark winter months. Celebrating far away places, peoples, and diversity, this March *quint* contains articles by writers working in France, Palestine, India, North Carolina, Indiana, and California. We are also honored to present articles written by Canadian scholars: John George Hansen from the University of Saskatoon in Saskatchewan and John Butler from the University College of the North in Manitoba and to showcase Simon Samuel's story about the Caribou child from interviewer Clara Samuel. The subjects that this *quint* invites you to consider include the challenges of globalization, aboriginal indentity, the continuing influence of John Milton, the nature of power, the indoctrination of the young, the importance of same-sex bonding, women's revolutionary agency, the function of memory, the significance of space, Mulk Rah Anand's novels, and the art of Tim Burton. There is something here for everyone. For those interested in this issue's creative offerings, Lydia Criaig, from Chicago, has sent us a charming sight poem has proved to be a wonderful way to celebrate our lengthening light and rising temperatures. "Tick-Tock" always puts a smile on my face. Virginia Konchan, from Montreal, has honored us with a selection of beautifully-crafted, sophisticated verse that offers taut, thought provoking tropes while the snow melts. And always interested in light, shadow, and water Anne Jevne has submitted a number of spring photographs which she hopes her viewers will find entertaining.

As usual, *this quint* reminds us of the importance of good reading, interesting ideas, and thoughtful poetry in the North as the days begin to lengthen, and we all look forward to spending more time outside. Our next *quint*, forthcoming in June, will celebrate the arrival of the migrating flocks returning home and the summer solstice. Until then, we wish you once again the best of the Spring Melt and the happiness that always accompanies it.

Sue Matheson
Co-Editor

“Tick-Tock”

Things are sleeping or being quiet,
not waiting on me,
while I stand small and white
in my nightshirt,
with my cup,
gazing up at Tick-Tock,
where the Gold Thing keeps going,
moving from side to side.
Above are
Sticks
that twitch
from line to line
in giant circles,
round and round.
Da calls them Hands, but he is wrong,
because I have
Two
with lots of Fingers,
Five
on each,
and the Stick has only
One.

When my Waiting seems forever,

and I think
of scuttling back
to Bed...
Tick-tock will ring,
and at the End,
bursts out with silver Music
played
by
The People In The Door
locked by the Key
kept high above
Where only Parents reach.
I press my Nose against the Glass,
And wonder if
They tremble down below at
Two Glowing Eyes that bide their Time.

—Lydia Craig

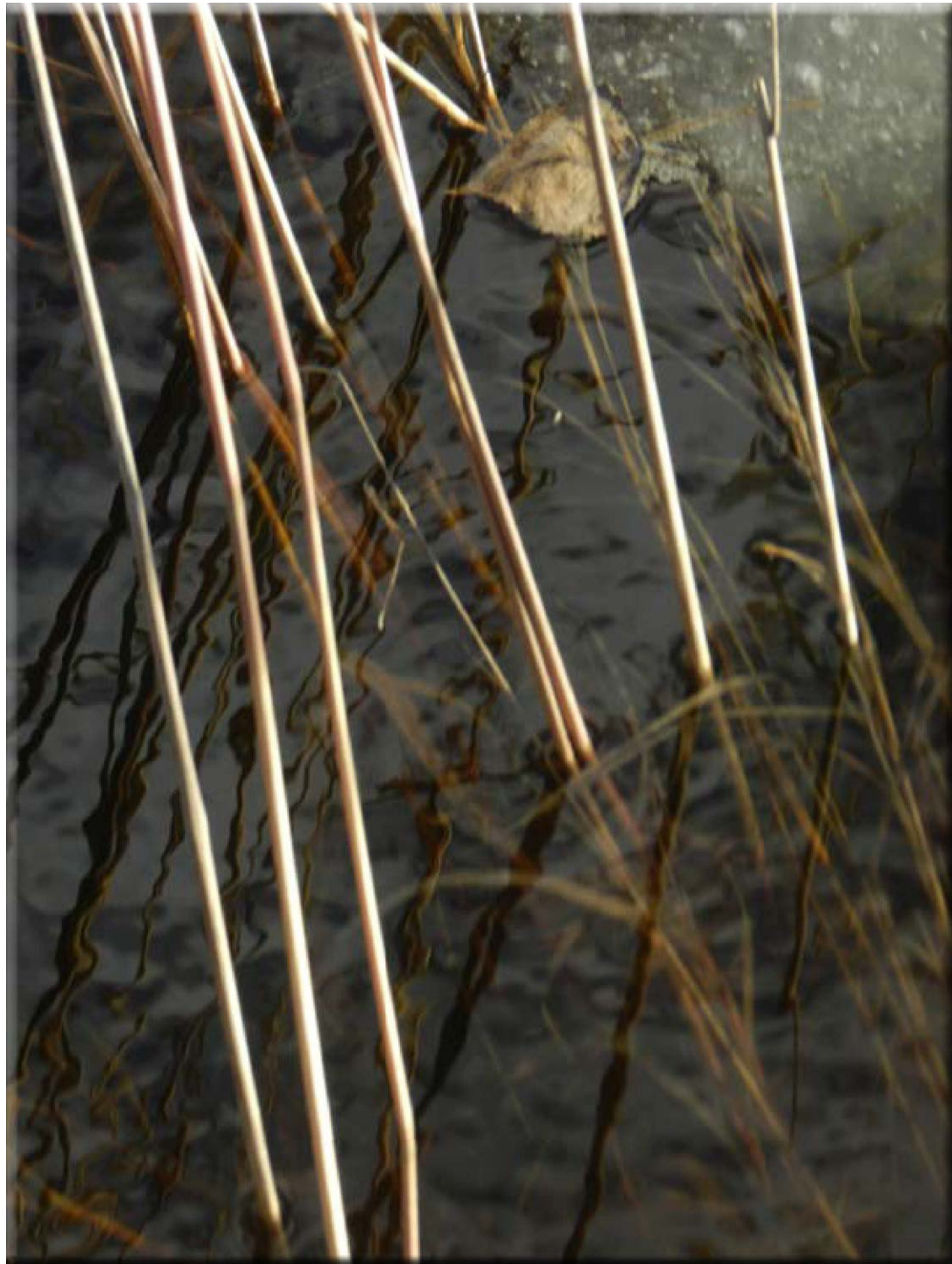


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE
DITCH #1

(Post)modernism and Globalization

by Haidar Eid, Al-Aqsa University, Gaza Strip, Palestine

Pursuing (Post)modernism¹

This paper attempts to contribute towards efforts aimed at producing a critical theory of the regime of what Mesud Zavarzadeh calls ‘post-ality’--a regime that “announce[s] the arrival of a new society which is post-production, post-labor, post-ideology, post-white and post-capitalist” (qtd. in Kelsh, 1998:1-2). In an attempt to develop a socio-cultural perspective that helps us understand the importance and impact of theories of (post) modernism, one needs to adopt a historical materialist approach such as that promoted by many Critical Theorists. Moreover, this article undertakes to explore and interrogate the ideological impact of theories of ‘post-ality’ on diverse and various fields of human life, society and culture. In particular, it recommends the use of a reconstructed version of the Frankfurt School critique of post-World War II capitalist society, building on some other neo-Marxist additions such as those of Fredric Jameson, Douglas Kellner, Steven Best, Ben Agger, David Harvey, Mesud Zavarzadeh, Donald Morton, Alex Callinicos, Edward Said--to mention but a few. While it clearly tries to avoid falling into a (post) modern celebration of ‘post-ality’, or into a rigid economic determinism, it adopts what

Best and Kellner (1991) call a 'multiperspectival' dialectical approach that combines the articulation of theoretical and cultural perspectives of theories of (post)modernism and Critical Theory with concrete studies of the social and cultural aspects of (post) modernism.

My contention is that in order to pursue theories of 'post-ality', one first needs to address the problematic prefix 'post' which seems to be used to underline a particular aspect of change with regard to a previous order. However, I maintain that 'post-ality', as represented in theories of (post)modernism, is not a complete 'rupture' from modernism, but rather a continuation and a move beyond it at the same time. Moreover, I hold that any attempt to discuss the broad range of cultural fields in which (post)modernism has played a role cannot ignore the intimate relationship between it and the political and economic factors that have determined its major characteristics. Hence the validity of Fredric Jameson's (1991a) and David Harvey's (1989) theorizations of (post)modernism as 'the cultural logic of late-capitalism',² and Mike Featherstone's distinction between the discourses of the modern and the (post)modern (1988). Featherstone, for example, conceptualizes modernity as the modern age and as a phenomenon that "reflected the modern capitalist-industrial state" (1988:198), whereas (post)modernity is the 'epochal shift' that describes the period which follows modernity, and thus reflects a capitalist society that is characterized by high-tech media, computers and electronics.

Jameson and Harvey's theorizations help us situate 'post-al' theories within a broad socio-economic context. Within this context, a few preliminary points on Harvey and Jameson's works are necessary to clarify my understanding of the relation between economics, late-capitalism in particular, and (post)modern culture. David Harvey's survey of the radical change in the economic, political and thus cultural spheres beginning around

1972 has informed this study. Harvey maintains that there is a relationship between (post) modernism and the shifts in the organization of capitalism and the new formulations of time-space experience. According to him, (post)modernism is the product of the newly organized forms of technology developed by late-capitalism which is characterized by a 'more flexible motion of capital'. "The flexible accumulation" of capital emphasizes "the new, the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life, rather than the more solid values implanted under Fordism" (1989:171). Harvey concludes that because of this change in the mode of accumulation, "the relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodifications of cultural forms" (1989:156). The importance of Harvey's theorization within the context of this paper lies in his empirical account of Jameson's Marxist theorization of (post)modernism as 'the cultural logic of late-capitalism'.

Jameson argues that (post)modern culture--accompanied by radical change in the modern concept of 'reality', the decline of the Enlightenment project, the rise of anti-intellectualism, and the transcendence of popular/mass culture--is linked to post World War II late-capitalism. Different from monopoly capitalism and its cultural logic, i.e. modernism, late-capitalism needs a global network that is run by multinational corporations (Jameson:1991a). The result is the "prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life ... can be said to have become 'cultural'" (1991a:87). What seems to have taken place in terms of theory and practice has created a change in the social, cultural, and intellectual spheres, i.e. (post)modernism is claimed to be a 'breakthrough' in the dominant socio-cultural and artistic directions of 'realism' and 'modernism'. 'Post-al' theories, in other words, have

declared a war against the hypocrisy of the destabilized bourgeois, 'grand narratives', the linear movement of history, the rationality of modernism and realism, foundationalism, and against 'universal knowledge'. (see, for example, Lyotard, 1984; Derrida, 1976; Baudrillard, 1994; Rorty, 1989).

And yet, I maintain that the metalanguage that has been used to discuss the '(post) modern condition' and describe it as a 'break' from modernism lacks a historical perspective. That is, like Best and Kellner (1991), Jameson (1981; 1991a), Kaplan (1988), Harvey (1989), Ben Agger (1992), Callinicos (1989), Zavarzadeh and Morton (1994), I argue that (post)modernism is a break initiated by modernism. However, modernism itself is a break from the Victorian nineteenth century, and at the same time a link between the current cultural movement and Romanticism. The (post)modern is, then, taken to be a continuation and a move beyond modernism in the sense that current modernity is continuous with the capitalism of the nineteenth century, but is also different in terms of consumption, leisure, cosmopolitanism, Americanism, and industrialism. Ben Agger supports this contention and suggests the term 'fast capitalism' (1992:299) for the present (post)modern moment; a moment which he believes to have "a sense of continuity between modernity and postmodernity" and which has distinctive features at the same time. "Fast capitalism", he says, "speeds up the rate at which concepts and images blur with the reality to which they bear a representational relationship ... Fast capitalism causes the 'rate of intelligence' to decline, thus checking the tendency of the rate of profit to fall" (Agger, 1992:299).

I am also aware of the problematic fact that there is no one agreed meaning to the term 'postmodernism'; however, some theorists distinguish between two major kinds. Hal

Foster, for example, distinguishes between a "postmodernism of resistance" that "seeks to deconstruct modernism from a deliberately critical perspective" and a "postmodernism of reaction" that repudiates modernism and celebrates (post)modernism (Foster, 1983:xi-xii). E. Ann Kaplan draws on Foster's theorization by distinguishing between two meanings linked to the term: a 'utopian' (post)modernism moving in a Derridean poststructuralist direction, and a 'commercial' or 'co-opted' one moving in a Baudrillardian direction (1988:3). The former is the 'cultural break' brought about by feminism, deconstruction, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and--most importantly--by the deconstruction of the subject; the latter "is linked to the new stage of multinational, multiconglomerate consumer capitalism and to the new technologies this stage has spawned" (1988:4). Commercial (post)modernism suggests that there is no material reality, but a world where the image has become the only 'reality' (cf. Baudrillard, 1994).

Undoubtedly, what 'post-al' theories have called into question is the different traditional claims to Truth and basic human values. In other words, these theories have a doubt that human Truth is an objective representation of reality. Instead, they claim that reality is constructed both socially and linguistically. The departure from the belief in an objective world, the delegitimation of 'universal knowledge' and a global system of thought and 'grand narratives', and the Derridean attack on the 'transcendental signified', have all led to the conclusion that there is no pure datum and that knowledge represents power (cf. Rorty, 1989; Lyotard, 1984; Derrida, 1976; Foucault, 1980). The multiplicity of perspectives that came about as a result of the developments in technology and the electronic media after World War II had already undermined the traditional belief in objective truth. 'Reality', then, was replaced by 'hyperreality', as suggested by Baudrillard (1994), and is always apologized for, if used, by means of inverted commas.

Yet, as Gerald Graff argues (1977), a historical perspective can trace the origin of such developments back to the critical philosophies of the Age of Reason and Enlightenment which dissolved the ancient connection between rational, objective thought and value-judgement. Value then became subjective and the objective world and the domain of meanings and values became ‘irreparably divided’ (1977:223). Modern industrialism deepened this attitude in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century by relating objective reality to technology, commerce and colonialism, and after World War II, to electronics, administration and media. Reason, after the horror of World War II, ceased to be a ‘potential cure’ (1977:223), but rather a source of alienation; and rational explanations are thus “no more accepted to be the source of enlightening and freeing modern man” (see also Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972). On the contrary, Reason is unreliable and has gone far beyond the end it was supposed to reach (Graff,1977:223-4). Graff, then, concludes that “the paradox of the sophisticated modern mind is that it is unable to believe in the objective validity of meanings yet unable to do without meanings” (1977:225). Thus the (post)modern ‘loss of meaning’ is a self-deception and “a betrayal directed at the world’s failure to yield an objective teleological order” (1977:225) since it is unable to do without meaning.

The fundamental question to address, however, is how to theorize the rapid changes in every aspect of life at the beginning of the millennium and how to utilize these changes to promote progressive social changes against the seeming victory of the market, and hence capitalism. The spread of ‘post-al’ theories in relation to the rapid transformation of socio-cultural life can never be theorized outside of the context of the current stage of capitalist development. That is precisely why I contend that Jameson’s theorization of (post)modernism is a good starting point for contextualizing ‘post-al’

theories; but I also find it necessary to relate it to Ernest Mandel’s stipulation of the third stage of capitalism since Jameson’s ‘cultural logic’ relies heavily on Mandel’s historical materialist study.

GLOBALIZATION

What is globalization? Why has it become the catch-all term that covers not only economic but also cultural and political events all over the world? Is it a rupture in history--as expressed in its cultural logic, that is, (post)modernism? Is it a “new” configuration of imperialism?

Undoubtedly, the relationship between globalization postal theories--e.g. (post) modernism, (post)structuralism, post-Marxism, post-Fordism, post-history... etc-- is a significant historical feature of the rise of the post-cold war era. Thus, to look at globalization as a one-sided phenomenon--defended by radical (post)modernists, and attacked by orthodox Marxists--is a big mistake, if not an ideological distortion.

Interestingly, Karl Marx and Fredrick Engles in *The Communist Manifesto* (1975) envisaged the emergence of a world market system leading to a global economic system as the market spreads all over the world. They argue that this global system would generate immense forces of discovery, transport, communication, and industry; hence the expected ‘universal independence of nations’. However, Marx and Engles maintain that the same world market produces its antithesis, a new class of industrial proletariat that is propertyless. Hence their prediction of a global crisis leading to a world revolution against global capital, a revolution led by ‘internationalist revolutionaries’.

Thus any dialectical approach to globalization must involve an understanding of the forces of domination and resistance, haves and have not, global capital and local

résistance, old and new, and general and particular. Capitalist relations of production in their structuration of social orders and hegemony are interconnected with (post)modern globalization. Hence the relationship between multinationals, global capital and the market. The market, for the first time in history, has become an epistemological mechanism that 'deconstructs' anything that is unique or culturally profound, a mechanism that has invaded culture, certainty, specificity, and even history.

Any critical approach to globalization cannot but be historical materialist that traces back this phenomenon to the process of colonial expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was joined by the development of modern commercial system and trade. As Marx and Engels argued rightly, world economic history is the history of breaking down of borders before the rapidly growing markets supported by the Industrial Revolution. The shift of the basis of economy toward information and communications technology after W W II, that is the technological and information revolution, has given capitalism the ability to renew itself, and colonize consciousness through the dissemination of ideas, values, and beliefs through images--or what Baudrillard calls "hyperreal simulacra" (1994). Thus being controlled by the ideology of the market economy, globalization extends colonialism to new uncolonized areas. It, therefore, comes to represent the ultimate degree of imperialist domination.

Ironically, contrary to what radical (post)modern thinkers claim, what (post)modernism--as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991)--does is a kind of containment and invasion aimed at depleting and nullifying cultural specificity. In other words, it aims to supplant the ideological conflict that was anticipated by Marx and Engels, by control of human consciousness through, what Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) call,

'culture industry,' that is, media images of a formalistic, depthless, and highly emotive content. As all Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School have argued very convincingly, what the culture industry ultimately aims at is to mold behavior and to entrench a specific pattern of consumption of commodities, knowledge and culture. What is created, then, is not an individual, but rather a 'one-dimensional' consumer with 'false consciousness'.

Being hegemonized by capitalist ideology, instead of using media and information networks to enhance human solidarity and enrich cultural identity, specificity and diversity, they are used to undermine and hegemonize both cultural and social borders. The justification is, of course, globalization. As Jameson maintains in *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), culture, as a social product, has become as much a part of the new economic system as tangible commodities. Such 'cultural commodities' are controlled by those who dominate the communications and information revolution. They are thus in a position to influence, control, hegemonize and shape values and behavior. Hence the antithetical question of representation and ideology within the knowledge/power equation, the question as to how can those cultures and social classes which are deprived of the technological means represent themselves? Globalization does not therefore stand for what it is claimed to be; rather it is a western cultural dominance.

Further, the claims of the disintegration of the individual and cultural specificity are intended to pave the way for the mechanisms of cultural globalization; or rather (post)modernism, which are to hegemonize the world within a single value system that will respond passively to the greedy demands of the world market. In all this, individuals find themselves implicated in a global; socio-economic change over which they have no control. World market norms ensure that cultural production is commodified and

that, what Habermas calls, 'public sphere' (1989) follows global market principles. The question, then, is undoubtedly a socio-politico-cultural one.

Within this context, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000), argue that the classical case of imperialism had now mutated into an imperial mode of domination, corresponding to cultural, social, and economic globalization.. And in his preface to *America, The New Imperialism: From White Settlement to World Hegemony* (2005) Eric Hobsbawm argues that so far as the Anglo-American notions of their imperial missions were concerned, "the rest of humanity was only a raw material, clay to be moulded by the potter's hand. This assumption of superiority may be called a legacy of British insularity, magnified by America's size and wealth" (xvi).

Having said this means that there is a need for a critical theory of globalization that overcomes the one-dimensional capitalist hegemonic interpretation. This is a dialectical theory that is supposed to take into account the fact that globalization can be positive vehicle of 'catastrophe' and 'progress' at the same time; a historical materialist theory that follows a dialectical approach to capitalism as a global economic system characterized by a world market and imposition of similar relations and production, commodities, and culture throughout the world. However, it is a theory which should recognize not only the power of globalization but resistance to it as well. This alternative theory thus should take into account the means by which general global conditions, interact with particular local cultures dialectically.

Ultimately, any radical theorization of (post)modern globalization needs to transform this experience and seek to endow individuals with a new sense of their place in the newly established global system--a theorization that respects the laws of dialectic

(Jameson, 1991). Further, it is supposed to be a Gramscian theorization that prizes the historical dialectic free from mechanistic models of interpretation--a theorization that is dialectically interconnected with a practice that aims to get us beyond the moment of our historical development, and which enables us to become agents for activities of local and international (differnet from global) character. Thus this theorization can neither be *ahistorical* nor *asocial*, albeit historical materialist that does not only theorize global power but also international resistance.

NOTES

- 1- The parentheses are used in order to emphasize what this thesis argues for, that is, (post)modernism is not a complete 'rupture' and break from modernism, but rather a continuation and a move beyond it at the same time.
- 2- The term 'late-capitalism', according to Ernest Mandel, "in no way suggests that capitalism has changed in essence, rendering the analytic findings of Marx's *Capital* and Lenin's *Imperialism* out of date ... The era of late capitalism is not a new epoch of capitalist development. It is merely a further development of the imperialist, monopoly-capitalist epoch "(1978:8) .

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Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

What's time to the uninitiated?
I brush dust from her body,
the buried book, no, saga,
of the coming-to-consciousness
of man. The view that
bipedalism preceded
increased brain size
in human evolution
is uncontestable:
epochal moment
the replacement
of "AL 288-1"
with Lucy,
and Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta
with Lady Gaga.
What does a woman want but fame?
Please tell me, after the lab experiment
begun in 1974, carbon dating
3.2 million years, you are smiling
under that skullcap of death,
having become a household name.

—Virginia Konchan



PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE
DITCH #2

The Autonomous Mind of Wasekechak

by John George Hansen, University of Saskatoon, Saskatoon,
Saskatchewan

Introduction

Since ancient times, Wasekechak has been the figure of autonomy in the Cree world. Even today, Wasekechak is still part of a rich tradition for teaching ethics, decision-making, values, critical thinking and how to overcome adversity and so on. Such wisdom was developed in the time-honored ways of the *Inninee* -- Cree people. For the *Omushkegowuk*--Swampy Cree, Wasekechak is usually a male figure who imparts a unique, indirect understanding of how one ought to interact with the world. When it comes to teaching life lessons many of the old Cree people trust that Wasekechak is still relevant in contemporary times.

To the Anglos of Canada, Wasekechak is sometimes called 'Whiskey Jack'. The old Cree people however, still use Wasekechak which has its origins in the language and culture of the Cree. Wasekechak does not live in an ideal world—he lives largely in the Cree world. This means that Wasekechak experiences colonial discrimination. In other words, Western society isolates and marginalizes Wasekechak as rigidly as it does

the Cree people. There is no independent Wasekechak separate from the Cree nation: Wasekechak is part of the total Cree world.

Since I am a hybrid; a product of a Swampy Cree mother and Danish father, I have developed the theoretical discussion as much as possible from a Cree point of view. I never had a choice as to whether I would be Cree or Danish, from the moment I came into the world, Western society constructed me as a member of the colonized nation and it still does today. I hope that the discussion contained in this chapter will undermine both the patronizing and colonial view that Cree narratives are mere folklore without any valid connection to reality. The Cree perspective contained in this discussion takes the following into account: the understanding of Wasekechak's autonomous mind and a motive for discussing him, the ways Wasekechak teaches us to overcome adversity, the arrogance of colonial thinkers that stimulates my desire to explore Wasekechak using Cree narratives and primary sources.

Wasekechak has a Keen Sense of Reality

Although a Western worldview has dominated Turtle Island for so long there is still a Cree way of looking at reality. For Wasekechak, he seems to be most concerned with looking at reality on the practical level. Wasekechak's wants to understand how to accomplish goals, what will make a difference to the outcome of a predicament, or what will not work. He wants to know what is important to accomplishing his goals and what is not important. I recall a predicament I experienced as a graduate student in a Western university. I was trying to explain my understanding of a Cree theory to a group of

professors. From the moment I stated "Cree theory" I felt that they rejected me, mind and body. It was my initiation into discussing Cree theory with colonizing professors. Obviously they considered me to be part of the "Indian Problem" that resists assimilation. They were condescending and rude, yet if I had the attitude I could have intimidated them with my muscle, because I could see that they viewed Aboriginals in terms of racial stereotypes—unsophisticated and crude. According to their colonial attitudes, they had the right to treat me like an inferior and foolish person, to insult my intelligence and silence me. I thought they were trying to figure out how they could prevent me from completing graduate studies, but secretly I plotted my vengeance. I would definitely complete my studies. I wondered if they belittled me just because I am an Aboriginal person from the north, or did they do that to all students—White or Aboriginal? I felt they degraded me because they did not understand a Cree way of thinking, and also because they were cruel. I viewed myself through their eyes—inferior, unintelligent and unworthy of their time. Obviously they would make me jump through unnecessary hoops. Interestingly, one of them was an Aboriginal professor who behaves like she is superior to others, particularly towards northern Cree's like me. When I was mentioning that the elders' wisdom is contained in the stories she mockingly said this statement was "naïve". But maybe she and the other two professors thought they had the right to treat me like a naïve savage because I have a Cree perspective. I figured she had internalized the societal racism that caused her to think like and be like the colonizer. I was tempted to tell her that her wish to be a 'White woman' is not possible, but then I remembered how Wasekechak accomplishes his goals, and realizing the trio of professors might try to prevent me from completing my graduate degree, I kept quiet. After all, the two other

professors were colonizers and shared the same disdain for my Cree point of view.

But why should a trio of professors stigmatize a whole Cree way of knowing? Such things tend to happen to colonized people. As I listened to them belittle me, my anger arose. Should I tell them to shut their grumbling mouths and let them feel the wrath of a colonized man? No, I am a Cree man, so I simmered down, and passively accepted my subjected status as a member of the colonized. I lacked the confidence and motivation to stand up to these authoritarian bosses, confront them and struggle to have my perspective taken seriously. I only wanted to do my research, and quietly complete my studies. So, in order to overcome this kind of adversity I will use Wasekechak to explain how to bust through colonial barriers.

In his autonomous existence in the Cree world, Wasekechak often overcomes adversity largely because of his capacity to accurately assess predicaments in which he found himself and outsmart or out think his opponents. Sometimes it seemed he was a giant in a world of little people, a wolf in a pack of coyotes. How was he able to accomplish this? How exactly does Wasekachak's mind function? I first heard about Waskechak in the 1970's when I was a young boy, so I've had much time to observe him and how he interacts with the world. Wasekechak's way of thinking is appreciated when it comes to accomplishing a wide range of goals but he also taught the people how to attain great results for living a good life.

The old Cree people still use Wasekechak to teach the younger generations of our past, our spirituality, how we are educated, and how our values, ethics and laws functioned to the benefit of the collective community. My own understanding of Wasekechak

emerged out of being raised by an *Inninee Esquew* (Cree woman) who passed down Omushkegowuk stories to me. Perhaps the most important thing is why such stories should persist, as it would be a shame to see them disappear forever. Cree stories serve to reproduce our social and cultural way of life and worldview, based on caring, healing and balance in life, which are still practised despite hundreds of years of imperialism and the Western-based education we receive in schools. Cree narratives present, after all, a real alternative to a dominant worldview. Wasekechak narratives demonstrate how philosophy is understood, educated and processed by the listener. The sense of the story has to be determined by the listener, not by the storyteller. The influence the trickster is recognized by Hallowell:

The trickster figure insists things can't be pinned down to a single meaning. Native American storytelling passes down its collective wisdom to new generations, so they can make sense of the stories in their own lives. Stories content cannot be separated from the knowledge and experience of the storyteller or from the circumstances of telling to an outside recorder. Who becomes thereby a partial insider. There is no omniscient narrator (Hallowell, 2001: 249).

The stories I received from my family narratives developed my own understanding of Wasekechak. I share these stories in order to help me make sense of Cree reality and because it would be a shame to lose this knowledge forever. As Stella Neff, a Swampy Cree elder from Grand Rapids Manitoba once told me:

We used to hear about Wasekechak and those stories were told on many different occasions and some of it was just to laugh and get together in the evenings. To hear the stories being told by different people, we had many stories to tell and they would ask you to tell your story or tell this story and it was such an entertaining thing. My biggest regret when I think of it now is that some of the stories are forgotten. They didn't get carried on because our culture and our language it wasn't considered even equal to the English language because when I went to school a lot of these stories were lost and a lot of our

story tellers. Those storytellers we had are gone, and they can't tell us those stories again and yet I know that our world our worldview was shaped by those stories... (Cited in Hansen, 2013:158).

Stella indicates that *Omushkegowuk* history and culture was passed down through our oral narratives and it also indicates that the trickster character *Wasekechak* is present in the stories that were told in various educational or entertaining contexts. The trickster was used as a means to teach gently about values, ethics, and lessons for living.

Wasekechak can make mistakes and correct them too

Watching *Wasekechak* preparing to meet a goal, I was always struck with how intelligent or foolish he could be about his decision making. He would look at his choices and see exactly what he needed to do. Yet, he could also be very foolish about his choices and his mistakes are often very funny causing him to be the laughing stock among the people. Whether by instinct or wisdom, *Wasekechak* came to understand that personal gain at the expense of others is no path to living a good life. Instead the good life is attainable by keeping things in balance. In terms of teaching offenders appropriate behavior William G. Lathlin, a Swampy Cree elder from Opaskwayak Cree nation states that:

*In the old way people sat you aside and told you what happened and how to correct it. And they didn't do it by themselves, they used the elders to come and explain it and they told it in a story form about something you can relate to. They used *Wesakachak*. *Wesakachak* was a man of many talents. And they used *Wesakachak* to teach you if you keep doing this, this is what's going to happen. And they used something that people can really to like animals and birds and things like that. In the other, in the white culture*

that is, they just throw you in jail and this is where you stay. There is no, to me you don't learn anything from going to jail and being locked up because you don't know why or the consequences of what you did. The consequences of what you did are being locked up but it just doesn't make any sense or any what they say rehabilitation. There is no room for that, so it's a perpetual way of creating employment for the people of the whole justice system (Cited in Hansen, 2013:143).

This quote by William is a good description of how stories were used. I want to emphasize that '*how to correct it*' refers to healing. In fact, all of the above three responses show that healing is the foundation of justice and that the trickster *Wasekechak* does not waste time in teaching appropriate behavior. The stories, the narratives and *Wasekechak* are tools used for correcting bad behavior.

Wasekechak doesn't waste time on inessentials; he only is concerned with what will work. This has made him a success as a teacher and a hunter, and has earned him a reputation as a trickster. In difficult situations, *Wasekechak* makes decisions but always lives with the consequences. Otherwise he has observed, the repercussions will always catch up with him. To a large extent, the suppression of *Wasekechak* coincides with the development of colonialism. The numerous strategies to assimilate Cree people into the Western society has invariably alienated the people from their past.

Waskekechak is a Spiritually Directed Being

On my reserve finding *Wasekechak* was always difficult because none of us had ever seen him. It mattered little that we could not see him: the elders knew he existed. Seeking *Wasekechak* on the physical level was more than looking for a trickster, it

was asking to fail. A fundamental factor in understanding Wasekechak is that he isn't somebody who lives principally in the physical world. He isn't particularly seen or heard. This doesn't mean that he does not exist; he is far from being non-existent. Wasekechak's mind is working all the time, but it isn't the physical workings of the mind that concern him. He is not very interested in exploring his own physical thought processes in detail. Instead, Wasekechak focuses his thoughts on the spiritual world, on what's going on holistically—who the plant people, animal people and two legged people are what they are feeling and thinking, and how that is going to shape what happens in the world.

The narratives I heard from my mother represent the accumulated stories that she received from her parents and her elders, adapted (not changed) to the situation she wanted me to be aware of, but, in Couture's words, nonetheless though. Some of these stories connect our family memories, our culture and values by using Wasekechak. For the Omushkigowuk, our mother was our first teacher; this is what the old ones say, and this is what I have experienced in my own time. And our mothers educate us by stories. Such stories and teachings have been an important factor in the development of my Cree consciousness, the way I perceive and understand the world. I recall a story I received from my mother who used Wasekechak so that I may understand the meaning of courage:

A long time ago granny's brothers went to fight in the Second World War. Only one of them was her real brother, the others were her first cousins. But they were all raised in the same household and they all were treated the same; there was Paul, Charlie, Gordon, Margaret and they considered themselves to be brothers and sisters. They grew up in Cumberland House Saskatchewan. The old people say that Wasekechak helped your grandfathers fight in World War II. Lots of Cree people went overseas to fight in the war that time. Wasekechak was with them in that fight. It is said that at nighttime the guns and bombs lit the sky so much that you could see the land as clear as day. One night it rained so hard that the trenches filled with water. Seeing dead bodies floating

in the trenches, Charlie hollered at everyone that if the enemy wanted to kill Gordon they would have to kill him first. The brothers protected each other in battle. At the end of the war all the brothers came back home to Cumberland. But, they say Wasekechak never came home. As well, many Cree people never came home after the War (Cited in Hansen, 2013:16).

This story provides an interesting example of how Omushkigo narratives are told, how traditional characters, like Wasekechak, are used for teaching, and how the listener has to find out her/himself what lesson should be learned by the story. The story, of course, also illustrates the process of how I learned about my family's involvement in the Second World War. But there is a lot more. As every story, this narrative tries to convey traditional values, the accumulated knowledge and stories I was referring to above. One of them is courage. As active participants in battle my grandfathers demonstrated their capacity for courage. Another one is caring and self-sacrifice. It is interesting to note that Charlie the oldest brother was willing to sacrifice his life so that the youngest brother Gordon could live. These values are part of our cultural awareness. Such stories seek to transmit our cultural values by using Wasekechak, and, as I will show with further analysis below, Wasekechak represents our culture, represents what it means to be *Inninee (Cree)*. This is particularly true at the end of the story, the last two lines I was brooding on after I first heard it. And I had to figure the meaning out all by myself.

I mentioned already that there were values taught to me through that story. Now, the story teller, my mother, did not tell us children that she would teach us values. We were just listening, figuring out ourselves what the story was about, and that it contained values, albeit that the storyteller herself, of course, was aware that she taught us values

and culture and had prepared the story accordingly. The values, like courage, were not named though but rather described with the actions of the persons who displayed them. Values are part of the accumulated knowledge conveyed by the elders who taught us those values. Accumulated knowledge used for teaching can be defined as wisdom. There is nothing naïve about that. It is not enough though to just refer to values as wisdom from elders, and I did not only refer to that when I made the statement. So, how does the story get intellectually challenging? What intelligent, coded message does it contain, particularly in the last two sentences? My mother said that although all the siblings came back from war, Wasekechak never did, as well as other Cree people. What message does this statement contain, what tragedy? This is not naïve or foolish thinking. Using the dark corners of my Cree mind, using my feelings as well as my intellect, the whole tragedy eventually became painfully aware to me. It was Wasekechak who had given strength to the people fighting in war, told to me by the line “and Wasekechak was with them”, meaning that the values displayed by the persons in the story refer back to our cultural teachings. Now, my mother told us that Wasekechak did not return. What she meant was that the people lost or were in danger of losing their identity, their culture, which is represented by Wasekechak.

The loss of culture, as I interpreted from the story, is represented by the loss of Wasekechak. So, the following is a definition of Wasekechak. This character is what it means to be Cree, representing our culture, our ancestors, our teacher who tricks us into learning, and in some stories he even represents the Creator.

And he never returned in the story my mother told me. To make it philosophically

even more challenging, the very last sentence of some Cree not returning as well could mean two things: Many people did not come back physically because they were killed, but there were also a lot of them who, although they did return, did not return as Cree. Instead they returned as damaged, fully colonized Aboriginal people, subservient and obedient.

Now I demonstrated how I made my analysis of the story. That is, by the way, also an example of an Omushkegowuk theory. My mother wanted to teach me about my identity, my culture, and tell me that it was threatened by *western* influence, which is represented by the war my relatives were fighting in for Canada, the representation of *western* culture and worldview to which we are exposed. She did, however, not tell me that directly or analyze it for me in an academic way. She respectfully left this to her son, trusting that his mind will become a Cree mind and figure out the meaning of the story. Now, I have talked about Cree methodology as it relates to Wasekechak. I hope I made the argument why Wasekechak is important to academic research, and I do not see this sort of Cree analysis as naïve, and I hope I made the case that the elders’ wisdom is in the stories. As mentioned the Cree methodology is to have the listener figure out the analysis of the story.

Besides experiencing culture through the stories and the gentle teaching by my mother, I have also studied this knowledge, the more *academic way*, which includes the reality that now I also have written it down so that someone might learn about an Omushkegowuk experience. Yet I also tried to write it down in a way an Omushkegowuk storyteller would tell the story. My mother told me the following story about spirituality:

An old man and a young boy went on a canoe trip at Rocky Lake. Soon they encountered another canoe filled with unknown people who were paddling in the opposite direction. They had a meeting in the middle of the lake. The unknown people were chanting a song that sounded like this; Lavalee, Lavalee' Lavalee. As the unknown people approached the old man and the young boy; the old man took out his pipe and offered the unknown people an opportunity to smoke it. Although the old man felt nervous of the unknown he found the courage to offer the spirit people the pipe and so they smoked the pipe. After they finished smoking, the unknown people resumed on their way; chanting Lavalee, Lavalee' Lavalee as they paddled away. The old people used to say that we should not be afraid of the spirit world (Cited in Hansen, 2013:18-19).

The unknown people in this story are spirits. In this context it is interesting to note that the name Lavalee is a French name, which reveals that a relationship existed between the Cree and the French. It also says that the Cree took this relationship serious, respecting the unknown people even on the level of the spirit world. The offering of the pipe shows that the respect to unknown people includes the sharing of one's own worldview and way of life. It shows that, although the pipe is definitely part of Omushkegowuk culture and represents the sacredness of life, it is shared with other people. Sharing means, in this way, not imposing our culture but rather teaching an understanding and respect of it. When I asked my mother why the spirits in the story were chanting this name, *Lavalee*, she said she did not know, which could be an indication of the responsibility of understanding the story being with the listener, not the storyteller. I want to share another story my mother once told me:

I was three years old when my grandmother passed away. I remember how she used to take me for walks and spend time with me. Before she died she used to see the little people in her tea cup. The old people say that somebody put a curse on her and the medicine was being used in a wrong way. It was used to make her sick, so somebody killed her. After she died I used to wait on the side of the road for her like I always did hoping that she would be walking home. I waited for her everyday but, she never came home.

One day, I had a dream that people were praying for my grandmother; and I felt good in this dream. When I woke up I knew that I did not have to wait for my grandmother on the side of the road anymore. So I was given the message through the dream (Cited in Hansen, 2013:20).

This story demonstrates that dreams and visions are taken seriously in the Omushkigo world. For my mom, the dream gave her the message that she no longer had to wait for her grandmother beside the road. Johnson (1976: 114) has discussed the capacity of dreams and visions to give us insights into existence: "the vision is not to be sought outside of oneself: nor is it to be sought outside of one's being. Rather it must be sought within one's inner substance and found therein." Thus, the phenomenon of dreaming informs one about various aspects of existence. It is a subjective experience that for the dreamer becomes knowledge.

There are also stories of little people who steward certain doorways to wellbeing. I have witnessed old people in Opaskwayak talk about the need to respect these spiritual beings. When contemporary Cree people tell of strange noises in their homes, young children talking to imaginary friends, or of the phenomenon of small shiny objects such as keys going missing, one understands that these are spiritual manifestations of the little people, not, as it might be interpreted by non-Omushkegowuk, just inventions of a child or childish mind. According to Omushkegowuk storytellers the little people usually live in the water and near the trees. When I was a young boy some of my cousins claimed that they saw the little people dancing in the windowsill at my grandmother's house. Not long ago I had a discussion with my elder John Martin about the little people:

The little people like to play with very young children; but they never do any harm

because they are our helpers. Sometimes one may hear strange noises in the homes; these are the little people who are making us aware that they would like an offering of food or tobacco. It is important to respect these spiritual helpers and to honor them with gifts such as cookies or tobacco. They like to eat sweets. But, nowadays, not too many people are feeding the little people anymore, but they are still around. We need to honor these little people because they are our helpers (Cited in Hansen, 2013:19).

The elder illustrates that stories from the Omushkegowuk community refer to the little people as beings that offer us a means for healing. I have to make sure that the reader understands that these little people as well as all the other spirits are real. They are part of our reality, and a lot of what is called *science* or explanations through *analysis* cannot be understood without respecting the reality of the spirit world.

My great Grandfather George Alfred McGillvary used to talk about the Sasquatch. He said Sasquatch. is always in high regions and he moves about only in blizzards so no one can see him. These spiritual beings continue to be a subject of interest among many Omushkegowuk in the north. The old people say that Sasquatch, Wasekechak and the little people are spirits. It is for this reason that it is extremely rare for someone to see a Sasquatch, a little person or even Wasekechak.

The Inninew—Cree people

Perpetuating stories about Cree spirituality makes me feel like a human being, an autonomous human being in the Cree world. Traditionally, there are no written records by Cree people; the history of our people has had to depend on oral tradition. However, the old Cree people say that we also carry the memories of our people in our

bodies. Still, it is now evident that the Cree interpretation of the past is being written down. The more Cree stories are examined, the more potential they have to be heard by the succeeding generations. Since these stories are meant to be educational and to entertain, it is understandable that subsequent stories on the subject are also educational and entertaining. It is basic to Cree philosophy that the people came to see these stories are relevant in their own culture. Wasekechak stories can be considered a Cree way of articulating an Omushkegowuk reality that allows one to think outside the colonizers box. McLeod (2007: 98) has discussed the notion of Indigenous theory:

Many people have attempted to articulate Indigenous models of theory. One way is to conceive it as a philosophical activity of reflective consciousness and an activity of thinking outside a state of affairs in the world. One could also argue that the aim of Cree philosophy is to think beyond colonial barriers is a theoretical activity. Others may say that “theory” is an inherently Western idea and cannot be rendered within Indigenous philosophies, or that there is no need for a discussion of Indigenous theory or philosophy.

In relation to the Cree tradition of storytelling, McLeod (2007: 13) comments that his grandfather “never said what the points of his story were; he forced the listeners to discover this for themselves. Consequently, the people make up their own minds about what they think about something; they have to decide what they believe to be true and the listener is given the chance to internalize the stories.” And that might go contrary to any academic method which, as I see it, often tries to give the definition that everybody accepts in a generalizing way but also in a confining way, the way it is presented, rather than giving the reader the responsibility to make sense according to their own experience. However, recently many qualitative researchers have produced uninhibited interpretations of narratives that are congruent with Aboriginal storytelling and research.

The power of research for the Omushkegowuk has been principally that of ‘open-endedness’ and storytelling; however, the many questions I was asked by colonizing professors about which theory I position myself in, what theory had influenced thinking etc., seem to originate from a misunderstanding of this Cree way of processing philosophical thought. When I stated my stance that I am positioned in a Cree theory I was ridiculed. When I insisted that I position myself in a Cree theory, I was punished. The Aboriginal professor gave me hell for insisting the wisdom of elders is contained in the stories and for supposedly being defiant and she demanded an apology. I really wanted to tell her to go to hell, but instead I apologized, “I am very sorry, professor it won’t happen again” even though I hadn’t done anything immoral. Since I knew the academic world is based on Western philosophy and how it supports Western theories, I decided to be like the trickster Wasakechak and call my Cree theory postcolonial theory. This, despite that no traditional elder has ever taught me that Wasakechak and Cree ways of knowing has to be defined in terms of postcolonial theory. As Smith (1999: 14) advises “Many indigenous intellectuals actively resist participating in any discussion within the discourses of post-coloniality. This is because post-colonialism is viewed as the convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world.”

I was very fearful of colonial professors—they caused me to feel extremely anxious-like butterflies in my stomach. I often found them condescending and harsh. Their attitudes of superiority were excruciating. As soon as they gave me instructions, I became passive and subservient, grateful for every comment, no matter how patronizing. These

academic conditions angered me. The hostility I nurtured during my agonizing graduate experiences motivated me to write about the situation. And I send this message to any struggling thinkers seeking protection from colonialism, Wasakechak is real, and he can help you develop an autonomous mind. Wasakechak however, is very tricky in this respect, and when one is not used to that kind of learning, one might not find the true wisdom that Wasekechak tries to teach; and the trickster himself is sometimes dismissed as being irrelevant in the university.

Conclusions

In my Cree experience, conducting research was extremely difficult because the university is based on Western culture and uses Eurocentric philosophy as the norm. It mattered little that I am a Cree/Danish hybrid: I grew up in northern Manitoba and identify with the Swampy Cree. Conducting research from a Cree perspective was more than searching for knowledge--it was asking for a fight. As long as colonial professors are available, a Cree would have an easier path using Western theories as their basis.

However, Wasakechak and his autonomous mind represent the Omushkegowuk University. The wisdom, academic knowledge, culture, and spirituality of the Omushkegowuk people are all contained in Wasekechak stories. I shared some of these stories in this chapter, and I hope the readers will find meaning in them one way or another. After all, the trickster does not do his tricks to confuse the people but rather to educate them, to prompt them to think and to open their autonomous minds to the meanings he wants to convey.

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Raised by his Grandmother Legend: Child of Caribou

Storyteller: Simon Samuel

Interviewer: Clara Samuel



In 2014, Clara Samuel interviewed elder/ storyteller Simon Samuel from the isolated community of Lac Brochet, Manitoba, in northern Manitoba with a population of 1500 Denesuline people. Samuel is a Dene drummer who travels across Canada to perform for various Dene communities. He is passionate about Dene culture, storytelling and transmitting the legends and myths associated with the Denesuline people. His parents passed down the knowledge of surviving in the North to him, through hunting, trapping and fishing, and crafting basic and useful

material such as toboggan and cabins. They also passed down stories associated with the Denesuline people. One of his stories he shared with Clara was about the Caribou and how much the Denesuline people value that creature.

Simon Samuel: Simon Samuel is my name.

Clara Samuel: Where were you born?

Simon Samuel: Brochet, 1954 April 8.

Clara Samuel: Can you tell me a little about how it used to be then?

Simon Samuel: Okay. Well I'll tell you. My mom, my late mom, told me. I asked her how I was born. And my dad was traveling to Brochet with mom. I was in her womb, eh. About 9 miles or 10 miles before, Brochet, I was in labour. So, my dad took everything out from the toboggan except for my mom. Another elder was with them. He left his toboggan there and put some my dad's dogs together. That way it will make it faster to Brochet. So when they arrived in Brochet back then there was hardly nothing. There was no, no doctors or there was no nurse, no clinic, no nothing. So there was an old lady alive. This old lady they use[d] to call her little granny. And my dad took my mom. My dad and that other elder took my mom with the blanket inside the cabin in Brochet. Back then in 1954, I guess there was no houses, I remember there was no house, so as soon as they brought my mom inside that's where I was born.

Clara Samuel: How many brothers and sister do you have?

Simon Samuel: Well before me there was...I have one sister still alive...but there was two before me that my mom lost. So there's just me and my sister right now.

Clara Samuel: And who were your parents?

Simon Samuel: My dad's name is Samuel Samuel, and my mom's name is Ann Samuel.

Clara Samuel: Did they ever tell you about any stories, that you recall...that was told to you when you were a child?

Simon Samuel: Lots of many stories, lots.

Clara Samuel: What kind of stories do you remember?

Simon Samuel: Well, my dad live[d] to be, over 80. When I was about 10 year old, my dad, elders use[d] to live with him, he use[d] to bring elders to our home and live with us...the ones that lost their wives or their husbands, I remember, and in 68-69-67...

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: Those years I remember we use[d] to live about 9 miles from Brochet. Cockering River, That's where we use[d] to have cabins and then, these old people use[d] to tell stories. So one of the stories, they called it, "Raised By His Grandmother." What that means is that this old woman, she found a little person, they said. I don't know, maybe thousands of years. I don't know how long. So beginning in the old days there was nothing. People, didn't know English, nothing. People use[d] to live like that, like animals. So the story, it was like this, two girls, young girls, were outside in the winter. Beautiful moon light and beautiful stars and kind of cold. I guess they were playing outside.

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: And they heard a little child cry, a baby was crying out in the lake. They were wondering what's going on. So they ran. And they went to the place where they thought they heard...no nothing. And then the second time. Again they ran there. Again, they ran there. Again. But nothing. Of course people heard it. So this one old woman came out. He went out, he heard a baby cry, and he said, "What happen[ed], what's going on?" "I'll go check it out," she said. So she went there in the winter under the shining moonlight. A nice night. And baby keep[s] crying and then she went there. There was a caribou. Caribou droppings on the ground. That's where she heard the baby cry from, so she had a, probably, a cane. She did this, and there was a little baby sitting there, very small. The way the story came, they said he was small. So she put the baby in the thumb of her mitten.

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: She put him in there. So, from there this old woman raised him. I don't know how big after many years. So, and then, there was a hard, a hard winter. Of the years, it was really hard, because, I guess, caribou was declining. It was very cold.

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: So, this one man killed some caribou they said. So the old lady grew a boy or a child, grew a child. That's what it means in translation.

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: So, they said that he said, “My grandmother go out and get me some food. I’m hungry.” So the old lady went out to get him some food. He didn’t eat the meat. They said, “He doesn’t eat caribou meat, flesh, but he eats, over here from the caribou (points at heel). The feet part, the hindquarter, right here. Only that. He only eat that part. Just a little piece only.”

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: So this old lady came in and said, “I’m here to get some food for my grandson.” She said, “Caribou feet.” Caribou feet means caribou foot. So this man said to her, “Does your grandson waiting for you outside when there’s people in here?” “Go home right now he said. They didn’t even give him. This old women felt bad for her grandson. So she came back to her place. She came back to her grandson. “Grandson, they don’t want to give you some food they said,” she said to him. And her grandson got offend “Eh, let them freeze, let them freeze,” he said, “What that means is their going to starve.” And then the old women said, “Grandson if you freeze to death what is going to happen to me?” And [he said,] ”I can bring you back here. What it means even though you die, I’ll bring you back to life somewhere. You’ll be alive again.”

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: He said that. So he said, “Grandmother let’s going over there. Take me somewhere.” So this old woman packed a little toboggan. Maybe there wasn’t that many...luggage, eh?

Clara Samuel: Umm huh.

Simon Samuel: ...took off, and they came to this big lake. They said, big lake. Right there he said, “Grandmother, let us settle here.” Whatever he says grandmother would follow. That[’s] what she’d do. “Grandmother, let us stay here,” he said. That’s where she put the teepee, eh? Long ago they used caribou hide teepee not like canvas. So he said, “Grandmother, make me some snowshoes.” Well [she] probably made little snow shoes, eh? So his grandmother made him snow shoes, put them on his feet, put his snow shoes on, and took him outside. That’s it, she put him outside to play until she could not hear him no more. Probably old lady was doing some other work, so she couldn’t hear the noise of him. So she came outside and he was gone. And then she found the tracks, snow shoe tracks into the bush, and that’s it. No, not all day he never

showed up. Night came around, and then evening came again. So the old women was sad: “My grandson came from the caribou, he came from the animal.”

Clara Samuel: Yeah.

Simon Samuel: He went back there. That’s what she thought. She was crying. This old woman was crying in her teepee. What that means was she was crying until something opened the canvas door. He came back, and this old women was happy, eh, to see him coming in. And he said, “Grandmother.” He had little jacket made out of caribou hide fur. He said, “Grandmother, untie this (points at his jacket zipper).” She untied his waist belt made out caribou hide. Probably, caribou tongue fell out from his little jacket, lots of caribou tongue. Huh, the tip of the caribou tongue. That’s it. Lots. And she knew he killed a lot of caribou.

Clara Samuel: Yeah.

Simon Samuel: So, tomorrow, the trackers of his snow shoes...small snow shoes track, must be cute, eh? That’s where he took his grandmother—one lake where they were going. That’s where they walked too. On the ice there was a lot of caribou that he killed. There was snow shoes track and on the ice it turned to caribou tracks. He came back as a caribou.

Clara Samuel: Yes.

Simon Samuel: So the caribou won’t run away. Caribou tongue...he bit off the tip of the caribou tongue. That’s how he killed them all. I don’t know how many. So he was there with his grandmother, that’s what they say eh? So, until she said my grandson, “What about our relatives back home? I bet they’re all hungry too.” Anyways, he said, he said, “Well grandmother can you come and put my snow shoes on again?” So that what his grandmother did. He was gone again, gone. She said, “Oh, he’ll be back.” At midnight he came back, and what happen[ed] was he went and checked the people that refused him food. They were almost starve[d] because there was no caribou around that area. So there, where people were settled, they were all hungry. And this one guy, he walked out on the lake early in the morning for water. There was a water hole. He saw caribou tracks around the water hole. Baby caribou, it means the youngest calf, walked around the water hole. And they went back. The man ran to the people, and he said there was a caribou track out on the lake. Maybe it came from the caribou. So the people all packed and took off. They followed the caribou tracks. They followed and followed until...back to the bush...and then there was...little snow shoe tracks can

be seen again. And they followed it. Barely they made [it] to where he came from, and him and this old lady had lot of caribou meat. So that is how the Denesuline survived.

Clara Samuel: Yeah.

Simon Samuel: So and then the old women kept this child for many years. And then he lost his grandmother. The old woman died, and so he went back into the bush. He walked into the bush, and caribou tracks can be seen. After they followed his track until they came to a pond. And he was amongst the caribou again from then on. There was too many caribou tracks. So that was it. He was gone back to the caribou.

Clara Samuel: Yes.

Simon Samuel: So the legend as told by the elders, when coming to the end time, all this that happen[ed] is going to come back. That's what they said. So it's very important to tell the stories because one day, grandchildren, children, they're going to see the end time.

Clara Samuel: Where did that story originated from?

Simon Samuel: The story belongs to the Denesuline people.

Clara Samuel: The Dene people.

Simon Samuel: Yes, yes. The Denesuline, us Dene people from the barren lands, where there is no trees. That's where we came from, that's what they say. And barren lands, it means the treeline. That's where we stayed, in winter, in summer. We were right in the treeline, close to the caribou. They call us caribou eaters. Caribou is gold to us Dene people. So in wintertime, you go back to the bush. So this is the Dene people story. Nobody else but Denesuline people.

Clara Samuel: Was that old lady living in the house alone?

Simon Samuel: There was no houses.

Clara Samuel: Or cabin, tent...

Simon Samuel: There was no cabin either. It might be a teepee made out of caribou

hide. That's all they had, eh? So in the old days, people, they don't live one place. They travelled around. They followed the caribou. Eh, yeah, where ever the caribou is that's where they go. That's it, without caribou you won't survive.

Clara Samuel: Yeah.

Simon Samuel: Like the story, nowadays, you can't live without the Northern Store—no more food, you have to go shopping. Long time ago there was no store or nothing. You have to follow where the food is. Yeah.

Clara Samuel: Follow the food.

Simon Samuel: Yeah.

Clara Samuel: Thank you for sharing that story with me.

Simon Samuel: You're welcome.

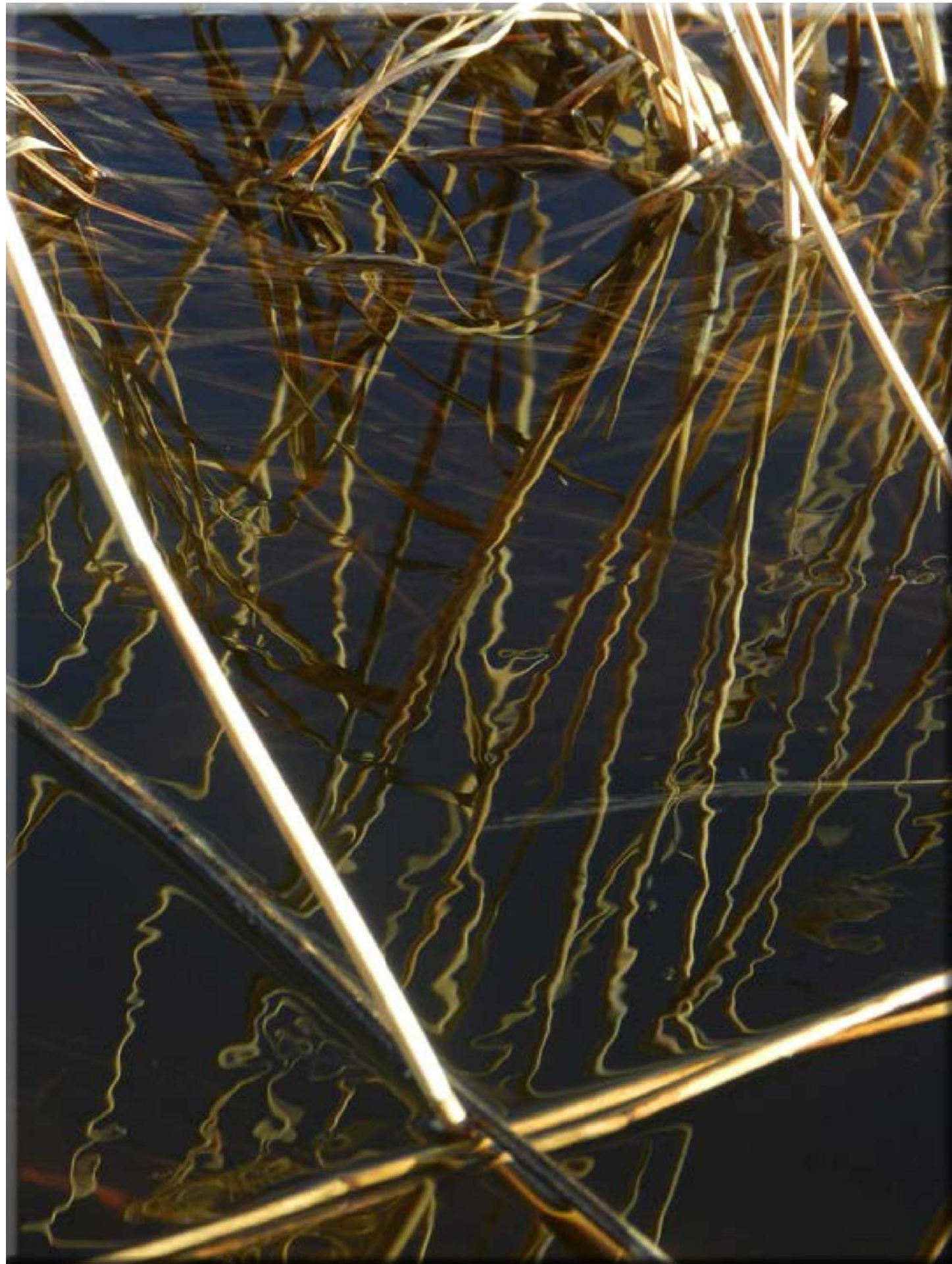


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DITCH #3

Milton in Canada: Ideal, Ghost or Inspiration?

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While according to Harold Bloom, John Milton is the traditional British “strong poet” whose influence younger poets fear and from which they strive to liberate themselves, this “anxiety of influence” does not necessarily exist for writers from the twentieth-century British working class any longer. Not a few of these poets would probably reject him and insist – in Tony Harrison’s words – “On Not Being Milton.” A similarly critical attitude is taken by many writers from the former British colonies who – like the Caribbean poet and literary scholar David Dabydeen – repeat Harrison’s title with a distinct political overtone. For better or worse, for writers from the former British colonies, Milton has also always been an “imperial icon, representative of British colonial administration and education” (Zwierlein 407).

In this paper, I want to have a look at the colonial and postcolonial construction of Milton’s role as a representative of Britain and/or of British literature from a mostly Canadian perspective, seeing the English poet as anything ranging from prophet to nemesis. Harold Bloom claimed as late as 1995 that Milton has been “the central figure in the history of the Anglo-American poetic canon” (*Western Canon* 526). For authors

from postcolonial literatures such as Caribbean writer David Dabydeen, however, “Milton’s ornate, highly structured, Latinate expressions, so unattractive to modern tastes influenced by Eliot and Yeats, are still the exemplars of English civilization against which the barbaric, broken utterances of black people are judged” (Dabydeen 8). The views of Milton in Canadian texts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that I will present here offer quite a spread of judgments ranging from obvious admiration to utter disgust. I will thus have a look at positive as well as negative constructions of “Milton” in Canadian literature, with authors ranging from Henry Alline to Margaret Atwood, including Eric Ormsby, who claims in a sonnet that in his youth “St. Paul and Milton were familiar ghosts.” For Ormsby, obviously, Milton stands for stodgy and stilted English views that have no appeal for young readers from the New World. Looking for reflections of Milton in Canadian poetry and prose, I will not, however, be interested in the many texts which only use Miltonic mottos or epigraphs.

My approach here will be – as in an earlier essay on Miltonic echoes in recent Canadian novels – to use “a model distinguishing between, on the one hand, Milton as a textual model to be imitated” and, “on the other, Milton as a name standing for ideological and political connotations rather than any specific literary work.” More bluntly, my aim is to differentiate “between Milton as admired literary model and Milton as politically [more or less] dubious representative of the British Empire” (Kuester, “Who’s Afraid” 18). As a classificatory model helping us establish some kind of order in the realm of Miltonic intertexts in Canada, I will at the end of my paper recur to a taxonomy devised by the late German Canadianist Walter Pache.

Miltonic Reflections in Early Canadian Exploration Reports

The earliest texts from the territory now known as Canada are often exploration reports, and texts like these are – as Northrop Frye has told us – often “as innocent of literary intention as a mating loon” (822). Still, critics such as Ian McLaren have shown that many exploration reports underwent a process of literary “emplotment” before they appeared in book form, and this emplotment also often involves intertextual embellishment. For example, in his *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories*, Alexander Henry (the Elder, 1739-1824) describes the landscape near Cumberland House with a reference to Milton’s War in Heaven, thus enhancing the sublime impression left by the northern topography: “I at last ascended the mountain, from one side of which [the masses of rock] had fallen; the whole body was fractured, and separated by large chasms. In some places, parts of the mountain, of half an acre in surface, were raised above the general level. It was a scene for the warfare of the Titans, or for that of Milton’s angels!” (328).

Although he would probably no longer really qualify as an explorer, John Howison (1797-1859), who lived in Canada from 1818 to 1820, and published *Sketches of Upper Canada: Domestic, Local, and Characteristic*, devised an interesting, though not necessarily fully positive Milton reference. Talking about the ideal inhabitants of the region that is soon to be called the province of Ontario, he thinks that “the man who is fond of a country life, who loves to be exempt from the restrictions imposed by fashion and ceremony, and whose wishes seldom stray beyond the limits of his home and domestic circle, might live

very comfortably and very happily in Upper Canada.” True rural democrats,

they will not find themselves thrown in the shade by the false pretensions of persons of superior rank, nor see the avenues to distinction closed, and their ambitious efforts defeated by the influence of a presuming aristocracy. I strongly suspect that all persons of taste, feeling, and judgment, *mentally* acknowledge the justness of the *principle* contained in those words which Milton has put in the mouth of the fallen arch-angel,

“Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven;”

and consequently, one thing that must render Upper Canada an agreeable place of residence of a certain class and of certain ideas is, that no person there can, upon any just ground, “lord it over” another, or claim precedence upon the plea of rank, or *extrinsic* dignity. (268-9)

I am not exactly sure whether Howison had really come to grips with all the infernal implications of his description of Upper Canada and its ideal inhabitants. Does he mean to say that only fallen angels will make good Canadians? Or is this another version of Jacques Cartier’s point of view that Canada was the land God gave to Cain?

On a more traditional literary note, John Mactaggart (1791-1830), a Scottish engineer in charge of the building of the Rideau Canal, describes the Niagara Falls as “sublime, awful and beautiful beyond my highest expectations,” although he claims that he cannot deliver a “description beyond the poetic quill of Howison” (42):

The waters at times seem green, and the next instance they are black. The frost adorns them with fringing icicles and furbelows of snow, while the sun paints them with streaks and circles of coloured light. Though I were a Milton, they would laugh at my muse; and being only a very humble individual, of course it is high presumption for me to speak; but triflers must be gabbling. (42-43)

Milton in Religious and Literary Texts

Even a mere glance at the 1960s edition of the *Literary History of Canada*, especially at Fred Cogswell’s contribution on “The Maritime Provinces (1720-1815)” under the general heading of “The Transplanting of Traditions,” leads us to the Miltonic influence on the American Baptist preacher Henry Alline (1748-84) who – to quote Cogswell – “from 1776 to 1783 ... traversed, on horseback and in all weathers, the length and breadth of the then settled areas of the Maritime Provinces, preaching, often several times a day, wherever he could find an audience” (75). According to Cogswell, Alline’s most important theological work, *Two Mites*, relies on – amongst others – the Bible and Milton to support its message. Another author under Milton’s influence, not in the Maritimes but in Montreal, is Charles Heavysege (1816-76), who wrote – according to Carl F. Klinck – a “Miltonic epic” (148) in his *Revolt of Tartarus*. As the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* tells us, he was “steeped in Milton and the Bible, but given to inconsistent diction and bawdy puns” (478).

As far as poets from mid-century are concerned, Charles Sangster (1822-93) in his *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems* writes about “England and America” as “[g]reatest twain among the nations” (318). England offers “mighty men of genius” such as “Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope,” who “[g]lorified that self-same language / Since become your pride and hope” (319). J. T. Breeze from Brockville seems rather modest in ironically stating about his 1870 publication *Oswald Grey, and Other Poems, on Canadian Scenery, History, Legends, Genius and Institutions* that “I do not dream that
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my little book when issued will shake the poles, or that its numbers and music will bend the stars and draw the seraphs from their spheres, or that our glorious Niagara and St. Lawrence will stop in their courses when their names are mentioned by the magic of their strains” (n. p.). Still he shows that he knows what true literature might achieve. Furthermore he remarks that

I do not profess to be the poet of ages, a Homer, a Gothe [sic], a Shakespear, or a Milton. I have not attempted to produce an Iliad, or a Faust, or a Paradise Lost... but I may be permitted to look with my own mental vision on Canadian Scenes, Histories, Memories, Legends and Incidents, and throw the light of my own nature around them ...” (n. p.)

Breeze thus stands for a modest colonial point of view, but he also represents the urge to represent a genuine Canadian voice.

Late 19th and early 20th Century Literary Texts

The general attitude in colonial Canada towards Milton and the other writers of the British literary tradition is expressed, for example, by John A. Cooper, who writes in 1897 that

Literature rests on tradition and on the books of past ages; consequently, for some time to come, Canada’s literature must rest upon the tradition and books of France and Great Britain, and Canadian authors must continue to draw inspiration from Shakespeare, Milton, Carlyle, Scott and Dickens; from Madame de Staël, Chateaubriand, Hugo, Dumas and George Sand.

Among Canadian poets of the late nineteenth century, Charles G. D. Roberts (1860-1943), who has been referred to as “the Father of Canadian Poetry,” makes rather traditional references to Milton in poems such as “Ballad to a Kingfisher,” where he

addresses the bird in the following way:

With your name for a pledge and a sign
Of seas calmed and storms assuaged set
By John Milton, the vast, the divine,
O Kingfisher, still you forget.

The reference here is to one of the “birds of calm” from Milton’s “Nativity Ode” that “sit brooding on the charmed wave.” Of course, the Canadian kingfisher is probably not aware of either the cosmic and religious overtones of Milton’s poem or of the allusion to Ovid’s story of Ceyx and Alcyone in his *Metamorphoses*. While Ovid’s Ceyx is slain by the gods and Alcyone is turned into a bird, Robert states that his kingfisher is “Of Ceyx not mindful a whit” and that it has not been metamorphosed into “Alcyone yet” either. It is totally unaware of its mythological connotations. This might be seen as commentary on the New World that is not haunted by European traditions, but it might also be interpreted as a certain loss of cultural tradition.

Roberts’s cousin and fellow Confederation Poet Bliss Carman (1861-1929) mentions Milton in the 1896 volume *More Songs from Vagabondia*, which he wrote together with the American poet Richard Hovey (1864-1900). In “At the Road-House: In Memory of Robert Louis Stevenson,” Milton is seen in the company of the great poets of the past whom Stevenson after his death has joined in “the road-house of the past.” Milton is “grave Milton,” but also part of “their kin, whose woven words / Had elvish music in the weave.”

The third Confederation poet, William Wilfred Campbell (1860-1918), in his “Ode

to Tennyson,” also shows his modesty in the light of the talent and European artistic environment that Tennyson represents as “Great Bard, thou Merlin of these latter days.” He sees Tennyson as “Sweetest and strongest in song since Milton sang” (127), “Milton, blind, the bard of newer days,” who follows Homer (128). Frederick George Scott (1861-1944), father of twentieth-century modernist poet F.R. Scott and sometimes associated with the Confederation Poets, in “Lines Written on Finishing the Life of Milton” (1882), equally sees Milton as a literary model whose quality can hardly be achieved in Canada and who is one of those poets who “*never* die who pass, like thee, / Enriching all their brother men” (70).

Another Maritime poet and educator, Theodore H. Rand (1835-1900), describes the blind woman Marie Depure, a devout Christ-like figure who “never thought with Milton, in his pride, / ‘Does God exact day labor, light denied?’” Here Milton, obviously, is not seen as an all that positive model, as he is above all associated with the deadly sin of pride, whereas Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927), a Victorian writer with a strong Christian conviction, sees Milton – together with Wordsworth – as a representative of England’s old traditions. In “William Ewart Gladstone,” she writes:

Milton hath gone, and Wordsworth, – but through thee
 Still rings their hate of tyranny defied;
 Still breathes the voice whose sound was “of the sea,”
 And that one “of the mountains;” – far and wide
 Their echoes roll, where’er true Britons be,
 Or men for liberty have lived and died!

Reminiscent of Milton’s sonnet about his blindness, in Machar’s “Canadian Tale” *Katie*

Johnstone’s Cross of 1870, Katie is told by Miss Grey that “there are different kinds of usefulness in the world, [...] and whatever is decreed for us by God must be that kind of usefulness which He desires from us at the time” (55). Needless to say that Milton’s line “They also serve who also [sic] stand and wait,” which will crop up in the context of Margaret Atwood’s adoption of Miltonic lines, too, is soon to follow.

Machar’s New Brunswick contemporary Rebecca Agatha Armour (1845-91) also has short Miltonic references in her *Marguerite Verne, or Scenes from Canadian Life*, for example when imagining what would happen if old exemplary men of law like Coke and Blackstone could rise again: “What a scene – aye, one that would need a Milton to describe” (173). The Reverend Duncan Anderson (1828-1903) modestly sees himself as not being up to the standards of the traditional bard. While “Milton sung a glorious song,” Anderson counts himself among “[a] thousand humbler songsters [who] long / To touch with trembling hand the lyre” (104).

Finally among 19th-century Canadian poets we must not forget James McIntyre, the “cheese poet” – who in his “Canada, Our Home, 1883,” saw a great future for Canada in a time in which Winnipeg would be its capital:

Then poets will arise and high their lays will soar,
 Worthy of the muse of a Burns or a Moore,
 A Shakespeare and a Milton, the great and the wise,
 Will sing the glories of our northern skies... (24)

In his poem “Milton,” he emphasizes:

Like mightiest organ in full tone,

Melodious, grand is great Milton,
He did in lofty measures tell
How Satan, great archangel fell... (119)

We may be able to understand why scholars have counted the cheese poet among not necessarily the best Canadian verbal artists.

Milton in Non-fiction

So far I have presented impressions from poetry and fiction, but one can also find images of Milton in less obviously literary and more factual texts about late nineteenth-century Canada. For example, there is the book *Our Own Country: Canada, Scenic and Descriptive...* by W.H. Withrow (1839-1908), a Methodist minister, journalist and author. When he describes the disadvantages of a “quaint hotel,” he points especially to a window the glass of which was

so twisted and warped that it distorted everything outside in a very absurd manner. For instance, a man passing the window, as seen through one pane, reminded one of Milton’s description of Satan as he sat “squat like a toad close at the ear of Eve.” As he passed the window bar he appeared to shoot up suddenly into the stature of the tall archangel that erect walked in Eden. (34)

In a truly Miltonic (or Pauline) fashion, Withrow could obviously see things only “through a glass darkly.” Withrow also uses Miltonic quotations in his novel *The King’s Messenger, or, Lawrence Temple’s Probation*, when he describes the church built under Temple’s leadership and compares it to Pandaemonium in *Paradise Lost* I.549-50:

Almost, thought Lawrence, might be applied the words of Milton,

descriptive of a structure of far other character:
“Anon out of the earth a fabric huge
Rose like an exhalation.”

But this was only the bony framework. (214)

Furthermore, Withrow describes Temple’s “efforts to reach his appointments” to “the progress of a far different character on a far different mission,” that of Satan in Book II.948-50.

Grant Allen (1848-99), who is probably better known in the field of detective fiction and was born in Canada before later settling in Canada and becoming a neighbour of Arthur Conan Doyle’s, also wrote *Biographies of Working Men* for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and in describing a stonemason by the name of Thomas Telford (who later became famous as a builder of bridges and canals), he stated that “He read whenever he had nothing else to do. He read Milton with especial delight” (10).

Miltonic references even occur in rather unexpected places such as the Prairies: In the description of *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear* in the aftermath of the Frog Lake Massacre in the North-West Territories on April 2, 1885, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney also quote Milton, but they do it in order to refer to the “Indians” war dance. In fact, in Delaney’s description, the Natives’

cries, their forms, their actions their very surroundings could be compared to nothing else than some infernal scene, wherein the demons are frantic with hell, inflamed passions. Each one might bear Milton’s description in his “Paradise Lost,” of Death.

This is followed by quotations from Book II.666-72 and Book I.381-90. In the same way, she wonders if “the scenes at the little church the morning of the second of April ...

are not those the deeds of beings not human, but infernal?” (120).

Hell is, however, gladly not the only Miltonic reference that Canadian writers have used to describe their country. In his contribution to the volume *Picturesque Canada: The*

Country as It Was and Is from 1882, J. Howard Hunter describes Elora in Ontario:

As Elora now bears the name of the vestibule that led to the Paradise of the far distant India, so our hither Indians regarded this lovely spot as no unworthy portal to the Elysium of their dreams and hopes. Just such a summer landscape as we have here must have deeply impressed Milton in his younger days, and kindled his fancy when afterwards out of the darkness he pictured one of the scenes in Eden. (473)

As a Miltonic illustration, Hunter quotes lines 257-63 from Book 4 with their reference to “umbrageous grots and caves.”

Another, perhaps more intellectual Canadian perspective of Milton is given by Goldwin Smith (1823-1910), who was Oxford-educated and moved to Canada in 1875 to become one of the leading intellectuals of Toronto. In his *Lectures and Essays* published in 1881, we find “Pattison’s Milton,” a discussion of a biography of Milton by Mark Pattison which had appeared in Macmillan’s “English Men of Letters” series in 1879. Smith does not like the English intellectual trend, of which Pattison is a representative, of withdrawing “into the sanctuary of critical learning and serene art, abjuring all theology and politics, and, above all, abjuring controversy of all kinds as utterly vulgar and degrading” (321). So he does not follow Pattison in seeing Milton as a literary person only and forgetting about his political activity: “Mr. Pattison’s air when he comes into contact with the politics or theology of Milton’s days is like that of a very seasick passenger at the sight of a pork-chop” (320-21). And when he accuses Pattison of “looking upon

the life of Milton the politician merely as a sad and ignominious interlude in the life of Milton the poet” (324), such an accusation might also easily refer to many conservative Miltonists in the twentieth century.

Milton Scholarship in the 20th Century

As early as the 1960s, Canadian scholarship in the field of academic Milton Studies was of course *the* central aspect of “Milton in Canada.” A.S.P. Woodhouse is one of the eminent pre-World War II Milton scholars that Millar MacLure mentions in his overview of literary scholarship in the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada* (539), as are of course Northrop Frye (540), Malcolm Ross (541), Ernest Sirluck (544), Arthur E. Barker (546), and Peter F. Fisher (548). Later generations of Milton scholars from Canada have been as brilliant as these named in the 1960s. Lauriat Lane, in the second edition of the *Literary History of Canada* adds scholars such as Hugh McCallum (41), Douglas Bush, Balachandra Rajan and Roy Daniells (42). In the 1990 edition, Balachandra Rajan, on the one hand claims that Milton scholarship “is not what it once was,” but on the other hand he adds John Spencer Hill and Dennis Danielson as well as Mary Nyquist (Rajan 139-40) to the list of deserving Canadian Miltonists, and more recent additions should be John Leonard, Paul Stevens, Nicholas von Maltzahn, Elizabeth Sauer, Katherine Acheson, Judith Herz, Annabel Paterson and many others. The best overview of Milton studies in Canada is probably Paul Stevens’s “Milton in the Far North,” the afterword to the volume *Milton and Questions of History: Essays by Canadians Past and Present* edited by Feisal G. Mohamed and Mary Nyquist.

Modern and Postmodern Milton

Another reference to Milton that one finds in the 1965 edition of the *Literary History of Canada* is the complaint by Douglas Bush, one of the 1920s intellectuals more interested in modernism than in the imperial tradition. He writes in the *Canadian Forum* in December 1926: “Every year one hopes to hear the last of our windy tributes to our Shakespeares and Miltons, and every year the Hallelujah Chorus seems to grow in volume and confidence” (quoted in Pacey 480).

Among modernist and realist writers, novelist Margaret Laurence (1926-87), who wrote most of her seminal stories and novels in the 1960s and 70s, admits in an interview with Alan Twigg that “anybody who is writing in the English language, after all, is in some way an heir to Wordsworth and Milton and Shakespeare anyway. But Canadian writers are taking the language and making it their own” (Twigg 269). Laurence reports in her memoir that “Malcolm Ross taught me a course on Milton and seventeenth-century thought at the University of Manitoba, a course that profoundly affected my life” (Laurence, *Dance on the Earth* 95). In her analysis of Laurence’s central novels *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*, Hildegard Kuester shows that “out of their concern for the under-representation of women writers in literary canons, feminist critics studying *The Diviners* focus on Morag’s reaction to her male exemplars, Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne” (145). Laurence’s heroine Morag Gunn in *The Diviners* is taught Milton by a male professor whose reaction to her problems with Milton’s attitude to women can be seen as somewhat paternalistic, when he uses John Donne’s line “For God’s sake hold your

tongue” in order to put her in her place. She has fewer problems with Milton, though:

“... But you can accept it with Milton, better, somehow, despite all those really awful things he says – ‘He for God only; she for God in him.’ You think, well, he was all bound up with so many things that were going on in England at the time, and when people’s feelings were concerned, except his own, maybe he just didn’t know any better. But – well – you wouldn’t have expected it of Donne, so much.” (Laurence, *Diviners* 155)

Nevertheless she falls in love with Dr. Skelton and marries him only to find out later that she has to emancipate herself from him. As part of that process, she moves to London, England, and works in the Agonistes Bookstore owned by J. Sampson (with a “p”) who – like his Miltonic model – is fighting against the philistines (with a lower-case p this time) in trying to keep his small store going.

So while we have Milton as a personal reference appearing in *The Diviners*, it is rather Milton’s work as an underlying structure that is used in Laurence’s *The Stone Angel*. Paul Comeau, in “Hagar in Hell: Margaret Laurence’s Fallen Angel,” reads *Paradise Lost* as structural prototype of Laurence’s novel, drawing parallels between Hagar Shipley and Satan, both of whom are driven by pride. In addition, Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen point out Laurence’s (and Thomas Wolfe’s) use of Milton’s “Lycidas” in the metaphor of the stone angel overlooking the Manawaka cemetery.

If one looks at postmodern Canadian literature, a good author to start with is the poet, novelist and theorist whom Linda Hutcheon once called “Mr. Canadian Postmodern,” Robert Kroetsch (1927-2011). Laurie Ricou, in his contribution to the *Literary History of Canada*, states about Kroetsch’s seminal volume *Seed Catalogue* (1977) that

Kroetsch's *Seed Catalogue* is part of a life-long poem that resulted in his never-to-be-completed *Completed Field Notes*, which starts with *The Stone Hammer Poem*, which Christian Riegel and Priscila Uppal rightfully see as belonging to the elegiac tradition dating back to Milton's "Lycidas." As Riegel writes, "though allusions to Milton are not direct in 'Stone Hammer Poem,' it is clear that Kroetsch's poem employs elements from the English tradition begun by Milton, as well as from the Greek, Roman, and later pastoral elegy traditions that Milton also borrows from" (57). Even though Milton does not appear in a computer search of Kroetsch's long poem, his intertextual ghost is certainly there all the time, which is confirmed by Uppal, who includes Kroetsch's long poem elegies under the title "Method for Calling Up Ghosts" (113-86).

Another contemporary Canadian scholar turned novelist is Eric McCormack, a specialist in 17th-century literature and also the author of what has been referred to as a "sexual gothic" novel. The title of this novel is taken from John Knox, and it is anti-Catholic as well as anti-feminist: *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. The novel deals with the life of a boy who grows up in Scotland and on an island in the South Atlantic and finally ends up in Canada. He feels eternally haunted by destructive fate (and women) until he is finally reunited with an old girlfriend and overcomes alienation through the concepts of love and trust and through the Miltonic – or rather Satanic – message that he had first taken for "maybe ... an old saying" (52): "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven" (*Paradise Lost* 1.254-55, McCormack 271). Andrew Halfnight's paradise turns out to be Camberloo, Ontario (a thinly disguised Waterloo, where McCormack taught at St.

Jerome's University). But quoting Satan in *Paradise Lost*, Halfnight seems to be on the devil's side, perhaps also without being aware of it.

Margaret Atwood is probably the best-known Canadian author who has made use of Milton references in her novels. As Walter Pache ("A Certain Frivolity" 129), reminds us, she took her Milton with Northrop Frye at the University of Toronto. In the totalitarian North American state of Gilead that Atwood creates in her *Handmaid's Tale*, the handmaid Offred is confronted with antifeminist lines from *Paradise Lost* as well as Milton's sonnets that are supposed to justify her lowly position. For example, the repressive 'aunt' tells Offred what Milton had meant as a solace for himself: "They also serve who only stand and wait, said Aunt Lydia" (Atwood, *Handmaid's Tale* 28).

In Atwood's more recent dystopia *Oryx and Crake*, an artificial paradise is created that is spelled with a *c*, and this artificial paradise created by a specialist in genetic manipulation is populated by human-like beings, the Crakers, that are supposed (or programmed) to be unable to think deeply or to imagine a higher or divine being. That this eradicating of the G(od)-spot is not necessarily successful is shown in Atwood's sequel *MaddAddam*. In *Oryx and Crake*, in a parody of the archangel Michael's lines from *Paradise Lost*, Oryx tells the Crakers that there now is a pharmaceutical counterpart of the religious concept divine providence: "Paradise is lost, but you have a Paradise within you, happier far" (308).

As the quotations from contemporary novelists show, Milton exists mostly in lines that are quoted as mottos and which have turned into proverbial citations that reverberate with mythical and mystical overtones but which are often used in ways that collide with

their original contexts. Milton thus often stands for stodgy tradition, as he does in Eric Ormsby's sonnet cited earlier, or he is quoted, or perhaps misquoted, so as to justify totalitarian points of view in Atwood's dystopian North America.

Alice Munro, Canada's first Nobel laureate, has a somewhat ironically refracted attitude to the giants of literary history, it seems, in that she calls a somewhat eccentric character in one of her volumes not only Milton but even "Milton Homer." It is not the character himself, though, but only Alice Munro, her narrator and her readers who are aware of the ironic connotation of the name.

More than twenty years ago, Walter Pache devised a model of the reception of classical themes and figures in Canadian poetry. I would claim that his taxonomy is also useful in the context of "Milton in Canada." Pache outlines the fashion in which the poetry of colonial and postcolonial Canada reacts to such "a Protean concept" as the classical tradition. For him, this process has four stages: first, classical myth as "timeless ideal and formal inspiration ensuring participation in the master discourse;" second, myth as an "elitist instrument of imposing order on a chaotic reality;" third, myth as representing the "oppressive prison of literary tradition;" and fourth, "playful 'appropriations' by contemporary writers who show themselves familiar with classical myth without being imprisoned by it" ("Modern Canadian Poetry" 155). Milton is not classical mythology, but sometimes he may be even more, as his version of the Christian message may overlap with the biblical original. We clearly find Pache's four typical stages also in the reception of Milton in Canada, with the 18th and 19th-century authors accepting him as "timeless ideal," early twentieth-century university scholarship often seeing him as part of educational

elitism, modern and postmodern authors protesting against Milton as a representative of oppressive tradition, and writers like Atwood and McCormack playfully adapting him to their literary experiments. Milton as a representative of the British literary tradition may have been a "familiar ghost" to some, but he has also been an inspiration to others.

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This essay incorporates some of the points made in an earlier publication on recent Miltonic echoes in Canadian literature (see Kuester 1996). In the present version, I profit from materials that have recently become available through the Early Canadiana Online Website eco.canadiana.ca (indicated as ECO at the end of the respective bibliographical entries).

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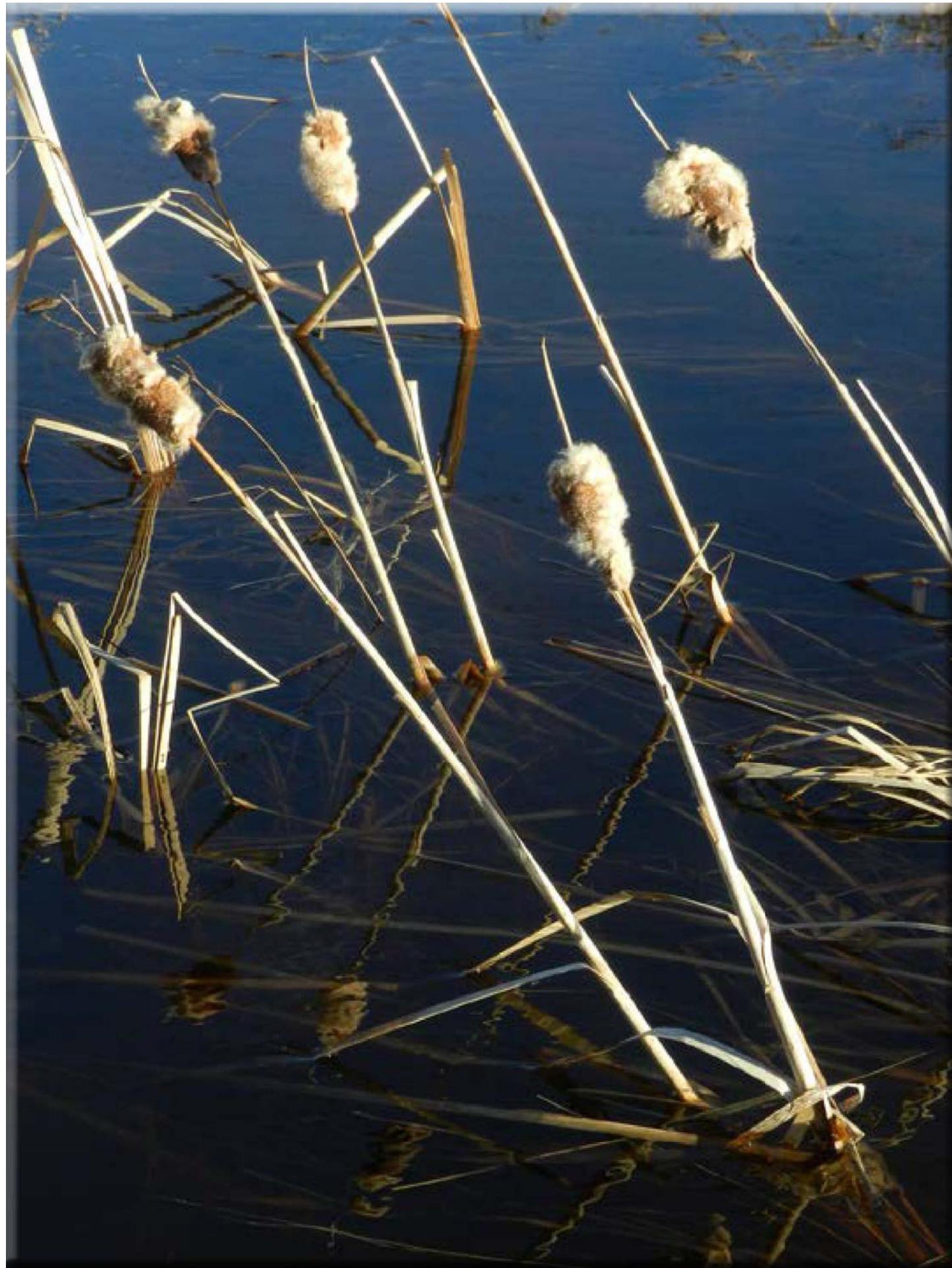
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Die Walküre

Dead hero in her saddlebag,
singing a tuneless dirge,
Brünnhilde reaches the
mountain's summit,
only to be told the idea
of arrival is a ruse.
Mortal, she sleeps,
prey to any man, until
Wotan demands Loge,
Norse demigod of fire:
encircle the mountaintop
with flame, as protection,
leitmotif of a savoir as-yet
thought, written, born,
whose name, in E Major, is not a name:
'Der diese Liebe mir ins Herz gehaucht'
(He who breathed this love into me).

—Virginia Konchan



DITCH #5
PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

Anne Killigrew and the Fragments of Power

by Laura Linker, High Point University, High Point, North
Carolina

“I pray God deliver us from the confusion which these beginnings threaten!”

John Evelyn, *Memoirs*, [June 17, 1685]

The Restoration poet and painter Anne Killigrew (1660-1685) responded to the court intrigues surrounding Charles II in several works included in her posthumously published *Poems* (1686). A known royalist, Killigrew had well-connected male relatives, Thomas Killigrew, the dramatist and her cousin, and Dr. Henry Killigrew, her father, the editor of her *Poems*, a staunch royalist, theologian, playwright, and Chaplain to the Duke of York and Master of the Savoy (Vieth 91-5). These connections helped to secure Killigrew a place at court, where she heard rumors of intrigue and rebellion.¹ The short prefatory poem to her works by “The Publisher to the Reader” describes her as a “A *Grace* for Beauty, and a *Muse* for Wit” (a), but several of Killigrew’s fragmentary poems make an important contribution to our understanding of early Tory satire in the 1680s. Like the more famous poet, John Dryden, who wrote an elegy praising Killigrew after her death from smallpox, Killigrew supported James II over his rebellious nephew, James

Scott, the first Duke of Monmouth, who acted on beliefs of his legitimacy when Charles II died in 1685, fighting against his uncle and having himself crowned king. Two works in the collection of Killigrew's poetry, *Alexandreis* and *To the Queen*, attack Charles II's most controversial illegitimate son, Monmouth, his favorite son by his mistress, Lucy Walter, rumored to be his "real" first wife by Monmouth's supporters.

Charles made no secret of his preference for his handsome, dissolute son and arranged for Monmouth to marry a wealthy heiress, Anna Scott, countess of Buccleuch. He granted Monmouth a number of other pensions and titles besides the dukedom, including Earl of Doncaster and Dalkeith, Lord of Whitcheater and Eskdale, and Baron of Fotheringay (changed to Tynedale). At court, Monmouth took precedence over all royal dukes not of legitimate birth and was made Knight of the Garter (Harris, *Oxford Dictionary*). Monmouth's acting on his claims to legitimacy led Charles to exile his son after several failed attempts to usurp power from James, then Duke of York, in 1679. In June 1685, several months after Charles II died, Monmouth returned, landing in Dorset, England with several ships and a band of men eager to fight for his right to the crown. The brief rebellion resulted in Monmouth's capture and execution on Tower Hill on July 15 1685, but those who supported Monmouth fought again in 1688 to support another, more powerful, contender who did usurp James II, William of Orange, married to James II's protestant daughter, Mary (Harris *Restoration* 580-90).

Killigrew's satires demonstrate her strong allegiance to James II and make an important contribution to the satirical battles waged against Monmouth by writers loyal to the king; they register the importance of satire in a decade that saw arguably the most

important and the longest-lasting change in monarchical rule in English history since the first William's conquest in 1066. While Killigrew never lived to see the Glorious Revolution, her work helped to create a space for women's voices in the larger national debate about the succession in the 1680s.

Though considered talented as a poet at court before her untimely death from smallpox on June 16, 1685, Killigrew was forced to defend her art against detractors in her lifetime, and she became a visible target of critics who accused her of plagiarism. Killigrew fought against her court enemies in verse and saw her poetry as participating in an ongoing, vibrant tradition of late seventeenth-century feminine poetics. In *Sappho in Early Modern England*, Harriette Andreadis argues for the importance of reading Killigrew's verse in a Sapphic tradition expressing same-sex desire, a legacy most women poets entering the established poet-muse model encountered in the Neoclassical age, when summoning one of the classical muses for inspiration provided a primary way for poets to authorize their art (111-24). Though Andreadis does not specifically examine *Alexandreis*, her explanation of Killigrew's poetical goals provides a framework for understanding how Killigrew intended to create a separate kind of poetry, one that rebelled against traditional patriarchal expectations, which typically excluded women, who formed their own coterie. As one of Mary of Modena's maids of honor, Killigrew likely knew the poet Anne Finch (1661-1720), another of the maids, and Killigrew compares herself to the poet Katherine Philips (1632-64), called the "Matchless Orinda" by her admirers. Killigrew praises Philips in "Upon the saying that my Verses were made by another," invoking Philips's name to defend the right for women to compose poetry.

As Robert C. Evans observes, neither Philips nor Killigrew have received the critical attention they deserve, particularly as they are both “forerunners of feminism” (409).

In the fragment *Alexandreis*, Killigrew introduces her important aesthetic concerns and challenges for women writers while attacking Alexander, the figure representing Monmouth. *To the Queen*, which features Thalestris, Queen of the Amazons, continues where *Alexandreis* leaves off and overtly politicizes Killigrew’s art. In the second poem, she more directly targets rumors of Monmouth’s rebellion in 1685 while privileging the female poet represented by Thalestris, called “matchless” in the poem, an allusion to Philips. Carol Barash argues that Thalestris represents Charles II’s wife, Catherine of Braganza (168), but Thalestris’s militaristic position in the poem does not cohere with Catherine’s well-known passivity in the turbulent last decade of Charles’s reign. A Catholic and foreigner, Catherine became an innocent victim of Titus Oates’s fabricated anti-Catholic plots in the late 1670s, and though the plots ultimately failed, they threatened her position and discredited her with anti-Catholics in England; the masses supported Monmouth, sent into exile when he openly challenged Charles’s marriage to Catherine. Charles II stood by Catherine throughout his reign, reaffirming the validity of their marriage despite her likely barrenness (he had seventeen known illegitimate children by various mistresses), but the rumors of Catholic conspiracy surrounding Catherine made her a victim of vicious gossip and accusations of treason (Harris *Oxford Dictionary*). As well, Catherine endured the presence of Charles’s politically active, foreign, and Catholic mistresses, including the go-between from Louis XIV’s court and Charles’s longstanding, chief court mistress from 1671 to his death, Louise de Keroualle, Duchess of Portsmouth,

a figure often targeted in political satire. While Killigrew admired and praised Queen Catherine, she does not employ her as a figure that openly challenges her opponents. In Killigrew’s “On the Birth-Day of Queen Katherine,” she likens the queen to Christ, calling her a “Saint” (49) and a sacrificial figure for peace and virtue. She most often appears in Killigrew’s verse as a retiring figure, suffering alongside her women at court.

Marilyn L. Williamson argues that Killigrew formed one of the “Angry Voices” in late Stuart England and that Killigrew’s “The Miseries” directly targets war and heroic values (78). Killigrew’s seemingly abortive epic *Alexandreis* and its second part, *To the Queen*, similarly target masculine conquest. The note that follows the last line in *Alexandreis*, most likely written by Killigrew’s editor and father, argues that “*This was the first Essay of this Lady in Poetry, but finding the Task she had undertaken hard, she laid it by till Practice and more time should make her equal to so great a work*” (5). Jennifer Keith explains that Killigrew addresses her reasons for abandoning the poem in *To the Queen*, arguing that “the spiritual and moral authority of the queen is a greater theme than Alexander’s exploits” and that “Feminine virtue allows Killigrew to establish a moral authority that legitimates her position as a woman poet entering the public arena” (60-1). But *Alexandries* is not unfinished, and it is not a failed epic. Like “The Miseries,” *Alexandreis* takes aim at the epic hero, overturning the expected formal considerations of the epic while it positions the woman satirist as a powerful figure for change.

Alexandreis at first appears to be a genuine epic praising the hero. By the end of the poem, however, the “Heroick Queen,” or Queen Thalestris, advances a “high pretence to War” and “Cancell’d the bashful Laws and nicer Bar / of Modesty, which did her Sex

restrain” (5). The description directly contrasts the queen to the weaker depiction of Alexander, who appears diminished when Thalestris appears; by *To the Queen*, he emerges as a clear target. The speaker in *Alexandreis* questions whether we should believe the mythology surrounding his conquests, wondering “if Fame you will believe, / To ancient Story any credit give” (1). Killigrew treats his exploits ironically, playfully questioning her skill to write about such a “lofty” hero. Killigrew shifts perspectives, moving through different poetic modes beginning with epic and moving to satire as she attacks the idle hero. Samuel Pepys, writing in the 1660s, when Monmouth began to dominate Charles II’s court circle, draws a similar conclusion in his *Diary* about Monmouth’s idleness, believing that the boy would not amount to much in life (December 6, 1666, 411). We find the same perspective on Alexander/Monmouth in both of Killigrew’s poems--rumored greatness but no substance.

Alexandreis ends when Alexander enters, cutting off the moment when it should start; the fragmentary form correlates to the political message Killigrew conveys. The Amazon women interrupt the poem and emerge as challengers to Alexander and his “masculine” aesthetic of war--a timely topic when the continuance of the Stuart monarchy grew more uncertain and Monmouth’s popularity among Protestants fuelled conspiracies. Known throughout the 1660s and 70s for dissolute living and violent brawls, Monmouth began to act on his rumored legitimacy, stirring controversy during the late 1670s and early 1680s. The Popish Plot (1678-81), which falsely alleged a Catholic conspiracy to execute the king; the Exclusion Crisis (1678-81) and Bill (1681), which sought to block a Catholic succession; and the Rye House Plot (1683), a plan to assassinate Charles II

and his brother and heir, James, then the Duke of York, placed into doubt the succession. The Popish and Rye House plots directly implicated Monmouth, leading to his exile. Monmouth was the protestant alternative to many of his Whig supporters, including Daniel Defoe, who wrote anti-Tory propaganda and fought for Monmouth in the 1680s; ultimately, these plots dissolved James II’s credibility and support, leading to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (Harris *Restoration* 585-90).

Though Killigrew died from smallpox during the height of Monmouth’s summer rebellion in 1685, rumors of treasonous activity implicating Monmouth dominated court gossip throughout the late 1670s and 80s. Monmouth’s return from exile was all but assured after Charles II died, and rumors reached a peak during the winter and spring months leading up to the rebellion. Killigrew’s well-connected family and post at court gave her a privileged position to hear information circulating about Monmouth’s return from exile. Like his father, Monmouth was often ironically compared to Alexander the Great. *Alexandreis* begins by cataloging his conquests:

I sing the Man that never Equal knew,
Whose Mighty Arms all *Asia* did subdue,
Whose Conquests through the spacious World do ring,
That City-Raser, King-destroying King,
Who o’re the Warlike *Macedons* did Reign,
And worthily the Name of *Great* did gain.

This is the Prince (if Fame you will believe,
 To ancient Story any credit give.)
 Who when the Globe of Earth he had subdu'd,
 With Tears the easie Victory pursu'd;
 Because that no more Worlds there were to win,
 No further Scene to act his Glorys in. (1 B)

Far from offering genuine praise for Alexander's conquests, however, the speaker questions the ideal of conquest by the close of the first stanza. Like frequent descriptions of the arrogant Monmouth by Pepys and Evelyn, Alexander appears egotistical. Monmouth also did not recognize any equals. While still the Duke of York, James took every opportunity to cast slurs on Monmouth's "natural" birth to discredit Monmouth, who was given command of armed forces by Charles II in the late 1670s, giving him an inflated sense of importance. James II wanted to emphasize Monmouth's illegitimacy as a ruler. The speaker trivializes Alexander/Monmouth's victories as "easy" ones won through tears rather than strategy. Monmouth was well known to have been poorly educated before coming to court and then uninterested in learning even when he had access to tutors and books. He was not adept at political strategizing or court life (Harris *Oxford Dictionary*).

Killigrew treats Alexander's rumored greatness ironically, and it is doubtful that readers of her verse in the 1680s would have mistaken her tone or the associations with Monmouth. Her speaker summons "some pitying Muse" who might now inspire

[her] frozen style with a Poetique fire,
 And Raptures worthy of his Matchles Fame,
 Whose Deeds [she] sing[s], whose never fading Name
 Long as the world shall fresh and deathless last,
 No less to future Ages, then the past. (1-2)

Richard Morton reads the speaker's concern about her "frozen style" as a genuine worry Killigrew felt (VIII) about her poetic theory in early works such as *Alexandreis*, while Keith reads the invocation of the muse figure as a voicing of the speaker's fear that the muse might refuse to help a woman (60). The speaker's ironic plea, however, is a way for her to attack Alexander as a figure far from deserving attention, at least in the way that Killigrew imagines him in *To the Queen*.

Killigrew directs most of her energy in *Alexandreis* to discussing the gendered battle for women writing satire rather than the political context that emerges in *To the Queen*, where she engages Monmouth more directly. These poems set the tone for a number of her works, many of them registering concern about her art or the conditions for women writing poetry while attacking targets of vice. Perhaps considering that Killigrew felt compelled to write a defense of her own art in "Upon the saying," it is no surprise to encounter bitterness in the speaker's address to the muse in *Alexandreis*:

Great my presumption is, I must confess,
 But if I thrive, my Glory's ne're the less;

Nor will it from his Conquests derogate

A Female Pen his Acts did celebrate. (2)

While asking the muse to take pity for her plight, the speaker adopts a mocking tone towards the subject's "God-like Acts," which can make her "Verse Divine" (2). The speaker ironically wonders if women can be considered worthy to write about "great" men's exploits. The invocation turns caustic as she scorns the deflated image of Alexander/ Monmouth and his "lofty deeds" (2). The poet positions herself in a supplicant's role of stooping and begging, humbling herself before the muse and acknowledging her capricious whims. But the lines are not meant to be read seriously. The "lofty deeds" turn out to be a waste of the muse's time in *To the Queen*, when the speaker shows more anger at Monmouth/Alexander.

Bitterness emerges as the prevailing tone in Killigrew's other works that attack the "great." In "To My Lord Colrane," for example, Killigrew launches into invective:

And can it be? she said, and can it be?

That 'mong the Great Ones I a Poet see?

The Great Ones? who their Ill-spent time divide,

Twixt dang'rous Politicks, and formal Pride,

Destructive Vice, expensive Vanity,

In worse Ways yet, if Worse there any be...(50-1)

The poem alternates between scorn and rage at these figures of folly. Killigrew sometimes

clearly communicates her disillusionment with politics; other times, she is more subtle. In "The Discontent," she condemns the whole world: "My Muse pronounce aloud, there's nothing Good, / Nought that the World can show, / Nought that it can bestow" (52). Rage is her most frequent tone, and her poetic eye looks scornfully on the vicious members of court and their vices in the *Poems*. She reserves praise almost exclusively for women, particularly highborn ones--like Queen Catherine--or other writers, like Philips. It is no wonder she felt frustration. Even her father seems not to have understood her art, and one wonders if it was Dryden, another political satirist, who urged her father to publish her *Poems*. The end of Monmouth's Rebellion was only the beginning of James II's woes. Killigrew's collection appeared the following year, when it looked increasingly likely that the absolutist James II, whom Dryden supported politically, might face new threats after Monmouth's execution, this time from Whig supporters of the Dutch Protestant, William of Orange, a more powerful claimant with an army and legitimate ties to the crown.

Killigrew saw herself as a member of an elite group of writers tracing their roots to Philips and the royalist cause. In *Alexandreis*, she shows reverence for the women warriors, the "Troop in Silver Arms." The description of the retinue contains allusions to the Cavaliers, known for their finery and feathers. Their dress was outlawed by Oliver Cromwell's sartorial laws during the interregnum for its political associations, but the Restoration saw this finery return as a symbol of royalist power. When the troop emerges, the speaker withholds their gender and manipulates the reader's expectations. Presumably, they form Alexander's retinue, a masculine army "devoyd of fear." In the

following line, however, the speaker reveals that they are “warlike Virgins,” not unlike Killigrew, an unmarried woman. She draws attention to the Amazons’ virginal state, authorizing them through their infallible purity. Often judged by their bodies, women writers were considered more “open” in mind and body, and Killigrew needed to establish her credibility not only as a writer entering a divisive, male-dominated tradition but also as a sexually “pure” woman, like Philips, the “Matchless Orinda.”

The Amazons’ virginity does not lessen their power but enhances it. Their depiction represents a golden age of female solidarity that alludes to the coterie poetics Philips began with her writing group, the Society of Friendship, in the 1640s:

Tw’as at the time the golden Sun doth rise,
And with his Beams enlight’s the azure skies,
When lo a Troop in Silver Arms drew near,
The glorious Sun did nere so bright appear;
Dire Scarlet Plumes adorn’d their haughty Crests,
And crescent Shields did shade their shining Brests;
Down from their shoulders hung a Panthers Hide,
A Box and Quiver rattled by their side;
Their hands a knotty well try’d Speare did bear,
Jocund they seem’d, and quite devoy’d of fear.

The description of the soldiers’ dress could easily refer to the Cavalier army that fought for Charles I. Killigrew suggests that such a force might again be required for his son. She redirects the myths about the real Alexander the Great to contemporize the setting. In the Greek collection Killigrew likely consulted, the *Alexander Romance*, Alexander and Thalestris engage in a tryst, and the Amazon queen brings 300 of her female soldiers to Alexander to breed an entire race with him. Though Plutarch later disputes the claim, Thalestris stays for a short time with Alexander, hoping to conceive a daughter. *Alexandreis* ends before an erotic encounter between the warriors can occur, and Killigrew subverts any such moments between the two leaders. *To the Queen* shows readers just how unworthy Thalestris finds the reputed conqueror. Thalestris’s seducing of Alexander would also hold unpleasant implications for Killigrew, particularly if Killigrew wanted her readers to see Thalestris as a figure for the woman writer. The Amazons represent an ideal in the poem, a projection of Killigrew’s own desire to write without fear of censure for plagiarism or promiscuity. In “Upon the saying,” she laments the “sad effects” (45) of her writing and despairs, “What ought t’have brought [her] Honour, brought [her] shame!” (45). She likens herself to an abused, raped figure, anticipating Finch’s pained female poet represented as a violated nightingale, a symbol for Philomel in the Ovidian tradition, in “To the Nightingale” (1713).

Like Finch, Killigrew also works with fables to express her poetic anxiety. In “Verses,” Killigrew sees herself as Aesop’s abused jaybird and “Rifl’d like her, each one [her] Feathers tore” (46). In the fable, the jay steals the peacock feathers, only to suffer them to be plucked off by the other angry peacocks, figures for other vain writers. Similarly,

Killigrew sees herself as the jay—the “inferior” bird—who appropriates the “feathers” or the poetic language of a long-established masculine tradition. Like angry peacocks, critics accuse her of cheating and stealing “feathers” or poetry that is not her own. She is “scorn’d” (46) by them and hopes for a day when she might reach Orinda’s heights in “Upon the saying”:

Th’envious Age, only to Me alone,
Will not allow, what I do write, my Own,
But let ‘em Rage, and ‘against a Maide Conspire,
So Deathless Numbers from my Tuneful Lyre
Do ever flow...(45)

Clearly angered by false accusations made against her, Killigrew may not have seen herself as an authoritative figure who could lead other women writers, but she imagines Thalestris as this type of leader, a “queen,” like Philips, among the female poets and other strong women resisting male dominance:

Thalestris now did head the beauteous Host;
She emulating that Illustrious Dame,
Who to the aid of Troy and Priam came,
And her who the Retulian Prince did aid,
Though dearly both for their Assistance paid. (3)

The “Illustrious Dame” in Greek myth refers to Hecuba, the wife of Priam, who saved one of her many children by him during the Trojan War, sending Polydorus, her son, to Polymnestor, King of Thrace. Later taken into captivity, Hecuba, now herself a captive, visits Thrace on one of Odysseus’s voyages and learns that Polymnestor has killed Polydorus. To avenge her son’s murder, she blinds the king and kills his children. The story resonates with the violence often associated with the Amazons and their treatment of men, either killed or taken captive, to be held for procreative purposes--only useful in their ability to sire children. It is a devastating allusion that resonates politically and personally for Killigrew. The woman poet, she suggests, is the woman warrior in troubled times.

Monmouth clearly wanted another civil war and another beheading, though it would ultimately be his head on the block. Killigrew imagines women engaging in a fight for James II, if not physically, then poetically. It is a legacy she inherited from Philips, whose voice registers concerns about legitimacy during and after the English civil wars. Considered an ideal woman writer, Philips maintained her allegiance to Charles I throughout the interregnum. Killigrew consciously models herself on Philips and imagines both a powerful and suffering figure in Thalestris:

But fear she scorn’d, nor the like fate did dread,
Her Host she often to the field had lead,
As oft in Triumph had return’d again,
Glory she only sought for all her pain. (3)

The Amazons pose the greatest threat to male patriarchy in Greek myth. So too did female poets engaging in a masculine poetic tradition--particularly ones like Killigrew targeting dangerous real life political figures. A violent bully, Monmouth had mutilated at least one member of Parliament who defied him. Leading the Anglo-Dutch brigade in the Franco-Dutch conflict in 1678 and quelling a rebellion of Scottish Covenanters at the Battle of Bothwell field on June 22, 1679, Monmouth's relatively minor successes nevertheless led him to believe in his own military greatness (Harris, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*). No one really knew how much support Monmouth might gain when he landed with his force, but Killigrew scorns his reputation for fame and conquest, risking herself for her monarch.

The poetic Alexander figure has likewise gained a reputation for military greatness, but Thalestris emerges as the more majestic of the two at the end of *Alexandreis*:

And while before the Town she did attend

Her Messengers return, she saw ascend

A cloud of Dust, that cover'd all the skie,

And still at every pause there stroke her eye.

The interrupted Beams of Burnisht Gold,

As dust the Splendour hid, did unfold;

Loud Neighings of the Steeds, and Trumpets sound

Fill'd all the Air, and eccho'd from the ground (4)

The moment of grandeur thus deflated, the "beams" are literally obscured by dust and horses. It pollutes the air and the entry of Alexander, whose glory is considerably tarnished. He disappears behind the filth covering him, much as Killigrew saw Monmouth, a treasonable pretender to the crown, covered in his own filth. The speaker distinguishes between the Amazons and Alexander's men, awestruck by them:

And now come up to th'*Amazonian* Band,

They made a Hault and a respectful Stand:

And both the Troops (with like amazement strook)

Did each on other with deep silence look. (4)

Alexander's troop stand amazed at the Amazon's majesty, but the women regard his retinue as a disappointment. Refusing to observe proper decorum, Thalestris transgresses normative lines for women, stepping forward first to make her speech:

First boldly did advance before her Train,

And thus she spake. All but a God in Name,

And that a debt Time owes unto thy Fame. (5)

There the poem ends—with silence. Time never paid the debt to Monmouth either; he died before he could be a "God in Name," a divinely ordained king. Left voiceless, the Alexander figure here is cut off in his prime, a foreshadowing of Monmouth's real life fate.

To the Queen continues the narrative begun in *Alexandreis*. Alexander disappoints
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the Amazon queen, and the speaker finds Thalestris a more fitting, sublime figure for her efforts, providing an implicit answer to the “unfinished” ending of *Alexandreis*, really just part of the satire, as Alexander/Monmouth does not appear to deserve the rest of his epic. Thalestris instead proves worthier of the poet’s genuine praise:

As those who pass the Alps do say,
The Rocks which first oppose their way,
And so amazing-High do show,
By fresh Ascents appear but low,
And when they come unto the last,
They scorn the dwarfish Hills th’ave past. (6)

The muse needs only to climb a small hill for inspiration for a low, “dwarfish” subject, Alexander. To write a poem about the queen, however, she ascends the highest mountain to find inspiration:

So thought my Muse at her first flight,
Thought she had chose the greatest height,
And (imp’d with Alexander’s name)
Believ’d there was no further Fame:
Behold an Eye wholly Divine
Vouchsaf’d upon my Verse to Shine!

And from that time I’gan to treat
With Pitty him the World call’d Great;
To smile at his exalted Fate,
Unequal (though Gigantick) State.
I saw that Pitch was not sublime,
Compar’d with this which now I climb;
His Glories sunk, and were unseen,
When once appear’d the Heav’n –born Queen:
Victories, Laurels, Conquer’d Kings,
Took place among inferior things. (6-7)

The speaker directly attacks Alexander as an “unequal” and “inferior” figure, held up for scorn and ridicule. The “smile at his exalted Fate” is an ironic slur about Monmouth’s illegitimate, “low” birth, likened to the muse’s lower spatial climb. Killigrew gives her readers an interpretative strategy for *Alexandreis*, less ambiguous in its treatment of the epic hero when we read it alongside *To the Queen*. The speaker indicates that her muse has wasted her efforts in *Alexandreis*:

Now surely I shall reach the Clouds,
For none besides such Vertue shrouds:
Having seal’d this with holy Strains,

Nought higher but the Heaven remains!

No more I'll Praise on them bestow,

Who to ill Deeds their Glories owe;

Who build their *Babels* of Renown,

Upon the poor oppressed Crown,

Whole Kingdoms do depopulate,

To raise a Proud and short-Liv'd State:

I prize no more such Frantick Might,

Than his that did with Wind-Mills Fight: (7)

The speaker condemns those who believe in these “Babels of Renown,” a biblical symbol for Monmouth’s sedition. The speaker’s reference to “Wind-Mills” alludes to Cervantes’s Don Quixote, a mad and foolish figure of “Frantick Might” that fights after a phantom glory, to his own detriment. This passage likely references satirists targeting the Stuart monarchy, particularly James II, and those supporting and praising Monmouth, whose rebellion ultimately amounted to a fruitless quest, though Monmouth, raised like a prince throughout Charles II’s reign, believed in his own “divine right” to rule. Killigrew’s references to the “Godlike” Alexander in both poems allude to Monmouth’s ego and his belief in a divinely ordained order that gave him rights to the crown.

Prior to his rebellion, Monmouth made progresses around England, gaining support in the West Country and performing the royal touch for the “King’s Evil” at

Crewkerne, in Somerset, which Tim Harris describes as clear evidence for Monmouth’s “belief in his own legitimacy” (*Restoration* 188-9). Ironically, it was the belief of a ruler’s “divine” powers that caused political unrest and dissatisfaction with James II’s absolutist model of kingship. James’s Catholicism and early attempts in his reign to repeal the Test Act of 1673, which effectively barred Catholics from public office, led to associations with Louis XIV, who revoked Henry IV’s Edict of Nantes in 1685, ending toleration for Protestants in France. Thousands of persecuted Huguenots fled to England. Monmouth was likely no different than his uncle in his absolutist vision, but he was a protestant, an important distinction that helped to make him look more English than even his father, rumored to have converted to Catholicism on his deathbed.

Though Charles II vehemently denied a true marriage with Monmouth’s mother, Evelyn records that the king went through several mock-marriages with his favored mistresses, including the Duchess of Portsmouth, in October 1671, and with various other women throughout his reign (*Diary* 589-90). Rumor of a notorious “black box” of evidence of the marriage to Lucy Walter continued to resurface at court and also on the streets. Though the evidence was flimsy, Monmouth believed it, having himself crowned in Chard and Taunton during his 1685 rebellion (Harris, *Oxford Dictionary*).

To the Queen condemns this ambition and envisions alternatives in a virtuous, more stable world. She invokes sublime language to imagine a utopian kingdom with a virtuous ruler invading the heart:

No, give me Prowess, that with Charms

Of Grace and Goodness, nor with Harms,
 Erects a Throne i'th'inward Parts,
 And Rules mens Wills, but with their Hearts;
 Who with Piety and Vertue thus
 Propitiates God, and Conquers us.
 O that now like Araunah here,
 Altars of Praises I could rear,
 Suiting her worth, which might be seen
 Like a Queen Present, to a Queen!

The virtuous queen represents Mary of Modena, James II's queen, whom Killigrew served, and she is collapsed with the figure of Thalestris--both serve the cause of justice, as good art and good politics are aligned. The argument participates in the values of Tory satire by Dryden and his poetic successor, Alexander Pope. Killigrew privileges the conquering Christian God over the misguided and violent Monmouth. The queen contrasts this figure of "bold Vice unmasked" (9) and emerges as a "Heavenly Beauty" (9) to contrast those engaging in "Rebellion," a biblical reference to the rebellious Israelites. The allusion strongly echoes Dryden's most overtly political poem written during the Exclusion Crisis, *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), which also targets Monmouth by using an Old Testament narrative of the rebellious, misguided son, Absalom/Monmouth revolting against his father, King David/Charles II.

To the Queen proposes an important role for women writing political satire, though the speaker suggests that the artist suffers for her task:

Alone she stands for Vertues Cause,
 When all decry, upholds her Laws:
 When to Banish her is the Strife,
 Keeps her unexil'd in her Life;
 Guarding her matchless Innocence
 From Storms of boldest Impudence;
 In spite of all the Scoffs and Rage,
 And Persecutions of the Age,
 Owns Vertues Altar, feeds the Flame,
 Adores her much-derided Name;
 While impiously her hands they tie,
 Loves her in her Captivity;
 Like Perseus saves her, when she stands
 Expos'd to the *Leviathans*. (8-9)

The speaker echoes Killigrew's prediction in "Upon the saying" that the female poet suffers "Cassandra's fate" (47), an allusion to the all-knowing female prophet of war and

doom. No one listens to Cassandra, and Killigrew perhaps felt that she would be likewise vilified or ignored for issuing political warnings. The monsters, those biblical Leviathans, represent the King's enemies, which she targets aggressively:

How dares bold Vice unmasked walk,
And like a Giant proudly stalk?

When Vertue's so exalted seen,

Arm'd and Triumphant in the Queen?

How dares its Ulcerous Face appear,

When Heavenly Beauty is so near?

But so when God was close at hand,

And the bright Cloud did threatening stand

(In sight of *Israel*) on the Tent,

They on in their Rebellion went. (9)

Alluding to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), Killigrew imagines Hobbes's famous giant monster composed of the masses, a Leviathan needing control lest it revolt and generate another civil war, Hobbes's greatest fear. These masses represent supporters of Monmouth, who represents Vice, while Thalestris, whose "matchless Innocence" (8) directly alludes to Philips, stands for moral good.

Killigrew does not conclude the poem with a triumphant moment of confrontation

between Thalestris and Alexander. Instead, she laments that she cannot retreat into a safer world, a "nearer Shelter" (9) that was the typical retirement mode adopted by women writers. Killigrew, like Finch, sought a place of refuge against the storm. The speaker imagines herself as a biblical symbol of Christ, the dove, flying "Between the Deluge and the Skie" (9), alluding specifically to a passage in the Book of Genesis. In the story of the flood told in Genesis, Noah sends out a dove to find dry land after God destroys the earth with flood water:

Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more. (KJV Genesis 8:9-12)

Collapsing Thalestris with the female artist, the speaker likens the woman writer to the seeking dove, worn down in search of a new land, the utopia she imagines filled with virtue: "Till then I Mourn, but do not sing, / And oft shall plunge my wearied wing" (10). Like Philips and Finch, Killigrew draws on Biblical authority to authorize her art.

To the Queen is a poem of resistance. It presents an ideal of virtue for reform, creating a Christian utopia inside the Ark that floats on dangerous waters:

If her bless'd hand vouchsafe the Grace,

I'th'Ark with her to give a place,
I safe from danger shall be found,
When Vice and Folly others drown'd. (10)

Nevertheless, the final lines suggest that she must retreat, allowing others to “drown” the voices of “Vice and Folly.” An unmarried woman at court, Killigrew understood that her reputation could not suffer the kind of harsh accusations often made against women writers like Aphra Behn, her contemporary, who also targeted figures at the late Stuart court in her works.

Discussions about whether or how women could engage ongoing debates about sovereignty continued long after Monmouth's defeat in 1685 and the deposition of James II in 1688. Women writing poetry after Killigrew, including Finch and Mary, Lady Chudleigh, often preferred the retirement mode, though Chudleigh importantly critiques conditions for wives in the tradition of Mary Astell's *Some Reflections on Marriage* (1700). Though they had differing politics, women writers, including Catharine Trotter, Mary Pix, Delarivier Manley, and Susannah Centlivre, also employed their art to address political concerns that emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly from tensions between the newly formed Whig and Tory parties. Several women writers, following Killigrew, attacked well-known political figures. Less than two decades after Killigrew targets Monmouth, Manley concentrates on another military figure, this time a powerful general, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and his wife, Sarah. The stakes were high, the punishment severe, as Manley was imprisoned by her

detractors (Ballaster 215-38). Killigrew's art extends the community of women writers established by Philips, and her works help us to see how women at court perceived their roles as satirists shaping political discourse, often at great personal costs. Though cautious, Killigrew continues Philips's legacy, raising up her monarch and her voice at the same time.

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ENDNOTE

1. Her other male relatives--all possibly known to Dryden--included Sir William Killigrew, another Thomas Killigrew and Charles Killigrew, Master of the Revels (Morton VI).

“All Societies Indoctrinate Their Children”:

The Education of Paul Isaacson in *The Book of Daniel*

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As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels inform readers in *The Communist Manifesto*, every society is formed “on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed” and “in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence” (232-33). In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser discusses several of these conditions and identifies education as the instrument foremost responsible for perpetuating the dominant bourgeois ideology and for developing a false consciousness among members of the lower class (103). Using Althusser’s essay as a framework, this study seeks to shed light on the formation of the worldview of Paul Isaacson, the executed communist patriarch in E.L. Doctorow’s *The Book of Daniel* (1972). Throughout the novel, Paul exhibits an understanding of the methods employed by the powerful to subjugate the poor. However, his irrational faith in the American justice system reveals a weakness in his ability to perceive his own reality. Despite Paul’s resistance to bourgeois conventions throughout the novel, he ultimately proves to be deceived by his education.

According to Althusser, society is composed of a variety of what he calls ideological state apparatuses, including religion, legal, and communications, among others (96). He argues that the most dominant among these is the educational ideological state apparatus, and he explains its function when he writes,

The school teaches ‘know-how,’ but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice.’ All the agents of production, exploitation, and repression, not to speak of the ‘professionals of ideology’ (Marx), must in one way or another be ‘steeped’ in this ideology in order to perform their tasks ‘conscientiously’ – the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), and of the exploiters’ auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (its ‘functionaries’), ect. (89)

The above passage is particularly useful in understanding Paul Isaacson’s education. In Book Three of the novel, during his trial, Paul recalls having the “finest straightest salute” while reciting the pledge of allegiance in his fourth grade classroom, which was decorated with “watercolors of Washington and Lincoln and Coolidge framed in glass high on the walls” (Doctorow 187). The pledge of allegiance obviously perpetuates nationalism and, as is often the result, the intellectual sterility of the masses. As an adult, Paul recognizes this process of interpellation when he says, “All societies indoctrinate their children. The marvelous Mrs. Goldstein in total innocence taught us the glorious history of our brave westward expansion: our taming of the barbaric Indians, our brave stand at the Alamo, the mighty railroads winning the plains” (Doctorow 187). The history taught to a young

Paul is the history written by the bourgeoisie and not the history of class struggle Marx discusses. The benighted Mrs. Goldstein instructed Paul and his classmates on the heroism and righteousness of American pioneers, soldiers, and industrialists and not on their systematic expansion of capitalistic exploitation.

According to Althusser, Mrs. Goldstein, a source of Paul's indoctrination, and teachers like her "do not even begin to suspect the 'work' the system (which is bigger than they are and crushes them) forces them to do, or worse, put all their heart and ingenuity into performing it with the most advanced awareness" (106). Althusser's essay challenges our conventional perception of education, while revealing truths about Paul's worldview and Mrs. Goldstein's role in society. Although Mrs. Goldstein believes she is equipping her students with the tools necessary for social mobility, she is actually instructing them on how to be subjects. Obviously, Paul would not be aware of this process as a fourth grader, but he seems to somewhat understand it much later, as he characterizes his teacher as an innocent in her pedagogical methodology. This description of Mrs. Goldstein also suggests that Doctorow understands the power of the educational ideological state apparatus to perpetuate bourgeois values and beliefs.

Although the school provides the earliest and most pervasive means for interpellation, it is not the only source of Paul Isaacson's bourgeois education. His thinking was also influenced by radio. In Book One of the novel, Daniel recalls his father listening to radio commentators when he states, "I remember Radio Town Meeting of the Air. He used to turn that on at home. It would make him furious. The question to be debated was always loaded. The strong speaker was always a right-winger" (Doctorow 39). Although

Paul disagrees with many of the perspectives on the airwaves, he is nonetheless drawn to and influenced by them. Readers might expect him to avoid right-wing ideological propaganda, but he instead subjects himself to it consistently. This aspect of Paul's personality suggests that although he is a communist, he still has faith that social justice will ultimately prevail in the United States. His idealism contrasts sharply with the skepticism of his wife Rochelle who reminds him that the radio stations are owned and operated by the capitalists and, accordingly, perpetuate their agenda.

Rochelle's perspective on the interests of the corporate radio programming is shared by Marxist critics Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. In their study *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), they expose radio as a powerful instrument of the bourgeoisie that produces mediocre entertainment which in turn molds the worldviews of the masses (121). Althusser concurs, describing radio as part of the "communications apparatus" which supplies its listeners with "daily doses of nationalism, chauvinism, liberalism, moralism, etc." (104). Horkheimer and Adorno also point out that broadcasting companies are typically owned by electrical companies, oil companies, and banks; as a result, the viewpoints expressed in telecasts do not contradict the agenda of the wealthy (122-23). Much like the schools, radio propaganda instills a false consciousness in its listeners. This concept is easily understood by Rochelle, but it is not so apparent to Paul. As with his perspective on the American justice system, Paul's insistence on being exposed to bourgeois propaganda illustrates his naiveté and false consciousness. Some readers and critics may argue that radio's ability to shape thinking is marginal at best. However, during Paul's lifetime, radio was "the voice of the nation" and it "acquired the illusory

form of disinterested, unbiased authority which suits Fascism admirably” (Horkheimer and Adorno 159). The majority of its listeners saw radio as an unquestioned authority. Accordingly, its power to shape popular opinion should not be readily dismissed.

Keeping Horkheimer and Adorno’s findings in mind, readers should find it significant that Paul repairs radios for a living. If we are to accept Horkheimer and Adorno’s assertion that radio is ultimately a tool of capitalistic manipulation, we must invariably conclude that Paul unknowingly betrays his social class and communistic ideals by making radios available to his already manipulated proletarian customers. Thus, he plays a similar role as Mrs. Goldstein in perpetuating bourgeois values. In Book One of the novel, Daniel claims that his father’s business “makes no profit” and “exploits no one” (Doctorow 38). However, one can deduce that Paul, just as Mrs. Goldstein with her impressionable students, assists his exploiters by making their ideology accessible to his subjugated clientele.

Paul’s role as oblivious educator of the bourgeois agenda expands in Book Two when he introduces his lower class neighborhood to television – the ultimate instrument of interpellation. Although Horkheimer and Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* just before the television era commenced, their principles are still very much applicable. In fact, their findings are likely even more prevalent when examining this powerful shaper of thought. Later, in Book Two of the novel, Artie Sternlich synthesizes Horkheimer and Adorno’s and Althusser’s theories on education and entertainment when he says, “Look there, what do you see? Little blue squares in every window. Right? Everyone digging the commercials. That is today’s school, man” (Doctorow 139). Sternlich’s assessment

that television indoctrinates the masses on an enormous scale should be obvious to even a novice student of Marxist thought, and it is reasonable to speculate that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Althusser would agree. Paul, once again unknowingly, emerges as an educator of bourgeois values when he betrays his ideals by introducing the television to his neighborhood. In addition, Paul is responsible for indoctrinating his own children, as they are left to watch Hopalong Cassidy lasso crooks while their father is in jail awaiting trial.

Although Paul Isaacson is an active communist up to the end of his life, he still serves as a case study for the power of the bourgeoisie to manipulate the proletariat. In Book One, Paul says, “It is unbelievable to me that the Congress of the United States could pass such an insane bill” (Doctorow 85). Paul’s comment reveals the depth of his false consciousness. Although he has joined the Communist Party, he continues to be the product of bourgeois indoctrination. Mrs. Goldstein’s history lessons are still very much with Paul, despite his interest in Marxist thought. His false consciousness is also revealed when he tells Rochelle, “We have done nothing wrong. There is nothing to be afraid of” (Doctorow 105). The education from Mrs. Goldstein’s fourth grade class and the rhetoric of the radio commentators no doubt led to this unmerited faith in the American justice system. Paul and Rochelle clearly had much to fear from their government. Paul’s bourgeois education comes full circle in Book Four of the novel when he says, “I look forward to baseball season. They’ve already broadcast some of the exhibition games of the Dodgers and Giants. Over the loudspeaker” (Doctorow 248). Near the end of his life, Paul betrays his long held belief that baseball, like other sports

and forms of entertainment, keeps the lower class subjugated. So although Paul Isaacson devoted his life to fighting the bourgeois hegemony, he ultimately accepted a few of its core methods for indoctrination. His example illustrates the power of the educational ideological apparatus and the entertainment industry to manipulate and exploit.

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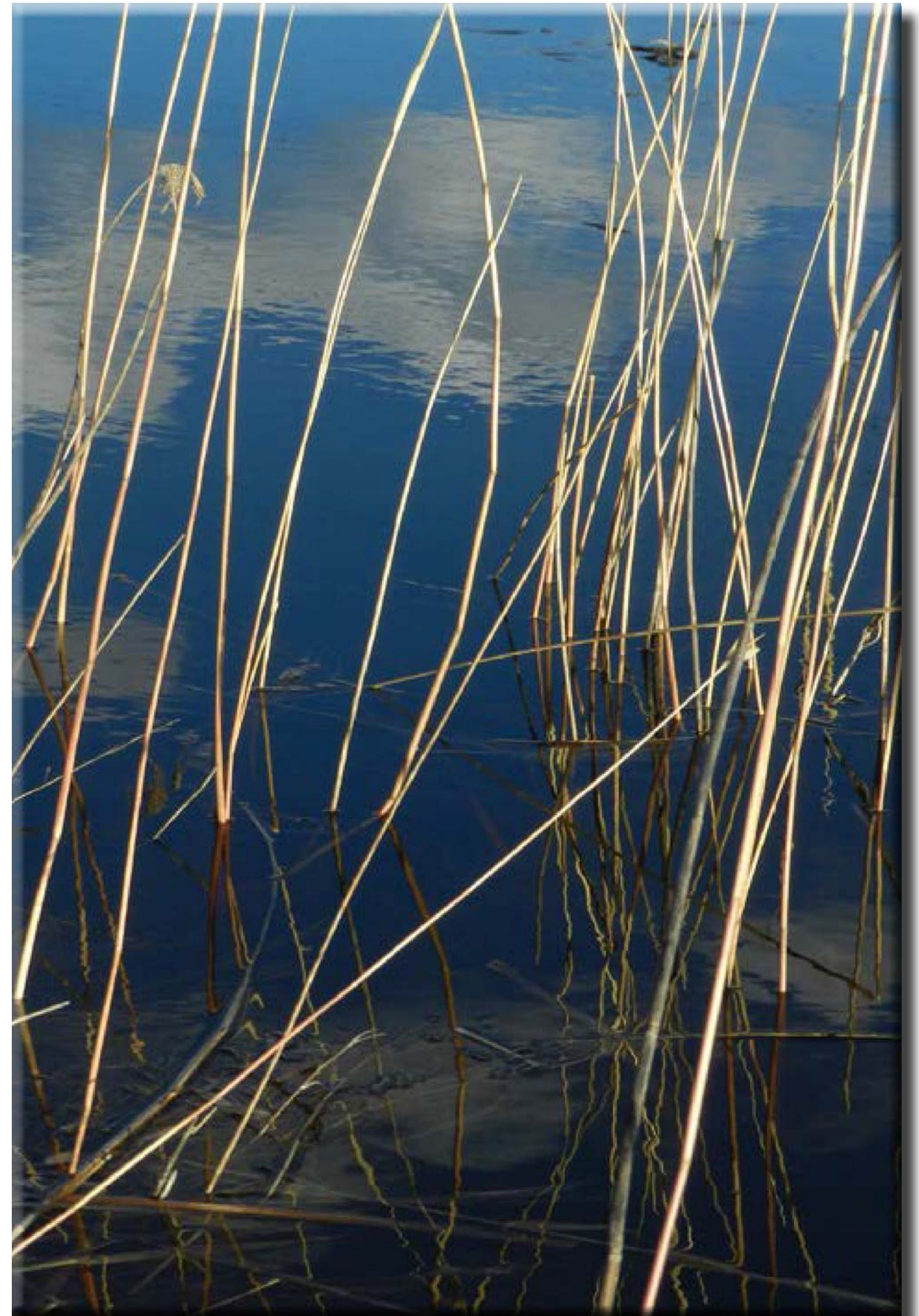


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

DITCH #11

Same-sex Bonding in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

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The Two Noble Kinsmen is a collaborative play by Shakespeare and John Fletcher (1579-1625), one-half of the Elizabethan age's most famous dramatic team, Beaumont and Fletcher. In 1613 Francis Beaumont got married to an heiress and decided that he no longer needed or wanted to write plays, so he withdrew from the partnership. Unfortunately, Beaumont did not long enjoy married life, for he died very soon after moving out of the rooms which he had shared with Fletcher. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is dated 1613, which means that Fletcher's collaboration with Shakespeare must have begun almost immediately after Beaumont's death. Fletcher had worked with other dramatists besides Beaumont, and by 1613 he was already an experienced writer of tragicomedy, a relatively new genre of theatre, and later on he was to team up with Philip Massinger, another long-term dramatic relationship. Lois Potter, who edited the Arden edition of our text, believes that Shakespeare became interested in Fletcher because he had worked on a continuation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, entitled *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer*

Tamed.¹ Fletcher went on to collaborate with Shakespeare once more in the lost play *The*

¹ Lois Potter, *Introduction to Shakespeare and Fletcher, The Two Noble Kinsmen* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 8. All references to the play are from this edition.

History of Cardenio (1613), and later succeeded him as principal dramatist for the King's Men when Shakespeare died in 1616.

What strikes one most on reading this still little-known play (which is often left out of editions of Shakespeare's complete plays) is that the plot, whilst ostensibly revolving around the rivalry of two young men for the love of a woman, the play is actually more about the nature of their friendship than it is about their relationship with Emilia, who is really a catalyst for the testing of their bond. Furthermore, when we look at the marriage between Hippolyta and Theseus, what seems at least as important as that bond is the one between Theseus and his friend Pirithoüs, with Hippolyta as a catalyst here. Emilia herself seems more involved with the memory of her deceased childhood friend Flavina (her name, derived from Latin *flavus*, means blonde or golden) than she ever gets with either Palamon or Arcite. Thus *The Two Noble Kinsmen* would appear to be a play that is as much about same-sex friendships, or, as we might say for the male characters, "male bonding. Shakespeare and Fletcher set up a threefold pattern in these relationships: Theseus-Hippolyta-Pirithoüs, Emilia-"a man"-Flavina, Palamon-Emilia-Arcite, with two people of the same sex "sandwiching" one of the opposite. These relationships are not homosexual, but rather homoerotic, and perhaps more likely to be seen as such by modern readers, although in 1664, when Sir William Davenant came to recast the play as *The Rivals*, he completely removed any references to Flavina and weakened any possibly homoerotic bond between Palamon and Arcite.² What Davenant did would suggest that he, at least, suspected something was going on and felt that it would not suit the tastes

² Lori Lee, *Shakespeare and the Embodied Heroine: Staging Female Characters in the Late Plays and Early Adaptions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 50-51.

of the Restoration audience.

The male relationships in the play seem more akin to those “blood-brotherhood” friendships in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, particularly the ones presented in *Sons and Lovers* or *Women in Love*. This paper will examine the same-sex relationships in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and attempt to place them in the overall thematic context of the play. These relationships are rather more interesting than the conventional male-female ones, which often serve more in this play to illustrate the depth of the same-sex bonding rather than serve as a viable alternative to it. These relationships may even, it seems, transcend male-female bonding, as they appear to do in Lawrence’s novels. Unlike Lawrence’s woman, however, Hippolyta is strong enough to understand and accept Theseus’s friendship with Pirithoüs, and she never asks him to choose between them, knowing, perhaps, that she will never have to. She tells Emilia “with great assurance/ That we, more than his Pirithoüs, possess/ The high throne in his heart” (I, iii, 94-96). Events will prove that Emilia is not so confident.

The main source for the story of Palamon and Arcite is Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale*, which itself was an adaptation of an episode drawn from Boccaccio’s *Teseida*. Going further back, the classical sources were Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Statius’s *Thebaid*. Scholars assume that either Fletcher or Shakespeare had also read a French prose redaction of the *Teseida*, because one was published in 1597 (Potter, *Kinsmen*, 44). This suggests that Chaucer may not have been the original source, because the opening scene of the play, in which three queens present their case to Theseus, is not in *The Knight’s Tale* but appears in Book 12 of the *Thebaid* and in Boccaccio. This is important to the way Fletcher and Shakespeare

develop the characters of Palamon and Arcite, because Boccaccio seems rather to favour Arcite, but Chaucer liked Palamon better. Our dramatists tried to balance the act by making the two princes exhibit clearly-defined differences in their characters. Palamon is headstrong and passionate, Arcite laid-back to the point of passivity at times. Thus the question of male bonding stretches back at least to the time of Chaucer and Boccaccio and further, to Statius and Ovid, and ultimately a source in Greek myth. In Greek terms, the whole concept of male bonding takes on a new dimension, as anyone reading Plato’s *Symposium* or looking closely at certain Greek urns might easily discern.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* the relationships between Palamon and Arcite and Theseus and Pirithoüs on the male side, Emilia and Flavina on the female side, take on no such dimensions. In some ways, Theseus’s relationship with his bosom friend is the more interesting of the pairings, because it is non-competitive, although even in this form it could have had a negative effect on Theseus’s marriage to Hippolyta. It is a stark contrast to the Palamon and Arcite pairing; neither of the two is a definite shoo-in to marry Emilia in spite of all their skill at Petrarchan love-effusions, and they are, in fact, “kinsmen,” not merely friends. There is also a contrast here to Emilia’s childhood bond with Flavina, which is already over because of the latter’s tragic death when they were still, essentially, children. Nevertheless, this relationship has a significant psychological impact on the way Emilia will deal with her two suitors. The pale hands of Flavina seem to be reaching out from the grave in the background to all Emilia does.

We need not retell the story of Theseus here, but Pirithoüs’s life and adventures are not so well-known. He features in Books 8 and 12 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but he

is not mentioned by Statius at all. He hunts boars, is present at Acheloüs's banquet, and marries Hippodamia, the daughter of king Adrastus, after winning her hand in an epic battle with the Centaurs, in which he gets help from Theseus, Nestor, and Peleus, the father of Achilles. Pirithoüs was king of the Lapiths, a tribe from Thessaly, and was a renowned warrior in his own right. He is already described as Theseus's "bosom friend"³ and is in fact stopped by him from fighting the raging Calydonian boar. "Keep back!" Theseus shouts, "Your life is dearer to me/ than my own; you are half my soul" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8:405-06). In the play, Pirithoüs does not have a major part, although he does relate the story of Arcite's accident (V, iv, 48-85), and his relationship with Theseus figures quite prominently in Act I, when he is left to govern Athens when Theseus is away. As Pirithoüs leaves, Emilia and Hippolyta discourse on the nature of the two men's friendship. "Their knot of love," Hippolyta says, "Tied, weaved, entangled, with so true, so long,/ And with a finger of so deep a cunning,/ May be outworn, never undone" (I, iii, 41-43). Her observation serves to lead into Emilia's recollections of Flavina, with Emilia admitting that the adult love of the two men "has more ground, is more maturely seasoned,' More buckled with strong judgments" (I, iii, 55-56) than hers had been for Flavina.

This conversation had led to a fair amount of critical stir because it demonstrates how Shakespeare and Fletcher were drawing on both ancient and contemporary sources. On the subject of friendship, they were both no doubt familiar with Cicero's *De amicitia*, which idealises friendships between people who see each other as equals and who always deal honestly with each other. According to Cicero, this would mean that if any disputes

³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. David Raeburn (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2004), 8:303. All references are to this translation.

arose, they would be conflicts of generosity and self-sacrifice, not quarrels involving envy or malice. Theseus and Pirithoüs were long-standing examples of this kind of friendship, but Shakespeare and Fletcher had other, more modern sources as their disposal as well as Cicero, perhaps the most interesting of those being Montaigne's essay on his friendship with Etienne de la Boétie, which they could find in John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays* (1606). Lois Potter argues that Hippolyta's speech has "not only the sentiments but even the rhythms of John Florio's translation" (*Kinsmen*, 55), and her observation is exactly right. Montaigne believed that the bond of friendship between two men was stronger than any possible between a man and a woman. "The ordinary sufficiency of women," he wrote, "cannot answer this conference and communication, the nurse of this sacred bond." Montaigne's very phrasing is echoed in the play as he calls the bond "a knot so hard, so fast, and durable."⁴ This is, of course, an updating of the same sentiments expressed by Cicero.

Shakespeare and Fletcher followed the spirit of Montaigne's essay as closely as they did the letter. Montaigne, too, compared friendship to marriage, saying that in the latter nothing is free except the decision to enter into it, but as far as friendship is concerned, Montaigne thought that women "could never yet by any example attaine to it, and is by ancient schools rejected thence" (*Essays* 1, 199). Marriage is one thing, friendship another, but in the end Shakespeare and Fletcher sought to modify Montaigne a little, because Hippolyta's wise comment suggests that women do have the capacity to understand the nature of male bonding and not allow it to interfere in marriage. And the Emilia-Flavina relationship is, strictly speaking, one of two pre-pubescent children; there is no evidence

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes of Michael, Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (London: J. M. Dent, 1915), 1, 199.

in the play that Shakespeare and Fletcher saw it as anything more, and certainly not on an equal footing with an adult relationship. Emilia even admits, as we have seen, that it was not “mature,” and Montaigne was, moreover, perfectly clear what kind of friendships he is discussing in his essay. They are not “Greeke license,” he declared, which “is justly abhorred by our customes, because according to use it had so necessarie a disparitie of ages,” and therefore “did no more sufficiently answer the perfect union and agreement, which here we require” (*Essays* 1, 199). Theseus and Pirithoüs are, in any case, not man and boy, but men of equal ages.

These two men never themselves discuss the nature of their friendship, and after the conversation between Emilia and Hippolyta in Act I the subject appears to have been dropped, at least as far as Theseus and Pirithoüs are concerned. Yet there is a reason for bringing it up, namely the comparison between it and the Palamon and Arcite pairing. The older men are mature, and we have seen that they are not rivals; there were no emotional conflicts as such, and the maturity of both Theseus and Hippolyta would have been enough to have stopped any potential for passionate outbursts such as occur in Lawrence’s novels, where Montaigne’s view seems to prevail and the women are incapable of coming to a complete understanding of the male bond. In Lawrence’s novels, the women, if they do not modify their expectations, are doomed to lose the competition for the men’s affections, and the men, of course, don’t even see there is a competition because they are better able to ‘compartmentalise’ than women are. Hippolyta, however, does not make that mistake (after all, she is an Amazon and thinks differently about men, one assumes), and this particular “triangle” works because she does not see one

relationship as a threat to another, and indeed might even see it as positive, in that it is not selfish or possessive. A Shakespearean symmetry of relationships may be setting itself up here, as Hippolyta observes that as she sees it, “we” (herself and Emilia, who are sisters), have Theseus’s love more than Pirithoüs does, thus showing herself to be non-possessive as well. However, that leaves Emilia herself and the two men who want her hand. If, as seems likely, Emilia “shall never, like the maid Flavina,/ Love any that’s called man” (I, iii, 95-96), it’s doubtful that she could really be said to have loved either Palamon or Arcite. As Laurie Shannon points out, Emilia, ever Diana’s votary, nowhere mentions anything about actual love when she is talking about the two princes.⁵ Emilia, it would seem, even believes that the male-male bond is stronger than the male-female bond; she scornfully dismisses Palamon at one point as “that miserable prince, that cuts away/ A life more worthy from him than all women” (V, iii, 143-44). In spite of that, she marries Palamon anyway, but only because Theseus practically orders the nuptials to take place after Arcite’s death, a last-ditch attempt on his part to restore order and harmony through a “normal” male-female relationship.

The bond between Emilia and Flavina is at once less and more complicated. It is less because it has been cut short by Flavina’s early death, and the adult Emilia can thus analyse it more dispassionately than she could have done were Flavina still there, but there are still some remembered erotic overtones in her recollections which make one wonder why Shakespeare and Fletcher introduced the relationship at all. It is this nuance which makes for complications. Emilia uses the language of courtly love, or at least approaches it, when she says that Flavina did not die, but that “she the grave enriched,/ Who made

⁵ Laurie Shannon, “Emilia’s Argument: Friendship and ‘Human Title’ in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” *ELH* 64.3 (1997), 662.

too proud the bed—took leave o' th' moon/ (Which then looked pale at parting)” (I, iii, 51-53). Some critics, for example Shannon, interpret this language as sexual because of Emilia’s use of words like “enjoyed” (I, iii, 50), and evidence of what might be her sexual ambivalence is further supplied through her mildly vulgar exchange with the unnamed Woman (II, ii) which concludes with reference to a card-game called “Laugh and Lie Down.” However, this is a mild double-entendre at most: in this game, “lie (or lay) down” simply means that when players can no longer capture any cards on the table they must “lay” their cards down. However, unless there is a subtext (and one can never be sure that there is not), the relationship may be seen as one between two young girls about to move into puberty and simply exchanging experiences. Both of them, as Emilia tells Hippolyta, “were things innocent,/ Loved for what we did and like the elements/ That knew not or why, yet do effect/ Rare issues by their operance” (I, iii, 60-64). An eleven-year old girl is only being natural when she notices that she is growing breasts, “(then but beginning/ To swell about the blossom),” as Emilia delicately puts it (I, iii, 67-68). The experience, though, is still very fresh in her mind.

Most of Emilia’s recollections concerning Flavina are actually about flowers and clothes, and her conclusion “that the true love between maid and maid may be/ More than in sex dividual” (I, iii, 81-82) is unequivocal. It is an exact reverse of what Montaigne said about women and friendship. Emilia is not describing sexual love at all; as she notes earlier in the same speech, it was “our souls” (I, iii, 63) which had loved. One might argue that their love was uncomplicated by sex, at least in its adult form, and for that reason would have been regarded as completely innocent. Montaigne wrote of his

friendship with La Boétie that it was the way it was “because it was he, because it was myselfe” (*Essays* 1, 202), and there is no reason why women, or young girls, should not have experienced the same reciprocity. Potter cites John Donne in “The Ecstasy,” where his (male) speaker says of his relationship with a woman as they sit on a bank together that “Difference of sex no more we knew/ Than our guardian angels do,” which of course refers here to non-physical or superlunary love. She also argues convincingly that in the lines “I was acquainted/ Once with a time I enjoyed a playfellow” (I, iii, 49-50), making “time” the object of “acquainted” rather than “playfellow” implies that Emilia is suggesting that “this kind of affection belongs to a particular age” (*Kinsmen*, 170 n.). Hippolyta’s reply, “you shall never, like the maid Flavina,/ Love any that’s called man” (I, iii, 83-84) simply observes that given what she has just said, Emilia will never love a man the way she had loved Flavina, which is true in more ways than one, as long as “Flavina” is made the object of “love.” Emilia’s rejoinder, “I am sure I shall not” (I, iii, 85) means that she has moved away from her childhood crush, realising that adult love is not like that. It does not mean that she will never love a man. Her devotion to Diana, which she shared with Flavina, never went as far as her becoming a priestess, but it was what formed her link with Flavina in the first place.

The Palamon-Arcite relationship is ostensibly more complex. They are, of course, “the two noble kinsmen” who are going to fight for the love of Emilia, and one of them will die, although not, of course, by the hand of the other, but through the agency of a skittish horse. In tragicomedy no-one should be purposely killed through human agency; Shakespeare employs the device of a bear to dispose of Antigonus in *The Winter’s Tale*,

and here the *animalium ex machina*, if we may call it that, is a horse. More potentially tragic action occurs when the Gaoler's Daughter falls in love with Palamon and then goes mad when her feelings are not returned, but this sad interlude need not concern us here, and in any case Palamon can hardly be accused of deliberately causing the girl's death.

In *The Knight's Tale* Palamon and Arcite, who are here cousins, have, as Palamon puts it, "Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til other,/ That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne/ 'Til that deeth departe shal us tweyne,/ Neyther of us in love to hyndre oother."⁶ Chaucer then provides an interesting twist; Arcite agrees with Palamon's declaration, but says that since Palamon doesn't know whether Emelye is a woman or a goddess, his love must be "affecioun of hoolyness," whereas his own is "love as to a creature" (1158-59). Let us see what Shakespeare and Fletcher do with this. In gaol, Palamon asks, "Is there record of any two that loved/ Better than we do, Arcite?" and further, "I do not think it possible our friendship/ Should ever leave us," to which Arcite replies, with what turns out to be dramatic irony, "Till our deaths it cannot" (II, ii, 112; 114-15). Following Chaucer's version now, Palamon sees Emilia for the first time and breathes "Behold, and wonder!/ By heaven, she is a goddess!" (II, ii, 132), but Arcite's reaction to the vision is simply "Ha!" (II, ii, 134). Palamon goes on enthusing about his goddess and launches into the language of courtly love, to which the more down-to-earth Arcite replies, as he did in Chaucer, "I love her as a woman, to enjoy her:/ So both may love" (II, ii, 165-66). At that, Palamon loses his temper and says belligerently, "You shall not love at all" (II, ii, 166), and so the argument about their friendship begins in earnest; a woman has now come

between them, a woman that they haven't even met yet, but have just seen. It is *their*

⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale," in *Complete Prose and Poetry*, ed. John H. Fisher (Boston, MA: Heinle and Heinle, 1989), l. 1132-35.

attitude which will bring on tragedy, not Emilia's, for she is never consulted, and when she does meet them she does absolutely nothing to exacerbate the situation. Palamon and Arcite dig the grave of their own friendship by showing themselves as irreconcilable opposites; Palamon loves something ideal that does not exist, and Arcite has reduced Emilia to a physical body that is to be enjoyed. Both will be disappointed, and both will lose out in the end.

True to their sources, Shakespeare and Fletcher have set Palamon and Arcite up as opposites, but they still share the common bond of idealised friendship. What they do admit is that "a wife might part us lawfully" (II, ii, 142); the key word here is "lawfully," which of course does not take any emotional factors into account. Shakespeare and Fletcher are suggesting, I think, that Palamon and Arcite have arrived at too rigid a definition of friendship, and in the end they each paint themselves into a corner and have no room to wriggle. They trap themselves inside their own idealism, and thus their attitudes are contrasted sharply with the other "pairings" in the play. Hippolyta takes a pragmatic view of her husband's male bonding, and Emilia realises that what she shared with Flavina was a one-off kind of love that will not happen again, thus recognising that it was not better, but different. If one of the noble kinsmen did marry Emilia, things would change, but as the relationship between Theseus and Pirithoüs indicates, they need not become enemies or even rivals because of it, and the two spheres of relationship, male-male and male-female (or husband-wife) need not conflict with one another. Palamon and Arcite, however, are unable to make the transition, partly because they are who they are, and partly because they are young and have no experiences which might have

helped them achieve a rational balance. The others, who are older and wiser either in years or maturity, can see a bigger picture which includes different sorts of friendships in a wider embrace, complementing rather than threatening one another. Even if Theseus and Pirithoüs were rivals for Hippolyta's affections, one gets the impression that they would work it out somehow.

This play, then, is about the inexperience and impulsiveness of youth, which, in a tragedy, could end up like *Romeo and Juliet*, where impulsive young lovers lend themselves to a ridiculous scheme that does not take into account chance happenings and leads to their destruction. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* the young lovers find themselves pitted against each other because they, like Romeo and Juliet, are incapable of exercising their reason in a mature way, and have allowed it to be overruled by the passions. Shakespeare and Fletcher are attempting to show the dynamic in several different kinds of relationships, including same-sex bonding, and how we must learn to distinguish one kind of affection from another and be flexible in the way we see our relationships with others, because if we are not, tragedy may well occur. The fact that tragedy is brought about by an accident rather than by a deliberate act does not make it any less unfortunate, but at least the survivor, now united with Emilia, can experience a maturing of love that he would never have had were both of the noble kinsmen still alive.

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Madame Butterfly

When the weather turns, they flee
to warmer climes, high-tailing
to Mexico to hibernate
in oyamel fir trees.

In March and April the eggs
are laid on milkweed plants:
from caterpillar to chrysalis,
ten days of sublunary growth.

After dormancy, metamorphosis
in the operatic version
of Nature: emerging from
the pupa to feed on flowers,

in flight. Until the hara-kiri
knife cut with spacetime,
at La Scala: six weeks
of free-wheeling ecstasy.

—Virginia Konchan

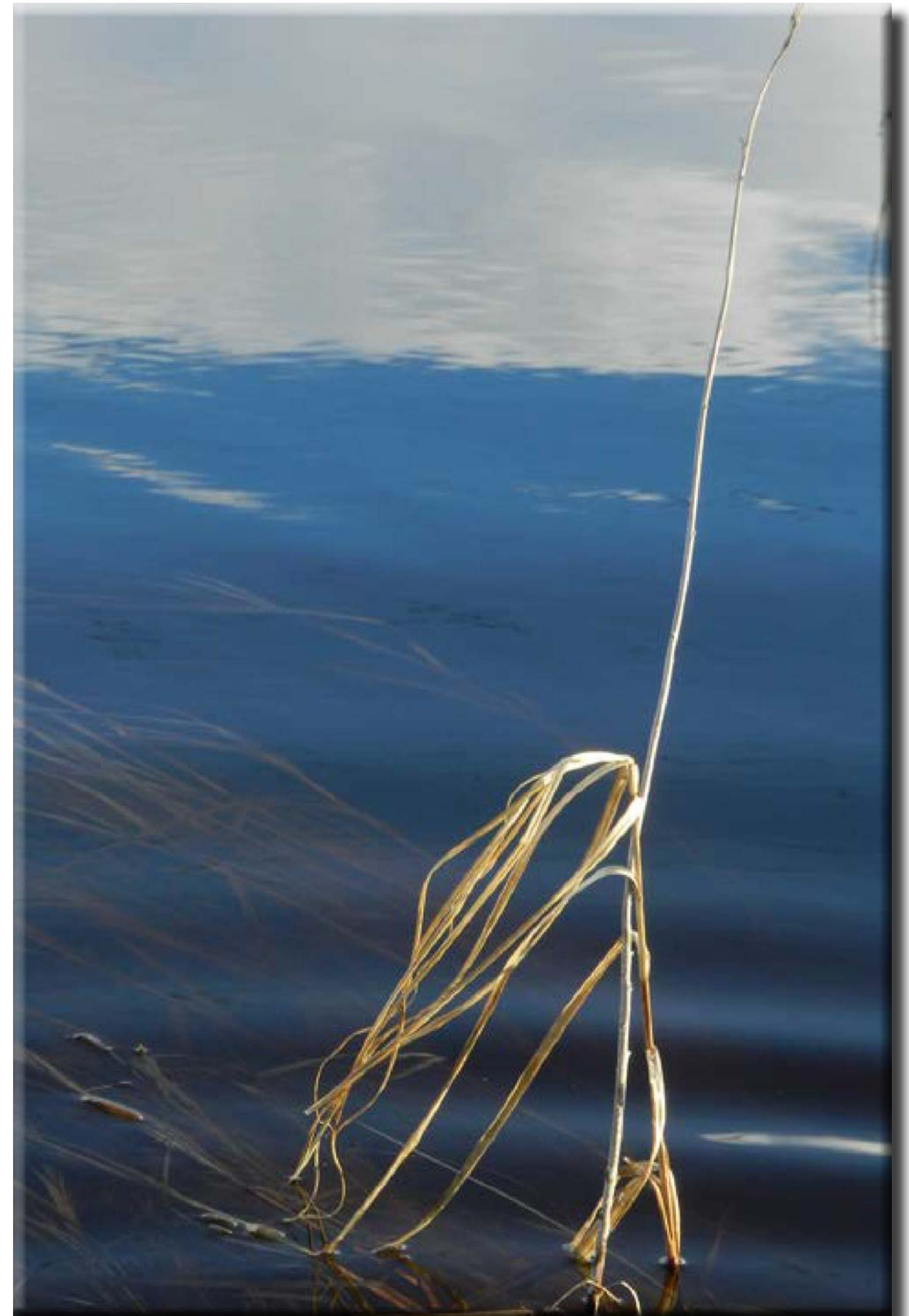


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

DITCH #16

The Gender of a Strike: Women's Revolutionary Agency through Three Marxist- Feminisms in Ousmane Sembène's *God's Bits of Wood*

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Senegalese author Ousmane Sembène's 1960 novel *God's Bits of Wood* (*Les bouts de bois de Dieu*) is a multi-layered narrative that is thoroughly permeated by the continual intersections of class struggle and its ideological variations across gendered lines. As a fictionalized account of an actual strike along the Dakar-Niger railway in 1947-48, the novel's main narrative premise is, as many Sembène scholars have already claimed, an explicitly anti-colonial polemic. Literary critics and historians such as Frederick Cooper have already exhaustively argued that *God's Bits of Wood* functions as a historicized situating of successful anti-colonial actions in French West Africa, which ultimately contribute to the African independence movements of the late 1950s and 1960s. Such analyses of Sembène's novel attempt to contextualize its fictionalized events within a constellation in which, as Cooper argues, "all forms of contestation against French rulers and bosses appear to be part of a seamless pattern of ever-broadening,

ever-growing struggle" (Cooper 82). While such readings undoubtedly contribute to a more specific rendering of the localized historicity of anti-colonial practices and their connections to larger pan-African movements for independence, they overlook the implicit gendered characterization of the strike as represented in Sembène's novel.

It is precisely in reaction to these abundant socio-historical readings, that this paper will start from a position which is largely unconcerned with the more obvious anti-colonial or postcolonial analyses of *God's Bits of Wood*, in favor of reading it purely as a nuanced exposition of gender and its relationship to class struggle. The Nigerian Marxist author and critic Chidi Amuta claims that:

To seek to transcend the limitations of the various formations of bourgeois criticism of African literature is to quest for a politically engaged, ideologically progressive and dialectical theory of that literature. In this quest, Marxism has been palpably and critically implicated not only because it represents the finest crystallization of dialectical thought into a social and political proposition but also because it encapsulates an ideological proposition in the context of which progressive forces in Africa are engaged in the struggle for negating the legacy of neo-colonialism and frustrating the designs of imperialism. (Amuta 504)

Therefore, as the specters of socialist thought, Marxian class analysis, and communist organizing all manifest themselves in various ways within this novel, this paper's analysis moves beyond the notion of reading *God's Bits of Wood* as a *postcolonial*, *anticolonial* or *African* communist novel – in favor of simply reading it as a *communist* novel

with no qualifiers. Moreover, it is a communist novel that constructs a conception of gendered resistance that is disparate and complex. It is a narrative of struggle that refuses to essentialize gender, and throughout its development many different ideological representations of what constitutes women's revolutionary agency appear.

Viewed solely from a communist reading, *God's Bits of Wood* can be interpreted as a novel that charts three parallel, but distinct, variations of Marxist-feminism as theoretical approaches to the same material struggle. The three Marxist-feminisms here correspond to the three stages of classical Marxism, autonomist-Marxism, and contemporary communization theory. While historically these three variations of Marxist-feminism form a progressive linearity, such a reading complicates the temporality of such succession by allowing all three historical stages to interact with one another in ways that can only exist in the temporal flattening of the fictive present of the novel form. Thus, the merits of fictionalizing a historical moment of struggle in the form of literary text become apparent precisely for this ability to coalesce successive histories of Marxist-feminism into one immediate fictive temporality. This grounding in form allows for a certain ahistorical dynamism, which simply cannot exist amongst the pretensions of the historicizing accounts of the 1947-48 Senegalese railway strike.

It must be noted that two of these three forms of Marxist-feminism, autonomist-Marxism and communization theory, did not witness their emergence until well after the 1960 publication of *God's Bits of Wood* in entirely different social, economic, and ethnocultural contexts. Obviously Sembène, even with his explicit communist affiliations (he was most notably a member of the massive French communist trade-union the

C.G.T.), would in no way be privy to these later developments within Marxist theory at the time of his writing *God's Bits of Wood*. Thus, this argument forms a retroactive superimposition of communist *theory*, not communist *history*, onto Sembène's novel. While Sembène may not have been explicitly thinking about the domestic sphere as a site of what the Italian autonomist-Marxist Silvia Federici calls the "reproduction of labor" or the process of communization as necessarily entailing the abolition of gender, he nonetheless goes to great lengths to present the "revolutionary woman" as an inherently differentiated category, and it is here that such theoretical speculation finds its validation.

While the various stages of Marxist-feminist development which will be expanded upon later in the paper do not exist as clearly delineated categories in Sembène's own authorial voice and language, his explicit differentiation of the "revolutionary woman" in the novel seems entirely calculated and not arbitrary whatsoever. This clarity of authorial foresight is perhaps most evident in his gendered juxtaposition between the revolutionary agency of men and the revolutionary agency of women in the novel. In contrast to the inherent variation and dynamism that Sembène ascribes to his portrayal of women, both as individuals and as a differentiated collectivity, the revolutionary men are static, machine-like, and utterly ineffectual in actualizing their revolutionary potential. The failure of Sembène's revolutionary men is depicted primarily in their figurative embodiment as the stultifying institution of the bureaucratic union. Sembène creates a narrative that is deeply suspicious of the ability of men to create truly transformative revolutionary situations and their union is consistently represented as impotent. As a

result, in *God's Bits of Wood* the onus of fomenting authentic revolutionary potentiality rests entirely with the women in three distinct and differentiated forms.

THE RECOGNITION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND CLASSICAL MARXIST- FEMINISM

At the strike's outset, the women of Thiès experience a collective elevation of their social status, which arises as a direct result of the contextual shift in gender roles that the beginning of the strike necessitates. This insurrectionary context results in a rendering of "woman" not as the conventional one in which it, as a signifier, mainly constitutes the gender excluded from explicit labor-production (a notion which is problematized later by autonomist-Marxist thought), but rather "woman" now constitutes its own revolutionary collective category with responsibilities that prove to be absolutely integral to the prolongation and success of the strike. In response to the decision to go on strike, which it must be said falls entirely within the purview of the men, and through the riots and clashes which immediately follow, the women in Thiès act in a manner which expresses unwavering solidarity with the strikers. This solidarity mainly takes the form of activities that, while still upholding traditional West African gender normativity, nonetheless move the role of women from that of passive subordinate roles in relation to men to active roles as participants in the larger societal response to the strike. This move mirrors the traditional Marxist prescriptions against the familial roles and structuring within early stages in capitalist development, specifically in regards to the domestic sphere.

In what is perhaps one of the earliest texts of classical Marxism that explicitly deals with the gender divide, Frederick Engels' 1884 book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, claims that with the development of the patriarchal family "the administration of the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of society. It became *private service*. The wife became the first domestic servant, pushed out of participation in social production" (Engels 79). It is in this way then that the actions of the women of Thiès represent an attempt to forcibly re-enter the public sphere of social production. Admittedly, the way in which they begin to re-enter the public sphere and begin to assert a fledging semblance of merit-based equality with the striking men happens along lines which represent gradual transitions that still evoke former domestic responsibilities rather than radical ruptures with their present gendered expectations. The most notable of these activities is that, without being asked to, the women of Thiès take on the responsibility of caring for the men wounded in the riots, using Dieynaba's cabin as a makeshift triage unit. This seemingly marginal detail of locating this first revolutionary activity on the part of the women in the novel in the home of Dieynaba is important here, as the novel suggests that Dieynaba is independent (whether by choice or by widowhood it is not known) and there is no male figure in her family unit. She is a food vendor before the outbreak of the strike, and after the riots she transforms her "house into an infirmary" (Sembène 27). This expression of an individual will which is independent of the authority of men, suggests Dieynaba and the women helping her care for the wounded are coming to terms with a new form of gendered agency which is implicitly signifying a burgeoning form of equality within the context of resistance. Here, the beginning of a gendered identification with the strike

begins to take hold in Thiès and it soon manifests in the women of other cities as well.

Figuratively, this recognition of the strike as *also* being the women's fight, is perhaps best embodied by the blind woman Maïmouna. In the course of the first riot and massacre in Thiès one of her young twins gets crushed to death in the ensuing melee and she herself sustains "cuts and bruises" (Sembène 28). Maïmouna, like Dieynaba, is not married and thus the visceral loss of her child makes the struggle her own. In a way which is intimately tied to a rendering of the female body as microcosm for the larger socio-political conflict, Maïmouna's life-affirming production of child is figuratively exploited to the point of its expiration – a death which reinforces the need for the strike to be a success, completely from the perspective of the now equally invested figure of the revolutionary woman.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DIFFERENCE AND AUTONOMIST-MARXIST FEMINISM.

After the riots in Thiès, Sembène's narrative exemplifies a shift that mirrors the theoretical transition from classical Marxist conceptions of feminism to autonomist-Marxist feminism. As a theoretical development, autonomist-Marxism saw its greatest period of theorization in 1970s Italy as a part of the burgeoning "autonomia" movement during what were painfully called the "years of lead." Autonomist-Marxism sees its greatest theoretical divergence from classical forms of Marxism in its refusal to acknowledge the state-form as a necessary stage of actualizing communism, the rejection of formal workers unions as a mode of resistance organization, and a broadening of the definition of the

"working-class" to include students, precarious workers, the unemployed, and women working in domestic settings. This last shift in the autonomist's definition of the working class, which recasts women's revolutionary importance, is of central importance for this argument. In *God's Bits of Wood*, the centrality given to the domestic realm underscores the way in which Sembène recasts the household as a legitimate site of contestation and struggle, and furthermore, as a site in which the revolutionary consciousness of women is raised.

In her seminal work, *Caliban and the Witch*, the Italian autonomist-Marxist and feminist theorist Silvia Federici claims that the failures of all radical feminisms before the autonomist treatment of gender relations "failed to acknowledge the sphere of reproduction as a source of value-creation and exploitation, and thus traced the roots of the power differential between women and men to women's exclusion from capitalist development" (Federici 7). Thus, even "socialist" feminism prior to the 1970s viewed the marginalization of women solely from the perspective in which they, as an entire social category, were excluded from conventional understandings of the exploitation of labor-power and the creation of surplus-value. What Federici argues as crucial to understanding this failure of analyses, is that the domestic sphere, what she goes on to call the "*re*-production of labor," is actually itself a form of production in which the most egregious profiting of surplus-value occurs, precisely because all domestic labor is unwaged labor. This position forms a radical break with classical Marxism as it effectively argues against Marx's theory of primitive accumulation and the origins of capital. Instead, Federici and other autonomist-Marxist feminists like Mariarosa Dalla

Costa argue that the early developments of capitalism cannot have occurred without expropriated capital, namely in the extraction of surplus-value in the form of the re-production of labor in the domestic sphere.

What is meant here by Federici and Dalla Costa by the “re-production of labor” is that capitalism encounters many self-contradictions, and one of the most obvious is that the extraction of surplus-value in the form of surplus-labor takes the form of working workers longer and harder hours. If a worker cannot replenish their physical and mental health before the next period of work (usually the next day), then productivity and efficiency in the workplace drastically decreases. It is therefore because of these biological contingencies, that workers cannot work twenty-four hours a day for seven days a week, and the history of the development of capitalism is marked by many experiments on behalf of capital to account for this uniquely *human* problem. Federici and other autonomist-Marxist feminists argue that up until the period in the Western world where women start to enter the paid-labor workforce, women for the first two-hundred years of early capitalist development, due to social and cultural constructions of gender normativity, were solely responsible for the domestic duties which made it possible for labor to “re-produce” itself and show up the next working-day to be exploited all over again.

This “re-production” is both viewed on the macro-level, namely in the biological reproduction of new labor reserves in the form of the creation of children, and at the micro-level in the cooking, child-rearing, cleaning, and other necessary domestic duties. All of this is labor, which is implicitly being exploited by the capital-owning class, and is

inherently expropriated precisely because the domestic sphere appears at the surface to be outside of labor/production relations when in fact it forms one of the most central and indispensable components of it. Therefore, as Federici and the autonomist-Marxist feminists argue, the domestic sphere is inextricably bound within capitalist relations and it forms a legitimate site for struggle and resistance.

It is in this way that Ramatoulaye and the women of her domestic compound in Dakar can be read as figurative representations of a secondary transition in the identity of revolutionary women in *God's Bits of Wood*. Whereas the women in Thiès, through their actions of solidarity and support, are implicitly showing the men that at least in the context of the strike they have the right to be viewed as equal contributors to its ultimate outcome, in Dakar the women are explicitly arguing that they are indeed a different social category than men and they have to be reckoned with precisely in this manner. Whereas the fledging hints of women's revolutionary consciousness manifest in purely reactive and supportive means in Thiès, in the city of Dakar, Ramatoulaye, the matriarch of a large household, leads the first collective *offensive* of revolutionary women within the context of the strike. This marks a decisive ontological shift in the depiction of women in the novel, as up until this point in the narrative, women do not actively engage in physical confrontation with the colonial authorities. As a mother and the domestic head of the compound in which she lives, Ramatoulaye already possesses a keen understanding of the seriousness of the strike even before she achieves a greater revolutionary understanding of her role as a woman through the act of revolt. Sembène writes: “Since the beginning of the strike Ramatoulaye had become more withdrawn,

and perhaps more stern. There was no longer time for gossiping. Her responsibilities had become very great, because the house of which she was the eldest was large...” (Sembène 40). It is clear from the moment of her introduction in the narrative that Ramatoulaye’s character is completely enmeshed with the preservation of the house, as a physical extension of her family and all of the domestic responsibilities that that entails.

It is also telling that Ramatoulaye is juxtaposed against the character of her brother El Hadj Mabigué, a man that as Sembène scholar F. Case argues, is representative of “hypocritical religious leadership, a grasping materialistic egoism and a reactionary fatalism faced with the forces of colonialist exploitation” (Case 283). It must be noted here that while El Hadj Mabigué is clearly a colonialist lackey, as he is someone able to procure already-rationed food storages through connections and means which suggest compromises with the colonial powers at the expense of his own people, Sembène seems to suggest that such self-serving action masking itself as piety when in fact it borders on cultural treason is only capable by a man.

After Ramatoulaye goes to her brother for help in securing credit for food for her family and he denies her, she accuses him of collaboration with the colonialists. She yells, “You are in league with them, Mabigué – and you are a fornicator as well. [...] You are a thief, in addition, Mabigué. You stole my [food] allotment by saying that I was an illegitimate child...” (Sembène 45). This accusation of collaboration is significant here, as it becomes figuratively transposed onto Mabigué’s goat Vendredi. Other Sembène critics have already written about the parallel between Vendredi’s well-known state as a castrated ram in their neighborhood in Dakar and Mabigué’s metaphorical castration

of power by being “in league” with the French colonialist authorities. F. Case argues that Ramatoulaye “thus identifies her brother’s socio-political castration [...] Mabigué has castrated not only his ram, but he has castrated himself” (Case 285).

As Ramatoulaye leaves her brother, she pauses and reflects on the anger that she expressed both at Mabigué and Hadramé, the shopkeeper that denied her credit with which to procure food. Amazed at her own initial anger, she expresses a moment of self-doubt and asks herself: “How could I have told Hadramé that I would be back? And if I went back, what could I do? I’m not capable of setting fire to his shop – I must have said that in a moment of anger. But why should I have threatened him? Is all this because of the strike – or is it perhaps because I am evil? No, I know that is not so, I am not evil – it is just that we are hungry” (Sembène 45). This self-reflection on the part of Ramatoulaye is indicative of the beginning of a truly revolutionary and insurrectionary consciousness which is divorced from the political maneuvering of the men in the novel and their figurative embodiment as the ineffectual union. Not only is the difference expressed here along gendered lines, but it is also a sharp ideological division as well – as it is the women, starting here with Ramatoulaye, that begin to encounter their own revolutionary agency completely independent of the union dictates. At this point in the narrative, Ramatoulaye still believes that she, as an independent actor in the overwhelmingly large political theater of the strike, is not capable of affecting radical change. The point however is that she represents one of the first characters, all of whom are women, that begin to even think of such insurrectionary actions as burning collaborationist commercial shops to the ground. By the end of *God’s Bits of Wood*,

Ramatoulaye's self-doubt turns into the realization of a full-scale insurrectionary force, and the beginning of translating the *thought* of this radical capability within her into actual *action* first appears in the scene where she refuses to pay the water-selling man.

As a part of the draconian measures taken by the colonial authorities to drive the strikers back to work at the railway company, the water is intermittently shut off in certain neighborhoods of Dakar. This act in itself implicitly recognizes the centrality of the domestic sphere in the re-production of labor-power on the part of the colonial authorities, and thus, the act of shutting off water to homes can be read not only as an attack against the strikers, but an attack against the home, and by extension, the women that are responsible for the re-production of labor-power. It is an encroachment of colonialist and capitalist power dynamics *into* the sanctity of the domestic sphere. Ramatoulaye possesses a sophisticated understanding of class dynamics as she claims that "real misfortune is not just a matter of being hungry and thirsty; it is a matter of knowing that there are people who want you to be hungry and thirsty – and that is the way it is with us" (Sembène 53). This astute awareness of the socio-political context of the strike affords Ramatoulaye a newly justified set of moral deviances which she argues are necessary in times of such repression and austerity. Thus, because of this specific context, Ramatoulaye feels no weight of conventional morality when she effectively expropriates water to quench the life-threatening thirst of her entire family.

This need to satiate her family's most basic domestic needs takes on additional metaphorical significance as the baby of the compound's second-wife Houdia M'Baye, oddly yet aptly named Strike, is in dire need of sustenance from its mother but because

of a lack of food, water, and added stress Houdia's "milk was exhausted" (Sembène 53). Thus, Ramatoulaye's expropriation of water, that life-affirming source, becomes not only the protection of her immediate familial unit, but it figuratively represents the "nursing" of the strike itself. Here Sembène is clearly calling attention to the importance of the domestic sphere in sustaining the revolutionary impetus within the strike itself. As Silvia Federici argues, the capitalist paradigm "should be interpreted as the effect of a social system of production that does not recognize the production and reproduction of the worker as a social-economic activity, and a source of capital accumulation, but mystifies it instead as a natural resource or a personal service, while profiting from the wageless condition of the labor involved" (Federici 8). Thus, Sembène is particularly adept at positioning women at a crucial juncture between their role as exploited *reproducers* of labor (i.e. the sustaining of their worker husbands' health), and as active revolutionary subjects.

It is telling that economic relations are at the core of the water-delivery scene. When the women of the house ask the mobile water salesman how much his water is selling for and they find out that the price has drastically increased, they complain: "That makes two times in a single month that the price has been raised. What will happen to us – you know we cannot pay such a price" (Sembène 54). Caught in between this monetary obstacle and the severity of their need for water, Ramatoulaye simply acts in a way in which conventional pre-strike morality no longer has any bearing. She simply decides out of such serious necessity and in a moment of insurrectionary clarity, to effectively steal the water from him. It is significant that when the man attempts to

physically confront and verbally berate the women after this collective expropriation, the *entire* household physically assaults him. Sembène writes: “The children and other women all descended on the water carrier now. Bineta seized his undershirt and ripped it open from top to bottom, while Mame Sofi slapped him hard across the face, screaming at the same time, ‘Help! Help! Everyone, help! A man is attacking us!’” (Sembène 56). After this shouting on the part of Mame Sofi, other women from neighboring courtyards come to the household’s aid and they all effectively drive out the water delivery man and “there was enough water for everyone, and the chipped cup was passed around again” (Sembène 56). It is important to note here that within the new morality that emerges from the context of the strike, such behavior as profiting off of others hardships which the water-selling man with his exorbitant prices represents, is contrasted with the merit of collective expropriation and redistribution, as evidenced when the water is shared freely with everyone, not only in Ramatoulaye’s household, but with those of neighboring compounds as well.

A new revolutionary ethics is emerging through the collective actions taken and it is absolutely integral to point out that this new morality of revolutionary subjectivity *first occurs within the women’s private domestic sphere* and not the static public sphere of the men’s union. It also is worth noting that the entry of the water-selling man into Ramatoulaye’s compound figuratively represents the encroachment of capitalist exchange-relations which in the novel are entirely equated with the masculine. Thus, if as Silvia Federici and other autonomist-Marxist feminists argue, the domestic sphere is a site where the expropriation of capital and value from women as wageless

labor occurs, then the stealing of water represents both a collective re-appropriation of value that was already stolen from the women as well as a categorical refusal to operate according to the logic of capitalism. While this scene in *God’s Bits of Wood* is an important developmental stage of the women’s revolutionary consciousness, it is not until the killing of Mabigué’s castrated ram Vendredi that the women of Dakar become full-fledged insurrectionaries.

In response to Mabigué’s dismissal of her request for help, Ramatoulaye warns him that if his ram Vendredi ever enters her household that she will not hesitate to kill it in retribution for his parsimony. Inevitably, this situation arises as the castrated ram makes its way into their domestic compound and eats all of their already scarce stores of rice and earthnut cakes. The crazed ram also breaks their gourds and cooking pots. When Ramatoulaye rushes home upon hearing the news of the destruction, she finds the other wives and female relatives all cowering as the ram continues his wanton devastation of the inner courtyard. Immediately, without second-guessing herself, Ramatoulaye “tightened her waistcloth around her hips and knotted the handkerchief on her head firmly in place” and gets down to the business of trapping and killing Vendredi (Sembène 66). As she engages in a fierce battle of physical will and finally overcomes the ram, she calls over to one of the other women, Bineta, to come and slice its neck while she holds it down. Lacking the necessary resolve which Ramatoulaye so evidently possesses in this moment of domestic crisis, Sembène writes that “Bineta found the weapon, but then she just stood there, her eyes bulging fearfully.” Ramatoulaye shakes her out of this fearful stupor by yelling, “What are you waiting for? Cut open his

throat!” (Sembène 67). It is important to note that while Sembène casts Ramatoulaye in the main position of female assertiveness and dominance, she does not slay Vendredi alone. In fact, her calling over the meek Bineta to be the first one to drive the knife into the ram can be interpreted as an inherently pedagogical act in which the raising of the women’s revolutionary consciousness takes on the appearance of a genuine collective act of group-identity formation. Thus, Ramatoulaye is encouraging the other women in her domestic compound to realize their revolutionary potentiality.

After this act of existential realization, one which is completely laden with sacrificial undertones, one of the other women, Mame Sofi, declares to Bineta: “I told you this morning that we would baptize Strike today [...] Now we will do it with a feast of mutton” (Sembène 68). While Mame Sofi is literally speaking about the household’s youngest child, the infant named Strike, the allusion here to the strike itself is obviously apparent. Thus, the women of Ramatoulaye’s household in Dakar are figuratively “baptizing” and injecting meaning into the too-long ineffectual strike by giving it an explicitly revolutionary tenor which it so desperately lacks when only the men are behind its organization.

After the existentially transformative moment of the slaying of the ram, the women of Dakar and later, women from all along the Dakar-Niger railway line, begin to escalate the insurrectionary confrontations with both colonial authorities and railway company representatives. When the police come to Ramatoulaye’s compound in order to apprehend her for the illegal slaying of Vendredi the women collectively respond in an incredibly hostile and aggressive manner. This marks the first moment of physical

violence in which the Senegalese possess a distinct advantage in its outcome, unlike the initial violence in Thiès where the striking men sustain several casualties, not to mention the psychological demoralization that comes with such a resolute defeat. As the police attempt to de-escalate the situation at Ramatoulaye’s compound, the women will have none of it, and “on all sides of [Ramatoulaye] the other women began brandishing bottles filled with sand, flatirons, and clubs of all shapes and sizes. In a few minutes the group of policemen was completely encircled” (Sembène 74). This same level of insurrectionary fury on the part of the women of Dakar is repeated throughout *God’s Bits of Wood* in the many all-women riots that lead up to the long march from Thiès to Dakar. Addressing this apparent shift in the women’s collective identity and the manifestation of their revolutionary agency, Sembène poignantly asks and answers what the reader is ostensibly thinking:

Where, then, had this violence been born? What was the source of this energy so suddenly unleashed? It was not the war; Ramatoulaye was not a man and knew nothing of the rancors that well up in soldiers on the march. It was not the factory; she had never been subject to the inhuman dictatorship of machines. It was not even in the too frequent association of men; she had known only those of her own family. Where, then? The answer was as simple as the woman herself. It had been born beside a cold fireplace, in an empty kitchen. (Sembène 74).

Thus, entirely in line with Federici’s theorization of the domestic sphere as being a legitimate site of anticapitalist resistance, the home is of central importance in the

creation and further cultivation of the women's revolutionary consciousness in *God's Bits of Wood*. While this second stage of ideological development according to the variations of Marxist-feminisms outlined in this paper is the most prominent and fully developed in *God's Bits of Wood*, Sembène's narrative also allows for a third and even more contemporary transposition of current Marxist-feminist theory onto the depiction of women in the novel – that of communization theory.

THE ABOLITION OF GENDER AND COMMUNIZATION THEORY

Juxtaposed against both the first movement of the women's resistance as occupying purely supportive roles in their care of the wounded strikers in Thiès and the second movement of women's resistance as active and engaged insurrectionaries in Dakar, the third and final reading of the different ideological variations of Marxist-feminisms in *God's Bits of Wood* takes the form of the theoretical notion of the "abolition of gender" which is prevalent in much contemporary communization theory – and this theoretical notion is figuratively embodied by the category-defying character of Penda. Whereas the first stage of classical Marxist-feminism is essentially an appeal for the recognition of equality, and the second stage of autonomist-Marxist feminism is the establishment of a revolutionary agency based on gendered difference, this third stage of feminism within communization theory attempts to do away with the apparent binarization between the first two theoretical stages in favor of gender's complete abolition.

Communization theory is an esoteric branch of post-Marxist and left-communist thought which emerged in the wake of the failures of the Italian autonomist movement of

the 1970s. It came to prominence, mostly in France, during the 1990s as a hyper-critical theoretical evaluation of what was been called the "death of the worker's movement" in the post-Fordist service-based economies of the Western world and its trajectory of thought has extended well into the 21st century. As theorized by groups and communist journals such as *Theorie Communiste*, *Endnotes*, and *Troploin*, communization theory explicitly agrees with most of the major theoretical tenets of autonomist-Marxism, namely the advocacy of decentralization, the rejection of the state form, and the refusal of organizational structures such as unions. While communization theory shares these beliefs in common with this earlier theoretical form, it goes further than autonomist-Marxism in that communization theory also advocates the refusal of work, the rejection of the value-form, and perhaps most importantly, believes that the abolition of capital necessarily entails that workers no longer view themselves as a homogenous class.

Thus, in order to achieve what Marx called "complete communism" communization theory suggests that the working class needs to negate itself precisely as a class. Furthermore, communization theory does not believe that any transitory period of what classical Marxism identifies as "socialism," in which the state-form persists before "withering away" to usher in "complete communism," can actually exist without being recuperated back into capitalist social relations. Instead, "complete" or full communism is achieved through the act of the revolution itself, hence the term "communization," which explicitly refers to the idea of communism in its predicative form as a process and not a static-oriented conception of something to finally be achieved.

Communization theory's relationship to gender and feminism has been most fully articulated only in recent years by Maya Andrea Gonzalez, one of the contributors to the communization theory journal *Endnotes*. In her essay entitled "Communization and the Abolition of Gender" which is included in a 2011 anthology entitled *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles*, Gonzalez argues that the categorical difference along the biological lines of male and female were used in certain epochs of particular modes of production in order to socially construct gender as the dichotomization of "man" and "woman." While this social distinction pre-dates the capitalist mode of production, Gonzalez argues that capitalism reifies this social construction of gender in ways that no heretofore mode of production could possibly achieve. The crux of her argument claims that "it is no longer possible to imagine a situation in which social divisions are dissolved *after* the revolution" (Gonzalez 221). This deeply contentious statement implies two main theoretical premises here.

The first implication here is that any so-called communist revolution that leaves the capitalist-supported gender binary intact will ultimately fail in actualizing full communism and be recuperated back into the late capitalist mode of production. Paradoxically, the second implication is that the gender binary must be destroyed both as a prerequisite to and as a cause of a communizing revolution. In her critique of previous radical feminisms, including the autonomist-Marxist variation, Gonzalez claims that "feminism historically accepted the gendered nature of social life, since it was only through gender that women could affirm their identity as women in order to organize on that basis. This affirmation became a problem for the movement

historically, *since it is impossible to fully reconcile gender – the very existence of women and men – with the simultaneous existence of the working class and capital*" (Gonzalez 232). Thus, for Gonzalez and other communization theorists, gender as a two-unit system of collective identity reduces singularities down to easily essentialized, and by extension, controlled subjects within the capitalist mode of production. Gonzalez sums up her main theoretical premise by arguing: "in order to be revolution at all, communization must destroy gender *in its very course*, inaugurating relations between individuals defined in their singularity" (Gonzalez 220). It is important to note that this conception of the abolition of gender is framed in a temporality rooted in action – the communizing revolution here is that process which "in its very course" "destroys gender and all the other divisions that come between us" (Gonzalez 234).

In *God's Bits of Wood*, Sembène presages communization theory by hinting at the possibility of overcoming rigid gender binarizations through the act of revolt. Admittedly this imposed theoretical reading does not apply to women as a collective category within the novel, and it is reserved for only one incredibly complex character: Penda. Penda first appears in *God's Bits of Wood* halfway through the narrative, and from the beginning it is clear that she defiantly transcends the rigid cultural strictures levied against the women in French West Africa. She returns to Thiès to her aunt Dieynaba's communal household in the dead of night, after "she had gone off with a man and stayed with him for several days" (Sembène 138). Already, this displays a callous disregard for the Islamic mores surrounding women's supposed propriety. Sembène writes about Penda, that "from her earliest childhood she had demonstrated a

resolute independence which only increased as she grew up” (Sembène 138). Later in the novel, Penda continues to defy the culturally imposed gender normativity in French West Africa when she becomes the first woman in the narrative who takes a position within the context of the strike which should presumably belong to a man. She is asked by the union officials in Thiès to “take over the distribution of [food] rations” (Sembène 142). This is a subtle twist of irony, as Marxist methods of socio-economic systemization are so often reduced down to a caricature consisting merely of the “re-distribution of resources” amongst the working class, and a woman is here quite literally placed in charge of such re-distribution.

Penda’s involvement in union activities is entirely unique and singular as no other woman in the narrative engages with the men’s activities in the way that she does. Crucial to understanding her involvement with the union is that it is entirely voluntary, and she does not let it change her individual revolutionary position, which is more than one can say about the reductive effect the union has on the men in the novel. This assertiveness and free association is best exemplified when Penda immediately responds to sexual harassment in the union office. Sembène writes that Penda “came to the union office frequently to help with the work, and one day, when one of the workmen had stupidly patted her on the behind, she gave him a resounding smack. A woman slapping a man in public was something no one had ever seen before” (Sembène 144). A conventional reading of this scene could interpret such defiance as the expression of a new type of feminist-inflected woman appearing in French West Africa, yet through maintaining a reading tempered by the perspective of communization theory Penda is

not merely a rabble-rousing woman, rather she is effectively enmeshed in the process of overcoming her own *signification-as-woman* and is actualizing her identity as a singular individual which transcends such reductive gender distinctions. Seen through this imposed reading, the anecdotal line: “A woman slapping a man in public was something no one had ever seen before” is problematized, as in this context it is no longer a “woman” which slaps the man and instead it is Penda as a singular individual actualized through the literal action of the strike itself which slaps him. Through this much more speculative reading, Penda is beginning to simultaneously subvert and transcend the bifurcated gender relations present in the novel.

All of this is not to imply that Penda is conscious of her destabilization of gender normativity, and in fact Sembène characterizes her as being quite unaware of her manifestation of revolutionary singularity. In a conversation between the blind woman Maïmouna and Penda, the former asks the latter: “You don’t seem to like men very much [...] and yet you are helping them with the strike... I wonder why...” (Sembène 144). Sembène goes on to write that “sometimes before going to sleep, Penda had asked herself the same question. ‘Why did I ever get myself involved in this business? I’ve got nothing to gain from it...’ But she always fell asleep before finding the answer” (Sembène 144). According to this communizationist reading, what Penda gains from her involvement in the strike is a non-essentialized subjectivity not reduced according to gendered delineations, which is realized only through the process of revolt itself.

Sembène alludes further to Penda’s clear otherness in regards to the gender binary as he writes that “she kept the women in line, and she forced even the men to respect

her” (Sembène 143). Here it is evident that Penda’s character has transcended the conventional gender roles of “woman” and “man” and it has happened solely as a result of the new social context of the strike. Penda embodies this revolutionary otherness in its most extreme form, as she is the only character in the novel whose metaphysical being is fundamentally changed because of the strike. However, throughout Sembène’s development of plot, such radical self-transformation is presented not without its own metaphysical limits and very material dangers.

At the apogee of Penda’s realization of revolutionary consciousness and singular potentiality, she is undoubtedly at her most militant and sure of her ideological convictions. She single-handedly suggests that the women march from Thiès to Dakar, in a long march which, given Sembène’s own communist pedigree, is an allusion to the famous Maoist long march in China in 1934. It is clear that for Penda the strike has become more than the simple clamoring for a few reforms and demands and instead she alludes to something much more visionary in her revolutionary foresight. She defiantly asserts during the large meeting in Thiès the day before the long march: “... this strike means the possibility of a better life tomorrow. We owe it to ourselves to hold up our heads and not to give in now. So we have decided that tomorrow we will march together to Dakar” (Sembène 87). During the long march from Thiès to Dakar, Penda is unarguably the leader, soul, and backbone of all the women on this arduous journey.

In the narrative climax, which in addition to its Maoist references alludes to Moses’s leading the Israelites out of the desert and to the Promised Land, Penda takes

on a certain semblance of prophetic grandeur throughout the course of the long march. Just like Moses, she is barred entry into the final destination – which in Sembène’s work is the coastal port city of Dakar. After Penda is shot and dies on the outskirts of Dakar by soldiers blocking the marchers’ entrance into the city, the women, no longer needing the inspirational figure of Penda, continue fearlessly into the city on their own. A conventional reading of this scene would suggest that Penda’s death is a reaction to the superfluous need for “revolutionary” leaders that the union men obviously possess. The men cannot act and affect any radical change without the authoritative presence of Bakayoko. The women express a level of collective autonomy that is not dependent on revolutionary leaders and their cults of personality. Sembène critics such as F. Case and Karen Sacks have already come to this conclusion about Penda’s precisely timed death at the end of the long march. Sacks implies that Penda’s death allows for a more egalitarian rendering of revolutionary consciousness as the “women create new roles for themselves and from this creation become conscious of their own collective basis for interdependence and opposition to the French” (Sacks 367).

This paper’s more subversive reading which uses communization theory’s advocacy for the abolition of gender as an interpretive starting point, views Penda’s death as indicative of the dangers in attempting to abolish gendered relations through the course of revolution *when no other agent is actively attempting to do so*. For all of the women engaged in the long march, it is a moment in which the collective realization of the women’s revolutionary consciousness occurs – yet, they still view themselves precisely as women. This is a position which is antithetical to communization theory’s

prescription for the abolishment of gender as outlined by theorists such as Maya Andrea Gonzalez. Penda is the only woman attempting to metaphysically go *further* in her revolutionary transformation, yet the problem is that she is ultimately engaged in becoming this radical alterity in isolation. Thus, seen in this context, her death is a return to normalcy – it suggests that while the strike may ultimately be successful in achieving its initial goals as described by the union men, the strike will not completely subvert all categories of oppression and exploitation. Most significantly for the scope of this paper, such a reading of Penda’s death also suggests that the abolition of gender is not possible within the context of this particular strike. Luckily for those partial to an affirmative reading of the novel’s concluding scenes, it is clear that the abolition of gender was never even an aim of Sembène’s polemical fictionalization of the Dakar-Niger railway strike, and all such speculative theoretical impositions necessarily encounter this fundamental obstacle. Nonetheless, it still is worthwhile to explore the retroactive relationship contemporary communist theory has to this novel, even though authorial intent suggests a reading entirely antithetical to it.

CONCLUSION

Ousmane Sembène’s novel *God’s Bits of Wood*, has often been interpreted by critics as a prime example of the actualization of women’s revolutionary consciousness and collective agency. What is limited about these previous readings is that it takes the role of women in the novel as an undifferentiated mass, and the feminism these readings parse out from particular moments in the plot do not contend for the way in

which Sembène’s work creates a *range* of women’s revolutionary subjectivity. Through refusing to essentialize the radical struggles of women in this novel, it therefore becomes necessary to analyze the way in which ideological differentiation occurs in the different revolutionary sensibilities of multiple women in the narrative. The initial show of solidarity by the women in Thiès after the first massacre of striking workers proves to be indicative of classical Marxist conceptions of gender and women, as evidenced by the materialist historicization of the familial unit as outlined by Frederick Engels in the late 1800s. The active engagement in direct contestation with colonial authorities by Ramatoulaye and the women of her household in Dakar, draws parallels to autonomist-Marxist critiques of the expropriation of labor within the domestic sphere. Finally, Penda’s attempts at subverting and transcending gendered binarizations in a revolutionary context evoke contemporary communization theory’s conceptualization around the abolition of gender. Taken together these three specific and chronologically progressive variations of Marxist-feminism prove to offer invaluable insight into the way in which Sembène, despite what the work of previous critics have shown, creates an conception of the “revolutionary woman” which is at once nuanced, differentiated, varying in intensity, and complicated – yet always integral to the strike at hand.

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Final Paramour for the Internal Soliloquy

Melt down the city spire,
collect the unbolted benches:
the scavengers won't listen,
or bloom. Pegasus ascends
(how high that highest
candle lights the dark)
until crashing down,
pedestrians parting to make
way for his homecoming
in an abandoned field:
processional slow as an
ice-floe carrying
his broken body
inside, a fly preserved
in amber, or vernissage
filled with T-Rex bones.
Beside him, licked lyre
triumphant, floating
downward to dusk
on a singed, waxen wing.

—Virginia Konchan

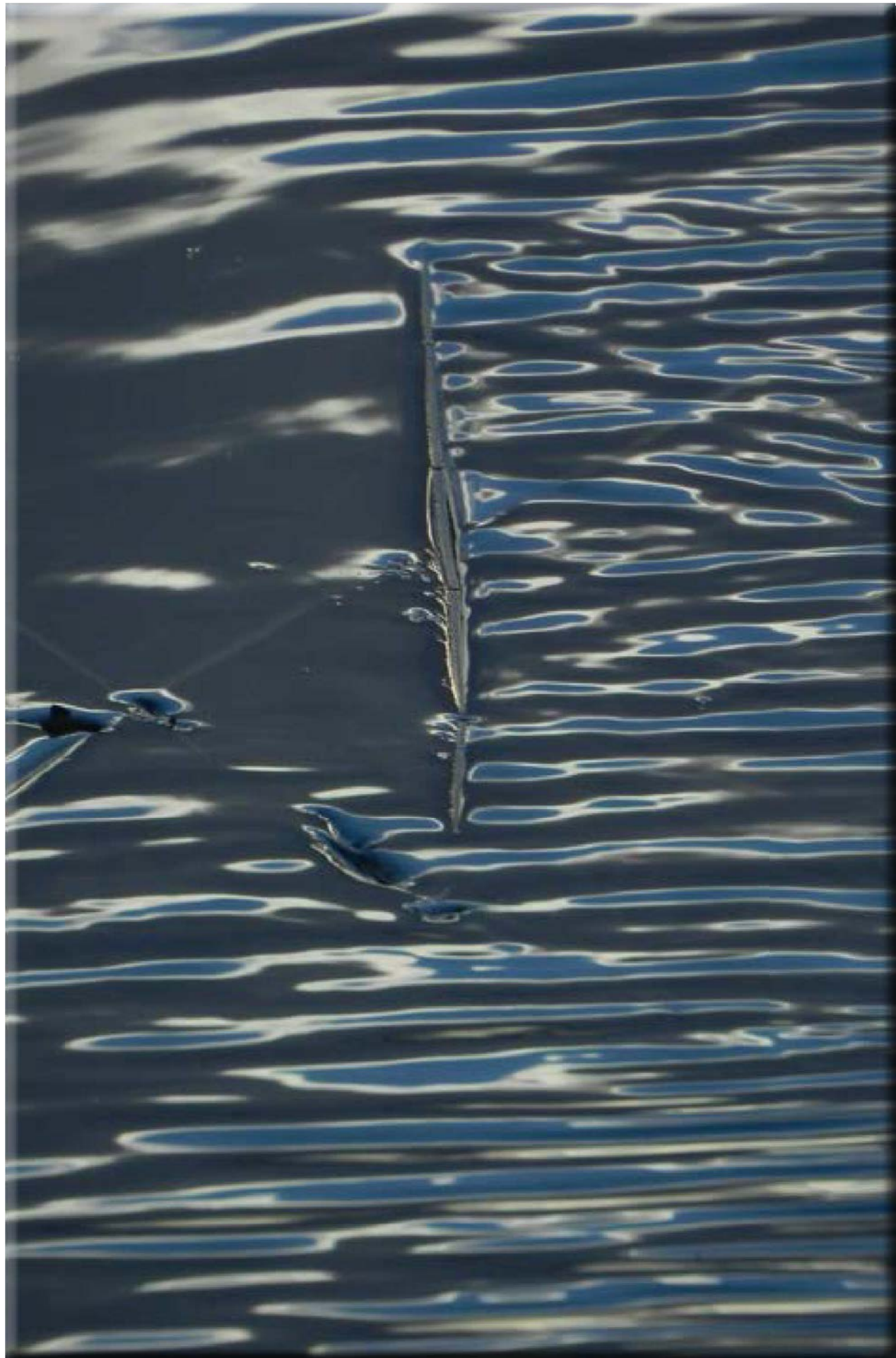


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE
DITCH #19

Travel poetics: memorial diaries, self's wandering and travel journeys between opened and confined urban spaces in the work of Paul Auster

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Just as time that controls the terms of the phenomenon of reminiscence, space is a fundamental social framework for the reconstruction of memory. On the basis of the theory of representations of Durkheim, the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs exceeds it by introducing two unknown fields in his time: town planning and memory. The meeting of these two concepts in the theory of memory of M. Halbwachs, produced a special kind of discipline that can be designated as the “urban anthropology”. According to M. Halbwachs, space is inextricably associated to representations of “collective thinking”¹. Looking at how the action symbol is elaborated in Paul Auster’s memory writing, Halbwachs’s theory, that the spatial framework is an inherent part of the construction of

1. “Places participate in the stability of material things, and it is in settling in them, enclosing itself within their limits and bending its attitude to suit them, that the collective thought of the group [...] has the best chance of immobilizing itself and enduring: such is the condition of memory.” (« Les lieux participent de la stabilité des choses matérielles et c’est en se fixant sur eux, en s’enfermant dans leurs limites et en pliant son attitude à leur disposition que la pensée collective du groupe [...] a le plus de chance de s’immobiliser et de durer : telle est bien la condition de la mémoire. ») M. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective* (Éd. critique par Gérard Namer), Paris, Albin Michel, 1997 [1950], p.165. (My own translation).

collective memory, proves to be very illuminating. Given the fallibility of our impressions and the human mind's oblivion, it is difficult to recapture the past if it is not kept in the physical environment around us. Indeed, space acts as a form of "sustainable reality"². The role of space is essential to the construction of collective memory in which there are complex dialectical relationships between memory and spatiality. In his conception of collective representation of memory, Halbwachs also believes that memories are rooted in space. The inclusion of these memories in spatiality conveys more generic reminiscent phenomena. In this sense, the accuracy of these memories varies with the distance in time and repeated action or not of the experience of reminiscence. We strive to meet the uniqueness of Auster's memory writing in his relationship with the various forms of spatiality. As such, two kinds of spatial typologies accompany the progress of Auster's memory writing. The first is characterized by the journey, including the character's wandering across geographic space. This is the case of Anna Blume in *In The Country of Last Things*, Marco Stanley Fogg in *Moon Palace* and Walter Rawley in *Mr. Vertigo*. The second is illustrated by imprisonment in the confined space of the room. This is the case of Peter Stillman in *The Locked Room*, kidnapped by his father to learn the original language, and the narrator A., locked in his monastic room in *The Invention of Solitude*. This binary opposition may also be present in the same novel, as in *The Music of Chance* where the destiny changing of Jim Nashe fluctuates between a state of constant motion, a symptom

2. "It's on space, our space - the one we occupy, or we return often, or we still have access, and that in any case our imagination or our thought is capable every moment to reconstruct-, that we must turn our attention. This is where our thinking must settle in, to come again this or that category of memories." (« C'est sur l'espace, sur notre espace - celui que nous occupons, ou nous repassons souvent, ou nous avons toujours accès, et qu'en tout cas notre imagination ou notre pensée est à chaque moment capable de reconstruire -, qu'il faut tourner notre attention. C'est là que notre pensée doit se fixer, pour que reparaisse telle ou telle catégorie de souvenirs.») M. Halbwachs, *La Topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte, Étude de mémoire collective*, Paris, PUF, 2008 [1941], p. 209. (My own translation)

of an erratic existence, and immobility in an enclosed and confined universe. However, the metaphorical journey undertaken through the mental and memorial wandering and the appropriation of Auster's memory writing of the journey's literary tradition inscribes the first in the extension of a whole tradition³. In addition, the room, the park, the desert, the cave, the wall and the city are spaces that open the ascetic and imaginary universe. Nevertheless, the monastic cell of the room remains the most recurrent form of spatial typology of Auster's memory writing. In the bedroom, the memorial thoughts overlap and meditations on memory, language and consciousness are gradually internalized. The fixed memorial quest undertaken in the monastic room remains at the heart of "The Book of Memory" for example, the second volume of *The Invention of Solitude*. It consists of subtle variations on memory and chance, family and community belonging, subsidiary and family transmission. In this context, it is useful to note that the mental wandering quest synonymous with the quest of both thinking and memory occurs in an order which corresponds to a network of paths progressively drawn. *The Invention of Solitude* highlights this association between wandering and memory on the basis of both "the image of the human bloodstream (heart, arteries, veins, capillaries) (IS. 122)", and that of the urban map⁴⁵. Indeed, urban journey generates mental and memory wandering, henceforth composing both a geographic and memorial journey. In *The Invention of*

3. "In our age, the gap between observation and scholarly discovery on the one hand and fiction and literary tradition on the other seems greater than ever before. Both observation and discovery are connected with originality and reality, with truth and sparkling results; fiction and literary tradition rather with fancy, with imagination and the world of books and the mind. (p. xiv). [...] Fiction, literary tradition, observation and scholarly discovery are useful categories with which to assess any travel writing." Zweder Von Martels (ed.), *Travel fact and travel fiction: studies on fiction, literary tradition, scholarly discovery, and observation in travel writing*, Leiden and New York, Brill, 1994, p. xviii.

4. "Thinking, like walking, necessarily occurs in a sequence : if we were to try to make an image of this process in our minds, a network of paths begins to be drawn, as in the image of the human bloodstream (heart, arteries, veins, capillaries), or as in the image of a map (of city streets, for example, preferably a large city, or even of roads [...]), so that what we are really doing when we walk through the city is thinking, and thinking in such a way that our thoughts compose a journey, and this journey is no more or less than the steps we have taken. (IS.

5.)".

Solitude, the erratic existence of thinking and memory is demonstrated on the scale of Europe and France in particular (IS. 83), setting up real multiple trajectories. The geographical wandering which was supposed to have been accomplished by the writer's grandparents⁶ is pervasive in Auster's memory writings. Each space between Europe and America reveals a personal history engulfed in the past and discovers "a secret, a root, [and] a sense forever denied"⁷. The transition of the confined space of the room to the open space of the desert in the case of *Moon Palace* inaugurates other memorial speech patterns and utopian spaces. The typology of urban wandering as well as journeys in the deserted immensity of the West is accompanied by an increased obsession with the quest for traces of generational past, origins and memorial transmission.

1. Auster's memory writing and memory trace quests: archival material and diaries

Paul Ricœur defines the trace as a material which is both independent of "real" memory and the product of a correlation between past and present: "when trace exists, it is no more the true memory, there exists mediation and history as a connection between present and past of which we know only traces, the result of a reconstruction, a selection occurred in these traces left by human activity."⁸ In Auster's memory writing, the quest for memory's traces and the relationship of the present with the past is developed by the

exploration of archives, letters and newspaper articles. They play a fundamental role in

6. We would point out that the European origin of Paul Auster's ancestry, particularly his Jewish ancestry coming from central Galicia, Austria region.

7. "Every novelist repeats the journeys that are supposed to have been made by his parents, seeking in each location a secret, a root, a meaning ever refused." (« Chaque romancier refait les pérégrinations qui sont censées avoir été faites par ses parents, cherchant en chaque lieu un secret, une racine, un sens à jamais refusés. ») R. Smadja, *Solitude* in Modiano family Booklet and *The Invention of Solitude* Auster, op. cit., p. 142. (My own translation).

8. [...] [L]orsqu'il existe trace, ce n'est plus de la mémoire vraie, il y a médiation et histoire comme rapport entre le présent et le passé dont on ne connaît que des traces, résultat d'une reconstruction, d'un tri opéré dans ces traces laissées par l'activité humaine. »P. Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, « Le temps raconté », tome III, Paris, Seuil, 1985. p. 291. (My own translation).

the triggering of mnemonic action. Indeed, memory writing inscribes its traces in the memorial speeches and reproduces them in the body of the narrative's diegesis. In *The Invention of Solitude* for instance, the exploration of memory trace is performed by the integration of archival material. The episode of the letter from Ken (IS. 34-5), that the narrator's cousins had received from a resident of Kenosha (Wisconsin), gives evidence of this exploration. He had sent her newspaper articles related to a tragic event that shocked the Auster family. This is the crime of passion committed by the grandmother of the narrator against her husband. It was through that meeting chance that the archival material (newspaper articles of the day) emerges at the surface of the text and allows the narrator to rebuild his personal memory. This is related to the distance of his father who, as a child, witnessed the drama. This event does not fail to illuminate a long experience buried in mystery and unspoken. Exploring the archival trace allows the reconstruction of the memorial past of the narrator and, in turn, that of an individual memory which was long remained in shadows. These newspaper articles acquire a testimonial dimension: "I read these articles as history. (IS. 37)." Moreover, the exploration of memory trace from the archival material is developed by diaries in which the Auster's character gives the account of his travel's itineraries and journeys favored by wandering. In Auster's memory writing, the diary is both an object of travel and memory. The simple reminiscence is not sufficient to transpose the look. The latter requires making immortal moments, objects, landscapes and memorial monuments and transcribe them into a notebook or sketch, travel diaries or manuscripts, which despite their incompleteness, are filled with the visual impression of the moment as well as the character's memory reflections. Indeed, the Auster's wandering character, taking often a figure of a writer, registers his memories

on diaries where he collects his notes⁹.

Diaries fill in Auster's memory writing a testimonial function and focus on the correlation between memory and spatiality. At the heart of the Auster's geographical and memory wandering's character, who often appear as a writer (Daniel Quinn, Anna Blume, A., Fogg, the anonymous narrator, Fanshawe, Peter Aaron), the notebook diary, welcoming both thoughts and memories coming most often in bulk, work like a memory storage of the journey¹⁰. The diary is also an identity *mise en abyme* and attests as such of a particular dynamic of the American writer¹¹. Motivated by the fear of oblivion, taking notes is revealed essential and fulfills its cognitive function of a link between memory, thinking and geographical trajectory of the Auster's character. In this context, the journey of the latter is similar to "an experience that generates memory."¹² Indeed, in Auster's works, the diary is an archival material that collects fragmented memorial writing. It establishes for the auster's protagonist a source of various testimonies which appear in the form of fragmented notes regarding torn reality and changing universe (Anna Blume in *In The Country of Last Things* and Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass*). The non-permanence of beings and things, as witnessed by the universe of *In The Country*

9. Very often we discover a recipient of the travel diary who is by no means the author of the diary.

10. "[...] Any writer's travel [...] is first a journey in the footsteps of a predecessor and a journey in the margins of an earlier text, before becoming a text to transmit ever further [...]" (« [...] tout voyage d'écrivain [...] est pour commencer un voyage sur les traces d'un prédécesseur et voyage dans les marges d'un texte antérieur, avant de devenir texte à transmettre plus loin [...] ») M. Caraion, « Objets de voyage, objets de mémoire », *Le voyage et la mémoire au XIXe siècle*, S. Moussa, S. Venayre (dir.), Actes du colloque de septembre 2007, Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-La-Salle, Coll. « SILEX », Creaphis Éditions, 2011, p. 340. (My own translation).

11. In several interviews, Paul Auster expressed his obsession with diaries. They are an important part of his literary creation: "Each notebook that I have written in might represent months of my life. [...] I would just put them in boxes and shut them away in my closet. And never look at them." P. Auster; M. Contat, *The Manuscript in the Book: A Conversation*, op. cit., p. 164. Moreover, in another interview, he reveals having filled dozens of diaries: "For ten years or so I published only poems, but all along I spent nearly as much time writing prose. I wrote hundreds and hundreds of pages, I filled up dozens of notebooks." P. Auster, *The Art of Hunger and Other Essays*, op. cit., p. 291.

12. "If memory is a process used to overcome the distance separating two moments located at different points of time axis, the journey is a process capable of overcoming the distance separating two geographic locations. The two processes are therefore similar and complementary. [...] As for complementarity, memory allows a travel

of *Last Things* and *City of Glass*, requires the preservation of the trace in a scriptural permanence¹². Anna's or Quinn's diaries are ways to rebuild the ruins of an evanescent reality. However, the dissolution of urban space is often accompanied by that of space dedicated to memory writing. The depletion of the space of writing in which Anna Blume transcribes the ephemeral nature of objects and concepts that describe them: "Now the entire notebook has almost been filled, and I have barely even skimmed the surface (CLT. 183)", is accompanied by the evanescence of urban environment. However, the diary serves as a testimony material in which she transcribes the decadent reality of the city in which objects disappear as well as language and the things it denotes. Indeed, the diary anticipates the handwritten letter of the narrator-character and serves as a material for it. Anna tries to fight against the progressive dislocation of language (split between the signified and the signifier) transcribing a testimony in her blue diary¹³. Memory writing gradually replaces the dislocation of language in the post-apocalyptic city. The whiteness of the page is gradually receding with her memorial speech defying the law of self-destruction governing her universe.

Nevertheless, Anna's epistolary and memory narrative reveals a nomadic memory, back in time, while a journey is an experience that generates memory." (« Si la mémoire est un procédé qui sert à surmonter la distance séparant deux moments situés à des points différents de l'axe temporel, le voyage est un procédé apte à surmonter la distance qui sépare deux endroits géographiques. Les deux procédés sont donc analogues et complémentaires. [...] Quant à la complémentarité, la mémoire permet d'effectuer un voyage dans le temps, tandis que le voyage est une expérience qui engendre la mémoire.

») **Thomas Klinkert**, « **Proust, la mémoire et le voyage** », *Le voyage et la mémoire au XIXe siècle*, Sarga Moussa et Sylvain Venayre (dir.), Actes du colloque de septembre 2007, Centre Culturel International de Cerisy-La-Salle, Coll. «SILEX », Creaphis Editions, 2011, p. 435. (My own translation).

¹² According to the logic of Halbwachs, memorial writing needs to bind the scriptural trace to a location, a space. This logic, we should note, is in continuity with the tradition of the arts of memory during antiquity, which articulates memory and architectural spatialisation.

¹³ “If I had not found these things in my bag the other day, I don’t think I would have started writing to you. But there was the notebook with all those blank pages in it, and suddenly I felt an overwhelming urge to pick up one of the pencils and begin this letter. By now, it is the one thing that matters to me: to have my say at last, to get it all down on these pages before it is too late. (CLT. 79)”.

...accentuated by her wandering through the city, and highlights the vagaries of memory and its resistance to transcribe the atrocity of the city. On many occasions, the narrator fails to tell sordid facts to the recipient of her letter, placing her testimony in the enigmatic sides of traumatic memory. Despite the disintegration of language and the evanescence of memory in the city, Anna manages to transcribe in a “partial” way the fight against the vanishing of the words: it is through writing that she conducts her struggle against loss

and oblivion¹³. Memory writing is transformed here into a testimonial writing that makes possible the externalization of speech and ensures the mental stability of the narrator “[...] if I don’t quickly write it down, my head will burst (CLT. 3)”, while echoing the narrator’s grieving writing following the sudden loss of his father in *The Invention of Solitude*¹⁵. Moreover, in *City of Glass*, Daniel Quinn, the detective writer disappears when the pages of the red diary in which he records his observations are depleted. As soon as he appropriates his diary, he is fascinated by its whiteness and seeks to control and fill it. By acquiring the red diary, he said:

“It would be helpful to have a separate place to record his thoughts, his observation, and his questions. In that way, perhaps, things might not get out of control. (CG. 46) ”.

Quinn finds refuge in a room without windows. Naked, he takes up residence and writes notes in his notebook diary. Considering that his destiny is inextricably linked to the notes of his diary, he observes with despair the pages gradually run. The more he advances in the transcript of his memorial narrative journeys, the more he accelerates the moment when the space of memory writing runs out. He begins to weigh his words with great care, adopting a minimalist writing that recalls the minimalism of the room. This is to write as

13. “[...] I know that I sometimes stray from the point, but unless I write down things as they occur to me, I feel I will lose them for good. My mind is not quite what it used to be. It is slower now, sluggish and less nimble, and to follow even the simplest thought very far exhausts me. This is how it begins, then, in spite of my efforts. The words come only when I think I won’t be able to find them anymore, at the moment I despair of ever bringing them out again. Each day brings the same struggle, the same blankness, the same desire to forget and then not to forget. When it begins, it is never anywhere but here, never anywhere but at this limit that the pencil begins to write. The story starts and stops, goes forward and then loses itself and between each word, what silences, what words escape and vanish, never to be seen again. (CLT. 38)”. ¹⁵ “the act of writing as an act of memory. (IS. 142)”.

clearly and economically as possible¹⁴. In this volume, the exhaustion of both the diary and Quinn is also accompanied by the gradual disappearance of urban environment. Retreating into the apartment of Stillman and renouncing his urban wandering, he expresses his own disappearance (CG. 156-7)¹⁵, which overlaps with that of the city. The changing city doubles the space of memory writing liable for disappearance, at the same time that the actor of this writing. Furthermore, the memory writing's urge in archival materials (diaries) underlies the speech of the three volumes of *The New York Trilogy*. The latter acquires the need for a testimony in charge of fighting against the evanescence of the urban environment. Quinn emphasizes the irresistible desire to write and register all the actions of Peter Stillman¹⁶. Just after the interview with Virginia Stillman and Stillman's son, Quinn is invaded by an irrepressible desire to buy a diary¹⁷¹⁸. In *City of Glass*, diary writing is an act revealing the intimate memory equation between writing, mnemonic action and fight against oblivion. Like the word "[to] remember (IS. 168-9)" (quoted 27 times), which defers death in *The Invention of Solitude*, the speech memory inscription in the red diary postpones death in *City of Glass*. However, the diary is gradually approaching the imminent end and Quinn confronts anxiety about the impossibility of writing his memory quest. Quinn has a premonition: the end of his

14. "At a certain point, he realized that the more he wrote, the sooner the time would come when he could no longer write anything. He began to weigh his words with great care, struggling to express himself as economically and clearly as possible. (CG. 156)".

15. "This period of growing darkness coincided with the dwindling of pages in the red notebook. [...] Quinn no longer had any interest in himself. [...] He remembered the moment of his birth and how he had been pulled gently from his mother's womb. He remembered the infinite kindness of the world and all the people he had ever loved. [...] Nevertheless, he tried to face the end of the red notebook with courage. He wondered if he had it in him to write without a pen, if he could learn to speak instead, filling the darkness with his voice, speaking the words into the air, into the walls, into the city, even if the light never came back again. (CG. 156-7)".

16. Unlike Anna's red notebook diary which transcribes fragments of memories with uncontrolled manner, Quinn's diary meticulously describes Stillman's actions and movements in a chronological linearity.

17. "Now that he had embarked on the Stillman case, he felt that a new notebook was in order. [...] For reasons that were never made clear to him, he felt an irresistible urge for a particular red notebook at the bottom. (CG.

18.)".

diary is inseparable from that of his own existence "to face the end of the red notebook with courage (CG. 156)". Confined in his room, this premonition does not prevent the development of a new way of storytelling. Quinn's comments (related to Stillman) are transformed into a memorial and existential meditation on the exhaustion of his diary. As the tales of Scheherazade (IS. 153) (incorporated in *The Invention of Solitude*), Quinn believes in the principle of the continuity of life, which is associated with that of the inherently memory writing: "as long as you go on speaking, you will not die (IS. 149)". He thus tries to postpone death through writing. The narrowing of his writing (Quinn writes always smaller) has preserved the pages of his diary. When the writing is facing the end of the blank page of the diary, the ghost of death is held progressively and Quinn disappears forever from the diegesis¹⁹. Nevertheless, Quinn's diary concludes with a hope that questions the progress of memory writing and the question of its future: "The last sentence of the red notebook reads: "What will happen where there are no more pages in the red notebook ?" (CG. 157)". Similarly, Blue in *Ghosts* systematically prepares reports on the actions (movements, specific days and hours) of Black on a diary. Upon exhaustion of his diary, he realizes his failure and the risk of his business. His observations are transformed into an existential meditation: "But you're nowhere, Blue. You've been lost from the first day. (G. 230)". In *The Locked Room*, the narrator also brings together the puzzle of Fanshawe's life from his red diary. However, in *The Locked Room*, the diary

19. Quinn reappears in other forms in later works.

does not escape the destruction²⁰ that reveals the aesthetic nihilism²¹ of Auster's memory writing. However, the depletion of the blank page that produces the disappearance of Quinn in *City of Glass* invites to question the status of the authorial instance. In *In The Country of Last Things* as in *City of Glass*, the diary remains the only material evidence of memorial narrative, while the authorial instance eventually disappear. Both diaries are brought to life by third persons in possession of the manuscript. The diary implies a multitude of interpretations, as in *In The Country of Last Things*, where the recipient of the diary and its transfer remain enigmatic. Moreover, in *The Locked Room*²², the anonymous narrator takes over Fanshawe manuscripts and uses them as a source of his memory writing. With these manuscripts, a memorial past reappears. Disappearing from New York, Fanshawe leaves behind a series of manuscripts, which he entrusted the fate to his childhood friend, the anonymous narrator, who will publish them and make it a bestseller. The cardboard boxes are delivered by Sophie Fanshawe, the wife of the disappeared writer to the anonymous narrator. These manuscripts (Fanshawe) bear the traces of the past, of a past existence and its relation to the "other", and allow the anonymous narrator to reveal an emblematic relationship with his childhood friend. Here, the past existence stimulates a creative inspiration that triggers memory writing²³.

20. "One by one, I tore the pages from the notebook, crumpled them in my hand, and dropped them into a trash bin on the platform. I came to the last page just as the train was pulling out. (LR. 371)".

21. "[...] aesthetics of the sublime can account for the discrepancy between art's sensible materiality and the law of the concept. Lyotard even maintains that this aesthetics [...] bear witness to the unrepresentable. He contrasts this negative task with the positivist nihilism of aesthetics as a discourse which, under the name of culture, delights in the ruined ideal of civilization. For Lyotard, the on-going combat between the aesthetic nihilism of the beautiful and art as witness to the sublime is exemplified by the reversion, in painting, to figuration or blending figurative motifs with abstract ones, as can be seen in certain trans-avant-gardist or neo-expressionistic works." Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2009, pp. 88-89. (First published in French as *Malaise dans l'esthétique*, Paris, Galilée, 2004).

22. The novel is an ode to typological variations in the space of the room which represents both a source of confinement and imagination.

23. "[...] yet it linked me with the rest of the world, and in its magic darkness there was the power to make things happen. (LR. 280)".

2. Memory Scripture and urban space

Gaston Bachelard defines the place of memory, or more precisely the concept of "topophilia"²⁴ as the product of combining images with memory spaces invested by human thought. According to Bachelard, individual memory of places is not a way to revive the past. It is more a space on which memory is fixed. The place would be a memory that is associated with a system of location (loci) and images that form a route. This can take the form of a particular journey and an initiatory or didactic ritual involving reminiscence. In the context of Auster's memory writing, the city combines the image to urban space's memory in which reminiscence is fixed. In addition, the city represents the evolving framework of the auster's character and shapes its falling movements and ascension. Indeed, the city is the essence of memorial narrative. The novel titles already put emphasis on the theme of space, its variations and its components: *City of Glass*, *The Locked Room*, *Moon Palace* and *In The Country of Last Things* emphasize this theme and each novel refers to a particular and changing space.

The West does not fail over to occupy the space of auster's memory writing as it stimulates the reactivation of American myths of freedom and Frontier conquest. However, New York is the frame of reference of memory writing in *The New York Trilogy* for example. Although *Mr. Vertigo* is located in St. Louis and *The Music of Chance* begins in Boston, New York remains the unquestionably privileged urban space for mnemonic action. *City of Glass*, *Ghosts*, *Moon Palace* and *Leviathan* also have the backdrop of New York City. However, *The Music of Chance* revives for its part the American myth of

24. Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, Paris, Quadrige/PUF, 2004 [1961].

the “Open Road”²⁵ pervasive among North American writers (Jack Kerouac and Don DeLillo) for whom other cities like Los Angeles or California revive a bygone American dream. In *The Music of Chance*, the geographic wandering of Nashe and Pozzi through the US territory contributes to building their existential and memorial journey thereby reactivating the myth of freedom²⁶. Nashe’s memory writing impregnates his journeys in the US territory, when he was traveling by car across the US roads. Let us now analyze how memory writing triggers in the urban space. Indeed, the city as an artifact conditions the existential and memorial journey of the auster’s character and marks the first outlines of his memorial quest. Urban space, a crossing point between multiple existences of the auster’s character, is an ideal space to divine providence and experiences of otherness. Although the city is portrayed as an oppressive and engulfing environment, it serves as a background for mnemonic action initiated by mental, memorial and geographical wandering of the auster’s character. However, the city is a space folded on itself and gradually transforms into a place of loss and violent austerity. The city is assimilated to a dead end place with except for an existence conjugated in the past. Despite the symbolic opening represented by the city, it remains, as we shall see, a space of confinement and personal inner quest. Moreover, the urban space is part of a “nowhere” that causes the dislocation of a free and harmonious space. The description of urban space is associated to emptiness and non-representation of place. In addition, the city is often obscured by memorial

25. “The trope of dropping out and taking to the open road is a further point of continuity [...] in the Beat generation. Since a literary model of aimless, bohemian wanderings already exists [...] fantasies of escape, mocking the naive belief that Kerouac held a secret alternative to the bruising, dull realities of everyday life [...]. In Don DeLillo’s *Americana* (1971), David Bell - who, like John Johnson, works in the entertainment industry - attempts a journey ‘into the depths of America, wilderness dream of all poets.’ Andrew Tate, *Douglas Coupland*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 124.

26. “Little by little, he had fallen in love with this new life of freedom and irresponsibility, and once that happened, there were no longer any reasons to stop. (MC. 11)”.

narrative that rarely describes it. The pervasive images of the urban setting contribute to the reminiscence and not to a detailed description of the city. The displacement of the visual experience (non-description of places) for the benefit of mnemonic action remains the product of the disruption of language contract between signifier and signified and the collapse of the precarious ground on which this mode of representation stands.

Nevertheless, the profusion of signs that Auster’s character must apprehend gives the city a specific language meaning, since it appears from the description of mental and memorial journeys of characters. We can mention the case of the “Tower of Babel (CG. 53)” in *City of Glass*. This inscribes the memorial and identity quest of Quinn in his journeys through the city, referring to the symbolic meanings that arouse and allows these journeys. In this context, the Auster’s filmic work also reflects this movement characterized by a double register of “ascention and descent”²⁷ in the urban emptiness. The emptiness of urban landscape is illustrated in both films, *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face*²⁸. Indeed, *Smoke* transcribes the fluctuations between the protagonist’s fall and ascent, in a space that is limited to the tobacco Office of Auggey Wren in Brooklyn. The protagonists are lost in the city trying to escape the urban “nowhere”. Similarly, *Brooklyn Boogie* is an ode to the modern urban space in New York City and Brooklyn.

3. Memory writing and hostile urban space:

In *The New York Trilogy*, there is an attempt to control the space by a language

27. “In *Smoke* we see a series of human ups and downs, all related to Auggey Wren’s tobacco shop in Brooklyn.” N. Caleffi, *Paul Auster’s Urban Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 3.

28. Both films *Smoke* and *Blue in the Face* (1995) renamed in French *Brooklyn Boogie* written by Paul Auster and co-directed by Wayne Wang, witness the beginning of the cinematic experience of the American writer.

configuration particular to memory writing (Tower of Babel for example (CG. 53))²⁹.

However, space defies any attempt to control, the “nowhere” by splintering the limits. In this context, urban space can both trigger the memorial writing and the identity crisis of the auster’s character. Indeed, *The New York Trilogy* is assimilated to a travel narrative. The theme of wandering is accentuated by implicit and explicit references to fictional travel narrative. These are suggested by the presence of Moby Dick (CG. 63), Arthur Gordon Pym (CG. 85) Robinson Crusoe (CG. 40), Don Quixote (CG. 118), History of the World of Walter Raleigh (LR. 325), The Journeys of Cabeza de Vaca (LR. 325), Marco Polo’s Travels (CG. 6), The Arctic Adventure of Peter Freuchen (LR. 300), Neverland of Fanshawe (LR. 272)³¹, and many others. Nevertheless, it is important to note that *The New York Trilogy* is a vanishing space. The geography of space is often confused. The characters disappear from the unfamiliar area of the city, as they disappear from the memorial narrative (Daniel Quinn). In *The New York Trilogy*, space is at the same time the place where subjectivity is lost and the “locus” in which new subjectivities are reclaimed. The space of the city affect the character’s identity: it vanishes gradually and splits until fragmentation into a multiplicity of shards. In *City of Glass*, for example, the endless space of the city creates an irrefutable and difficult-to-control movement. In this space, the self permeates the universe of the changing city according to a particular spatial configuration witnessing the “turbulence and bisecting evolutions”³⁰. Each of Auster’s characters is confronted to the progressive loss of identity

29. “In other words, the Tower of Babel stands as the last image before the beginning of the world. (CG. 53)”.³¹ Neverland is the fictional biography of Fanshawe: “We were, and as things turned out, perhaps even more than Stuart had imagined. *Neverland* was accepted later that month, with an option on the other books as well. (LR. 272)”.

30. (« turbulences et des évolutions bifurquantes »). C. Grandjeat, *Le hasard et la nécessité dans l’œuvre de Paul Auster*, op. cit., p. 154.

until disappearance. Walter, in *Mr. Vertigo*, changes identity. At the end of the novel, the space of the city drowns him into violence, making him regain his animality adapted to his new environment. Similarly, towards the end of *City of Glass*, Quinn becomes an “other” immersing himself in the menacing environment of the oppressive city. Driven by an “invisible hand of modern nothingness”³¹, Daniel Quinn walks across the lost spaces of urban environment. Through a duplicity effect and taking on the appearance of private detectives, he becomes the fleeing man he is currently tracking the traces (Stillman Father). The failure of his quest and his vain wanderings marginalize and exclude him from the city. The latter is characterized by a confusing reality in which space suffocates the subject. To avoid the oppressive city space that swallows him, Quinn is forced to invent another linguistic reality for countering the alienation exerted on him by urban environment. It is the quest for traces of Stillman in the streets of New York that leads to map out the pathway of “The Tower of Babel (CG. 53)”. While considering the city as a physical and a moral custodial universe, Quinn gradually sinks in Manhattan and is carried away by this hostile environment that accompanies his identity and memory-quest. Neglecting his existence, he tracks the footsteps of his double (Stillman) to the borders of the city. His urban wandering draws this symbolic trajectory (The Tower of Babel (CG. 53)) and triggers a mental wandering halfway between an individual memory related to his own childhood and an American collective memory related to the first urban buildings in New York. However, he gradually surrenders to the alienation produced by urban space, to achieve the ultimate annihilation which coincides with his setting up in a bare and a minimalist room, but allowing him to watch the apartment of Stillman, who swallows

31. “He has walked the main city avenue [...] as if pushed by the invisible hand of modern nothingness, he spontaneously turns into the man he is trailing.” N. Caleffi, *Paul Auster’s Urban Nothingness*, op. cit., p. 3.

him by taking possession of his body. Space is here associated to a force that gradually destroys the self, absorbing him (the apartment of Stillman) gradually. At the end of his diary, Quinn will disappear forever and come back later in the form of onomastic references appearing throughout the Auster's memory writing. Similarly, the loss in the space of the city is characteristic of the erratic trajectory of the anonymous narrator of *The Locked Room*, third volume of *The New York Trilogy*. At the end of the volume, the anonymous narrator goes to Boston in pursuit of Fanshawe, the missing novelist. Like Quinn, the anonymous narrator of *The Locked Room* to the pursuit of his old childhood friend, tackles the failure of his quest in urban environment.

Similarly, the city in *Moon Palace* is characterized by arbitrariness and elusiveness. During his inner journey in order to rebuild his identity and memory pathway, the character (Fogg, Effing Barber) leads an erratic existence. The fleeting nature of urban environment will be quickly replaced by the western desert environment, and ends on the Pacific (Fogg). This erratic course is not linear but sprinkled by loss, extreme excesses and dislocation landmarks. The inability to establish a spatial reference, real or metaphorical, forces the character to get rid of any inheritance, as the experience of Fogg who separates from his books. Having lost his job, he is forced to gradually sell the books to survive in a logical of austerity. The city is opposed to any landmark permanence and goes against any material anchor in space. This anchoring prevents mobility and imposes a stagnation of the trajectory and destiny contrary to the novel's memory writing based on geographical and memorial wandering. In *Moon Palace*, identity process is placed under the sign of nomadism and perpetual motion that strengthen the cohesion of the subject

and the universe³². M.S Fogg follows the same identical process as Thomas Effing (his grandfather). The theme of the double and the repetition of the same³³ emerge here as a constant related to memorial speech. Effing and Fogg share the experience of retreat in a cave. The first in the vastness of the western desert territories. The second in a recent past in a cave in Central park. Similarly, in *In The Country of Last Things*, the books of the great library which is the only functional structure of the city are consumed by fire, thus confronting Anna to memory writing in her last refuge at The Woburn House. The city in the novel conveys an evil force and is anything but a protective space for the characters. Instead, it draws a model of oppression and alienation of the self, immersed in a ghostly city where humans disappear at the same speed as things. Space rejects Anna Blume who finds herself in a jungle city described as a source of suffocation and is characterized by the whitening of its landmarks. The attempt to Anna and her companions to flee the city through its battlements and walls separating the city from the desert and the sea remains unknown. The changing reality of the city raises questions that remain unanswered, which increases the information gap of the memorial narrative.

4. American Metropole and memorial writing: New York

The mnemonic action is a collective enterprise activated in man-made socialized places. According to Pierre Nora, there are places where “[...] the memory is selectively embodied and which, by the will of men and the work of centuries, remained as the most striking symbols”³⁴. These memorials are part of a long-term common sense, and set

32. “Now I was being plunged into a world of particulars. (MP. 121)”.

33. “It was [...] like following the route of an explorer from long ago. (MP. 22)”.

34. «Celebrations, emblems, monuments and commemorations, but also speeches, archives, dictionaries, and museums constitute these memory symbols.» (« Fêtes, emblèmes, monuments et commémorations, éloges, dictionnaires et musées constituent ces symboles de la mémoire. ») Pierre Nora (éd.), «La République », *Les Lieux de la mémoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984, p. VII. (My own translation).

themselves in a dynamic of traditional and ancient continuities. Indeed, the space of the city seems to be not only a framework for auster's memory writing but a place of memory. Despite the abundance of mobile trajectories related to the journeys of the auster's character, New York remains a stamping ground. The character drops anchor to new geographical journeys. Like the room, the matrix of memory writing, the city of New York³⁵ seems to be the geographic matrix of mnemonic action. It is in the room of 6 Varick Street (IS. 136) in Brooklyn, New York, that *The Invention of Solitude* has emerged. The writer's scenes of the past construct the major part of auster's memory writing and the characters seem to be imbued with the own American experience of the writer. In this context, it is useful to note that the auster's wandering character ends mostly in New York. As the title indicates, the three volumes of *The New York Trilogy* have New York as a frame of reference. These volumes trace the journey of three men in their respective quest for identity and memory landmarks they discover by chance. They engage all in a long process of physical and mental disidentification for an identity and a memorial rebirth. It is in this bewildering metropolis, often likened to a maze of signs, that the writer Daniel Quinn in *City of Glass*, Ghosts, the detective Blue and finally the anonymous narrator in *The Locked Room*, are immersed in the urban environment to conduct a detective investigation and discover the secret of the traces left by a missing character.

They adopt the (urban) space to merge completely with it. New York becomes their

35. It is important to emphasize here that New York is the first reference framework for the American writer. This place is associated with its own past. It is in this city that he grew up and is henceforth the environment in which he evolves. Brooklyn, where he still lives today, constitutes another stamping ground for auster's memory writing. In an interview, P. Auster declares to be inspired by an American reality which epicenter remains New York: "We live somewhere, and that place is in itself a major world to every individual. An artist, whoever writer respond to the environment where they live. In my books, I answer to the reality around me, an American reality" (« On habite quelque part et ce lieu constitue en soi un monde essentiel à chaque individu. Un artiste, un écrivain quiconque répondent à l'environnement où ils habitent. Dans mes livres, je réponds à la réalité qui m'entoure: une réalité américaine. ») G. de Cortanze, *La Solitude du Labyrinthe : Interviews with Paul Auster*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1997, p. 91. (My own translation).

only guide and imposes in return a logic of material dispossession which is taken to the extreme. Indeed, in *Ghosts*, the second volume of *The New York Trilogy* has New York as a backdrop. In this volume, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wakefield* is explicitly mentioned and used to create a mise en abyme's effect. Here, the experience of urban space is undertaken through the quest of collective memory. The inexplicable absence of Wakefield (whose novel bears the name) becomes the paradigm of the self's existence in *Ghosts*. We recall that under the pretext of making a short business trip, Wakefield went into exile without any reason for twenty years. Like the latter, Blue gradually separates from his inner self and dissolves in the urban mass leading an erratic existence. Moreover, in *Moon Palace*, Fogg's urban wanderings in the streets of New York inspires his meditations and his memorial wanderings allowing a meticulous introspection through which he discovers his origins and rebuilds his individual memory. M.S Fogg left Chicago to begin his initiatory and memorial journey in New York and work with Effing (his grandfather). The New York space also provides the framework to Fogg's journey. Here, urban space accelerates the fall of the character who has no desire to act on his fate. Instead, he lets himself progressively engulf by the city. After finding refuge in his room, thinking that he could prevent his imminent fall, he is quickly evicted from his apartment for lack of financial means. He turns into a homeless wandering the streets of New York, before finding shelter in the artificial jungle of Central Park. Fogg's refuge in the city which initially engulfed him, becomes a place of rebirth (in Central Park), and opens the way for a second existence³⁶. Effing's memorial narratives, inscribed retrospectively

in his New York apartment, make discover to Fogg a whole aspect of the American past:

36. Saved by his two friends, Kitty and Zimmer, he found shelter under the roof of Thomas Effing who employs him as a secretary. Fogg reads to the blind man novel's passages and writes his obituary.

the West, the desert and the first natives of America. These places open the space of the Effing's apartment and make possible to rebuild a deficient collective memory (the memory of the first peoples of America). The enclosed space of the apartment, symbol of interiority³⁷, opens as Effing's memorial narrative progresses. His stories triggered in him an abundance of desert landscape images and stimulate his imagination. Effing's narrative is the story of an initiation to memorial journey, transcending the walls of the New York apartment, crossing the desert and the American founding myths. However, the city of New York as it appears in *Moon Palace* remains an undefined place, devoid of any specific geographic marker³⁸. While New York is the favorite place of Auster's memory writing, other places go through it. In *Mr. Vertigo* for example, the initiatory journey of the young Walter Rawley begins to Missouri, where he was discovered by the rabbi Master Yehudi. This takes him to his farm in Kansas where he learned his method of physical and symbolic levitation.

5. New York Jungle (Central Park) and reactivation of American West myth

In *Moon Palace*, the park's area is opposed to confinement that represents the space of the city itself. With all and for all in a backpack and some personal effects, Fogg's erratic existence following his expulsion from his apartment leads him in the South of

the city, where he finds refuge in Central Park³⁹. Although the urban jungle is at the heart of the city, it breaks with the outside and prison-like world and urban confinement and allows the narrator to go beyond the walls of the park: "I found myself [...] absently running my hand along the stone wall that divides the park from the street. I looked over the wall, saw the immense, uninhabited park, and realized that nothing better was going to present itself to me at that hour. (MP. 55)." Central Park offers an opening that allows Fogg to escape the suffocating atmosphere of urban environment. In addition, the New York artificial jungle, "a man-made natural world (MP. 62)", represents a source of peace, as it protects Fogg from the violence of the city. The peaceful nature of the New York jungle is similar to a haven that gives to Fogg the freedom to initiate his memorial quest. Fogg transforms the park into an observation space which is likely to mental and memorial escape. The park offers the possibility of geographical wandering that multiplies to infinity. This in turn triggers mental and memorial wanderings allowing the self (Fogg) to retreat into a deep state of loneliness⁴². The "homelessness" of Fogg, first wandering the streets of New York before striding across the soothing space of Central Park, offers the possibility of a creative solitude: separation from the world is undertaken to achieve a rebirth journey. Furthermore, the symbolism of the park refers to the nature and convenes the American transcendentalist literature of Henry David Thoreau, posing in his novels the premises of an American collective memory. Thoreau refers to nature as

37 "In the park, I did not have to carry around this burden of self-consciousness. It gave me a threshold, a boundary, a way to distinguish between the inside and the outside. If the streets forced me to see myself as others saw me, the park gave me a chance to return to my inner life, to hold on to myself purely in terms of what was happening inside me. (MP. 57)".

38. "This was New York, but it had nothing to do with the New York I had always known. It was devoid of associations, a place that could have been anywhere. (MP. 56)".

39. "At about eleven o'clock I found myself walking down fifth Avenue, absently running my hand along the stone wall that divides the park from the street. I looked over the wall, saw the immense, uninhabited park, and realized that nothing better was going to present itself to me at that hour. At the very worst, the ground would be soft in there, and I welcomed the thought of lying down on the grass, of being able to make my bed in a place where no one could see me. (MP. 55)". 42

"It became a sanctuary for me, a refuge of inwardness against the grinding demands of the streets. There were eight hundred and forty acres to roam in, and unlike the massive gridwork of buildings and towers that loomed outside the perimeter, the park offered me the possibility of solitude, of separating myself from the rest of the world. (MP. 56)".

a moral force. In *Walden*, the call to nature is a pattern to purify and elevate the internal nature of the individual⁴⁰. Despite the symbolism of the “artificial nature” of the park, it remains the source of Fogg’s memorial quest in urban areas because it promotes a deep exploration of his inner self and therefore reminiscence. In addition, in the heart of the New York city, the park is closely associated with the notion of refuge. It is a return to the womb, as suggested by the image of the matrix cave located in the heart of the park. If the pathway of Fogg duplicates Effing’s journey (his grandfather), the nature “created by man” seems to reproduce the experience of the return to origins accomplished by Effing during his west desert crossing. Central Park takes a mythical dimension which recalls the story given by Effing at the conquest of the US border and accentuates the similarity between vast deserts of the West and urban space: “There were eight hundred and forty acres to roam in (MP. 56)”. Geographic wandering in the park projects the New York city in a mythical dimension which questions, by the immensity of the covered territory, an American collective memory⁴¹. In addition, the park area also recalls the idyllic version of the vagabond in American picaresque literature⁴². Furthermore, the geographical wandering of Fogg in the New York jungle strengthens its concept of freedom, for his decision to live in the park emanates from his introspection will, his resistance to the

40. “[...] Thoreau writes startlingly, “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome” (W. 221). [...] The moral paradox on which *Walden* rests, or perhaps totters, is its appeal to *external* nature as a vehicle for cleansing and sublimating *internal* nature.” Robert Milder, *Hawthorne’s Habitations: A Literary Life*, U.S, Engelska, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 63.

41. “I liked wandering back and forth among these different sectors, for it allowed me to imagine that I was traveling over great distances, even as I remained within the boundaries of my miniature world. (MP. 63)”.

42. “Among the numerous American diaries produced in the first half of the eighteenth century, the works of William Byrd II, Edward Kimber, Sarah Kemble Knight, and John Lawson best exemplify the experiences of a privileged, perceptive, and witty observer on a journey through the back country, frontier settlements, and the wilderness. [...] They thus made the most of their southward or westward explorations in a style often akin to picaresque literature. The narrator was, however, no picaro recollecting sinful ups and downs in a stratified society, but a gentleman or a lady attentive to the manners of fellow colonists or Native Americans. [...] In such cases the routes through towns, villages, and backwoods led no farther west than the Appalachian Mountains.

laws of the city and its willingness to fight against the conformity of the urban world. He refuses to blend in the mass and prefers voluntary exile in the “natural” area of the park. The solipsistic experience of the park is oppressive and reminiscent of the suffocating room in *The Invention of Solitude*. The transition from the room to the park in the case of *Moon Palace* reveals a new approach of loneliness. That of a loneliness lived in the midst of the crowd, which requires a self-sufficient existence, introversion and dislocation of the subject. However, as the memorial narrative of the desert’s exploration formulated by Effing, Central Park is not immune to night terrors betraying the precariousness of the place. The park also exercises its power of repression and confinement. As the Western desert area is for Effing, the park is an alienating space for Fogg and produces a mirror effect between the experiences of the two men. Like the getting closer of death in the Effing’s cave lost in the desert, the space of the park threatens Fogg’s life: death, is pervasive, lurking around the urban maze. The similarity between the two erratic lives (that of Effing and Fogg) also doubles their memorial and generational transmission quest. Adventure in the New York jungle creates a dark image of it. The area of the park, originally described as a haven of peace (“inner colloquies (MP. 61)”) ⁴⁶ turns out into a ghostly place. The terrifying misadventures experienced by Fogg in the darkness of the night brands a separation from the peaceful existence described in resonance with the American Transcendentalists texts. The reactivation of the vagabond myth in the immensity of nature is opposed to the area of the artificial nature of the park that eventually engulf the self, revealing, behind its idyllic side, a hidden side made of nightmarish realities:

“One night, a gang of kids chased me across Sheep’s Meadow, and the only thing that saved me was that one of them fell and twisted his ankle. Another

time, a belligerent drunk threatened me with a broken beer bottle.

Those were close calls, but the most terrifying moment came on a cloudy night toward the end. (MP. 64) [...]. [A] shadowy figure rose up and pointed [...] a gun in my direction. (MP. 65)”. monumental bursts – screeching battalions of cats and dogs, pure wrath tumbling from the clouds (MP. 66)”.

Similarly, Fogg’s freedom in the space of Central Park « you were free to do what you liked (MP. 57)” is also a false freedom. The illusion of freedom lived in the Park is denounced by Zimmer and Kitty Wu, who put an end to the wanderings of Fogg giving him shelter. Fogg left the cave when he completes his identity and memory journey. The end of wandering in the New York jungle could probably suggest the impossibility of reactivating the myth of freedom in the space of the city. This is described from the outset as a monster, a “biblical behemoth (MP. 235)”⁴³, which swallows the subject, proving that freedom and city are two antagonistic entities. Freedom is indeed elsewhere in Central Park, this nature created by man. This artificial nature follows the pattern of hostility of the urban environment that surrounds the park. However, it is only by meeting Effing that Fogg reactivates the myth of freedom in the memorial speech. Fogg reactivates the American past of the conquest of vast spaces and overcomes the boundaries of urban environment. Thus, the myth of freedom⁴⁴ is reactivated by a movement of expansion driven by imagination and mnemonic action. This raises the traces of a past linked

to a subsidiary symbolic of transmission (memorial and generational: Thomas Effing is Fogg’s grandfather). The journey in both opened and closed spaces triggers Auster’s memory writing and arouses the construction of identity and memorial quest.

43. “Sitting in repose, with his bald behemoth’s head jutting from the folds of his massive neck, there was a legendary quality about him, a thing that struck me as both obscene and tragic. (MP. 235)”.

44. “More frequently than Thoreau, Melville tempered his view of the western frontier, the terrain of the future, with skepticism about such fictive promises of American liberty. [...] In fact, the American west frequently united Edenic possibility and demoniac desire, its mythology, created largely in advance of its history, provided a simultaneously geographical and psychological stage on which Americans dreams of liberty, prosperity, and world leadership could be enacted.” Eric J. Sundquist, *Empire and Slavery in American Literature: 1820-1865*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 19.

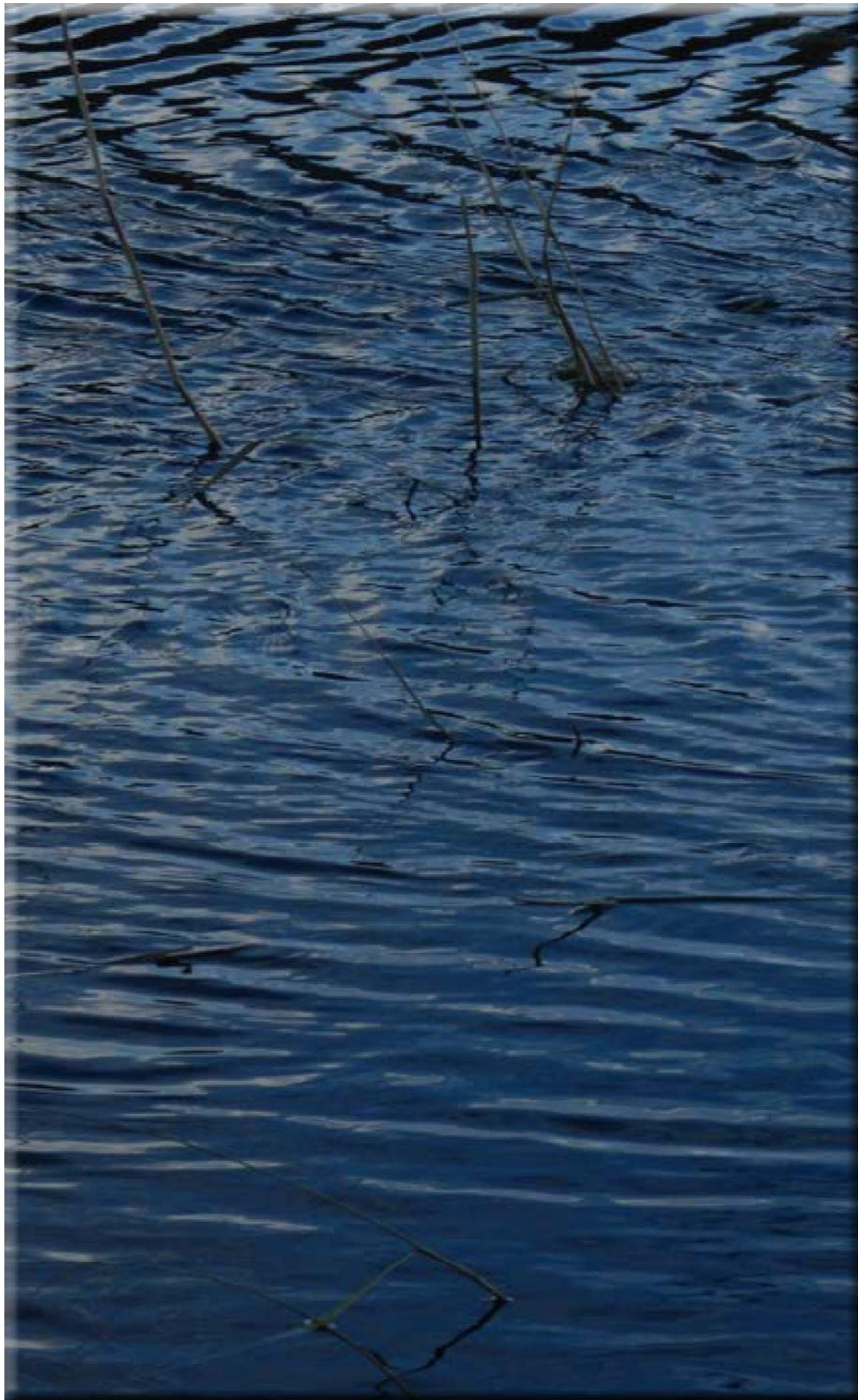


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

DITCH #21

A Critical Analysis of the Protagonists of Mulk Raj Anand's Novels

by Shashi Yadav, University Institute of Technology, Bhopal, India

All the characters of Mulk Raj Anand's novels are remarkable for intimate touches of fidelity to life and intense realism. He has written about the suffering and tragedy of the downtrodden and the poor, whom he has actually seen and known in his childhood and youth. Anand remarks:

The passions which have occupied me were, perhaps, my own dominant moods, and therefore all those characters may be said to be part of the same autobiography of the torments, ecstasies and "passionate consciousness" of the last three generations.¹

In his novels Mulk Raj Anand represents a departure from the tradition of Indian fiction in which the underdogs had not been allowed to enter the pages of the novel and act as protagonists. He allowed the poor to enter; his characters are from the lower strata of society, such as sweepers, peasants, plantation labourers, city drudges, sepoy and coolies, and he treats them with sympathy and respect, as human beings.

Anand's characters are both types and individuals. In portraying major characters like Bakha, Munoo, Gangu, Lalu, Nur, Ananta, Gauri and Krishan, he skilfully employs the techniques of the inwardly-working novelist, and aims at exploring the intense suffering of his characters' souls. Besides the exposition of the soul and psyche, he portrays vividly and realistically the contours of the human body. Anand covers a wide and comprehensive range of the Indian social and political scene over a period of more than thirty years, from maharaja to untouchable with equal vehemence and force. He attempts to introduce the

¹ Mulk Raj Anand, "How I became a Writer," *Mirror* (May, 1977), 14.

downtrodden to the realm of the Indian novel, which is an important and memorable contribution in the context of Indian literature in English. Anand's realism is revealed in his efforts to establish his point of view in a very determined and powerful manner; like George Bernard Shaw, Anand firmly believed that there could be no literature without any social purpose.

His interpretation of India is based on realism, as his protagonists are derived from real characters with whom he freely mixed for play and friendship, paying no attention to their caste, creed or colour. As Anand himself acknowledges in his preface to *Two Leaves and a Bud*,

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflections of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood. . . They were flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, and obsessed me in the way which certain human beings obsess an artist's soul. And I was doing no more than a writer does when he seeks to interpret the truth from the realities of his life.²

One of the social concerns that frequently recurs in Anand's novels is the inequality between the wealthy and the poor. He expresses deep sorrow and sympathy for the unfortunate poor and their inability to cope with circumstances. He poses these problems of social inequality at large, and also attempts to seek resolutions to social conflicts. The resolutions he proposes are the empowerment of the weak and the development of social consciousness and awareness for social growth; his novels also aim at wiping away social barriers, orthodoxy, caste and communalism. Anand's themes depict the complex social structure of society, which he perceives is devoid of humanity.

Anand's first novel, *Untouchable*, deals in vivid artistic terms with the problem of caste in general and untouchability in particular, and its power is evident on every page of the novel. *Untouchable* lays bare the humiliating experience of Bakha, who challenges the Brahminical attitudes of high-caste people. Anand's biting satire against the high caste and the rich exposes their double standards; he says that caste is a crime against humanity and that everyone who believes in human dignity should actively try to eliminate it. He describes an inauspicious day in the life of the low-caste Bakha, who is made to feel that he is, as a sweeper's son, untouchable. The workaholic and dutiful Bakha thus faces the abuses of society because of his low origin; the feeling of untouchability is so deep-rooted in his soul that it prevents him from taking any action against the sexual abuse of his sister Sohini. But all these insults and injuries strengthen Bakha's body and stiffen his soul. He eventually confronts all the abuses and in the end comes through as a survivor.

Two Leaves and a Bud is mainly directed at the evils of the class system, which Anand considers an even greater evil than caste. A low-caste man can enjoy a lot of freedom in modern times as long as he has money, but even a high-caste man who is not wealthy may find himself in near-slavery. The tragedy of Munoo in *Coolie*, the horrible exploitation of Gangu and the ill-treatment of his daughter Leila in *Two Leaves and a Bud* amplify this truth. *Coolie* is another novel of the poor and downtrodden, offering readers a chance to experience the unending pain, suffering and prolonged struggle of the poor. The misery of poverty is presented through an orphan boy, which particularly strikes a deep chord of sorrow in the reader; through his character Munoo, Anand represents those numberless Indian children whose childhood is lost in endless physical labour. Love, care and fun are strange words for them.

The plot of *Coolie* is episodic in character, a chain of incidents joined together but keeping Munoo as its central figure. However, Anand's portrayal of English characters in the novel, particularly in the Bombay chapter, is not realistic. Here Anand's zeal for emphasising the picture of exploitation damages, to some extent, his art and vision. The final part of the novel, for example, where the Shimla scene is introduced by the hackneyed device of accident, is poor. This part of the novel gives the impression of being

² Mulk Raj Anand, *Two Leaves and a Bud* (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1983), 2.

sketchy and hasty; as such it is slight and unconvincing, although the overall impression one gets of this novel is that it is a sensitive and impressive work. Despite these faults, it remarkably succeeds in rousing our human feelings for the poor and oppressed, and it possesses enough energy and fire to kindle our souls to work for a society where compassion and kindness would be an unwritten law. K. R. S. Iyengar praises *Coolie* and calls it “a prose epic of modern India.”³

In *Two Leaves and a Bud* Anand turns his wrath on British tea plantation owners and Indian merchants for their inhumane treatment of labourers, who are overworked and underpaid. The events are narrated in a tightly-structured manner, and the novel is a powerful crusade against imperialism and capitalistic exploitation. As a social critic Anand is extremely sensitive to the evils of capitalism and imperialism, but his open criticism of the British is very harsh and, unfortunately, a bit unconvincing. In the novel, of all the English characters the most inartistically created is the author’s own mouthpiece, Dr. John De La Havre, whose frequent homilies concerning imperialism and capitalism and his very role in the novel lack credibility. It seems that there is too much of Mulk Raj Anand in the character of the doctor. André Gide’s advice in this regard was “present ideas, except in terms of temperaments and characters,”⁴ but Anand failed to pay any heed to this good advice when writing *Two Leaves and a Bud*, and because of this the artistic and social strands do not merge well in this novel.

In those novels which are better-known as Anand’s “mature” novels, he is preoccupied in tracing out the internecine struggle between exploiter and exploited. Anand pleads in *The Big Heart*, for example, that industrialisation should proceed with caution, but apart from this the novel has many other things to say such as advocating the removal of the caste system, capitalism and male chauvinism, as well as stressing a need to practice humanism as a religion. The author’s real-life applications help him to bring out properly the hero’s perfections and imperfections, and the supreme merit of the novel is its powerful and realistic characterisation of the hero Ananta and his beloved Janaki. This vital experience of the novel helps the reader to extenuate its only weakness, the polemical presentation

³ K. R. S. Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 267.

⁴ Cited in Miriam Allott, ed. *Novelists on the Novel* (London: Routledge, 1973), 104.

of social problems, and the theme of tradition versus modernity which forms the central conflict in the novel is convincingly portrayed. The death of Ananta in defence of the machine as well as society’s cruel character assassination of Janaki for not living the conventional life of a widow are the sins of tradition, and Anand’s social concern is evident in his direct castigation of tradition-bound society.

The Road is merely an amplification of the theme of *Untouchable*, but now viewed from a different angle and incisiveness. Bhikhu, like Bakha, is the victim-hero who is tried and tested by caste distinctions and discrimination. In this novel, however, art and ideas do not altogether mingle well; the main defect is the weak characterisation, and the protagonist Bhikhu fails to emerge convincingly as the hero. All the enthusiasm and energy is derived from another character, Dhooli Singh, who actually appears to suppress the character of Bhikhu. Further, the stage is crammed with the introduction of too many characters who divert the reader’s attention from the central character. The author’s gratuitous introduction of a love motif also destroys the authenticity of the novel. In spite of these defects, however, *The Road* has a powerful focus, and it points out that the untouchables, tortured and condemned for centuries, deserve a better deal, and this is possible only if people give up the old belief in caste and karma and spread the message of love and tenderness towards one and all, irrespective of the difference of caste, creed and colour.

In *The Death of a Hero* Anand once again turns his attention to Indian politics, dealing with the post-independence era of unbridled violence and its resulting volcanic outburst of social conflict. The protagonist of this novel is a Christ-like figure through whom Anand portrays the selfless heroism and sacrifice of millions of heroes like Maqbool. The principal concern of this novel is religious fanaticism and its impact on society. In *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* Anand explores the post-independence era from a different angle, this time the decadence of the Indian princely states. The Prince himself is an interesting character because he typifies the author’s own life and personality. Anand seems to have written this novel mainly to achieve a personal catharsis through the creation of a hero broken by the destructive force of love.

Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts, in which Anand presents the last days of Nur, an unemployed M.A. who has been suffering from consumption, is, as the author rightly calls it, a long story. The protagonist's childhood, his college life, his inability to get a suitable job and his married life with Iqbal are all presented as passing scenes before the eyes of the dying young man, and the novel closes with his death. It reveals Anand's keen observation of modern-day Muslim society in India, and its greatness lies in its deep and authentic search for illumination, in its lyricism and its appealing theme, which brings out vividly the dangers of having an obsolete educational system. The most important aspect of this novel is pain, presented in a beautiful form which forces Nur to make his philosophical search into his past. The novel exposes those aspects of our education system which stand as major roadblocks to our national goals and prosperity. Nur symbolises the misery and misfortunes of millions of Indian youth who receive university education and remain thereafter unemployed or underemployed.

Anand's female characters are often very traditional and confined, since he considers them the apostles of the love, warmth and security that is home. Anand is saddened by the fact that the average Indian woman has only the stature of a slave, bound for the service of her heart and an instrument of fecundity. He has introduced in so many of his novels the theme of women's hardships with characters such as Janaki in *The Big Heart*, the suffering and widowed Maya in *The Village Trilogy*, who, being a landlord's daughter, faces many restraints, and Rukmani in *The Road*, whose marriage was delayed for want of money to provide a dowry. But in *Gauri* Anand gives women more of a voice to express their hitherto silent sufferings. Gauri, the heroine, becomes conscious of her individual talent and aware of her self-esteem; she defies traditional society and decides to live freely and fearlessly. Gauri's struggle for survival can be viewed as self-discovery and self-actualisation. Her character is drawn with expert strokes and her gradual initiation into defying the customary male domination is indeed an act of self-assertion. As Anand himself observed, "Gauri, who believed in the worship of her lord and master and wanted ultimately to conquer him with her devotion. . . [was] willing to wait like the Hindu wife and go patiently through everything."⁵ Anand used this novel as a medium for

making people sensitive to the ill-treatment of women. He also shows that unless women themselves come forward and fight for their rights nothing can be done. His greatest contribution towards the movement for the emancipation of women is *Gauri*, which projects the evils of male chauvinism and society's ambivalent approach with regard to women and inspires the Indian woman to face the challenge by courageously working for her emancipation, which alone can redeem Indian society and save it from sure destruction. As women are an intrinsic part of the human race and an integral part of the nation, Anand makes a touching appeal through *Gauri* for women's complete integration into society.

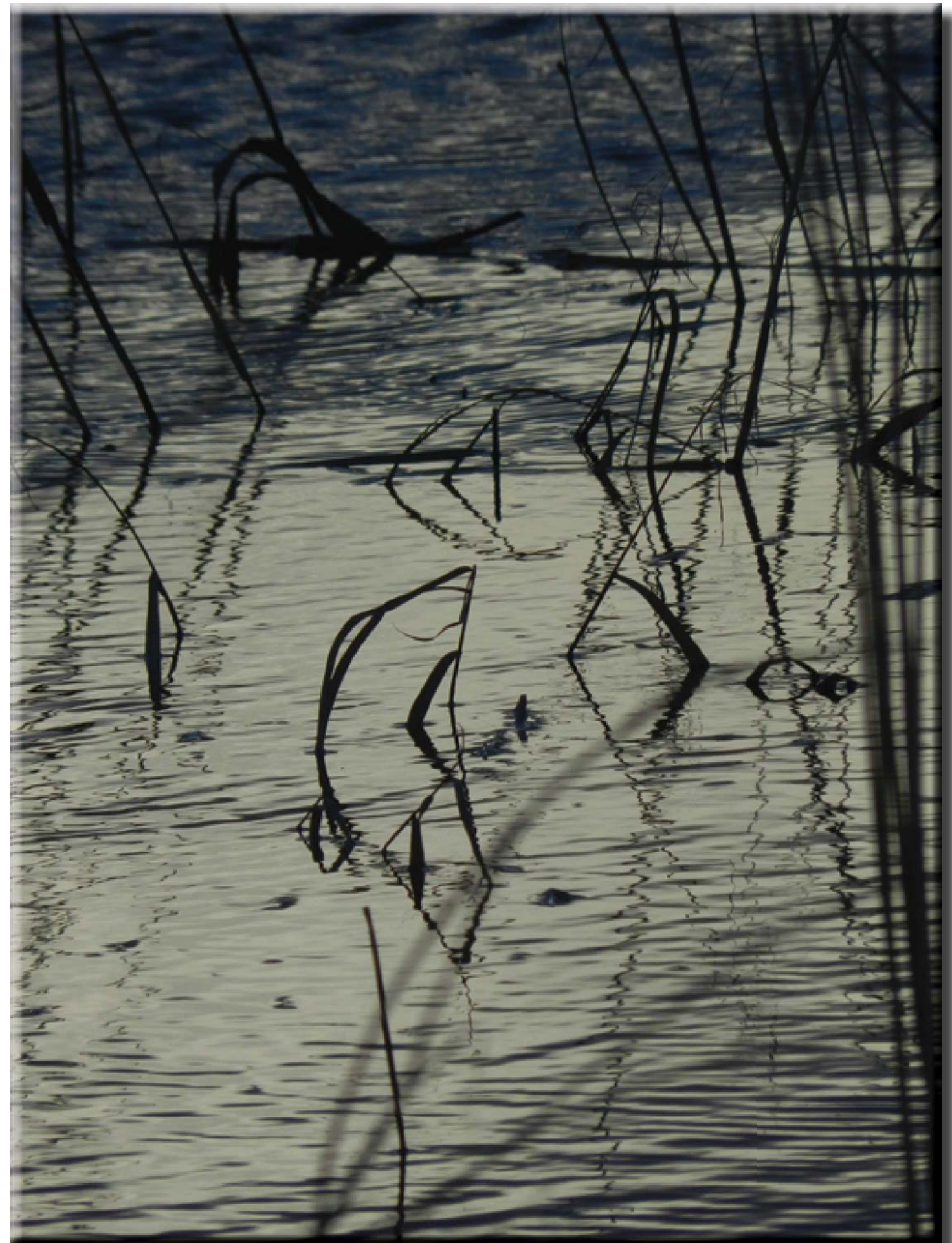
In a second trilogy (*The Village*, *Across the Black Waters*, and *The Sword and the Sickle*), Anand traces out the transformation of his hero, Lal Singh, from an irresponsible Sikh youth to a committed revolutionary. Lal Singh's ostracism is both religious and social, not only in the very act of defying the age-old religious sanctions he is born into but also from the society in which, as an outcast, he is condemned to live. He is later drafted into the British Indian Army and joins the war as a professional soldier, and his heart bleeds at the sight of all the death and destruction. His brief love-episode with Maya, wherein lies the redeeming feature of this otherwise sordid novel, is but a passing episode in the epic drama of pain and laceration. From Maya, Lal Singh gets an enlivening warmth in a world vitiated by caution, fear and resentment; in the third novel of the trilogy Anand concludes with a note of Lal's quest for self-realisation and self-actualisation.

Anand lived in an age which threatened the individual's sense of personal meaning in life, and he wrote autobiographical novels in order to secure that sense of self. These break the vise of reticence and overwhelm the reader with expressive emotional honesty in all four volumes, *Seven Summers*, *Morning Face*, *Confessions of a Lover* and *The Bubble*. His "confession" in these novels is secularised rather than sacramental; individualisation, not salvation, is his central preoccupation in these works, in which everything is subordinated to the acts of self-exploration and self-actualisation. The earlier novels may have an epic range, but their framework hindered the novelist from unlocking the secrets of his own heart and psyche.

⁵ Mulk Raj Anand, *The Old Woman and the Cow* (Bombay: Kutub-Popular, 1960), 102.

The struggle of the individual becomes more significant in these novels. Anand adopts the first person narrative, and in *Morning Face*, for example, he demonstrates that personal experiences can be transformed to another plane of understanding. Anand may be criticised for placing too much emphasis on the body in *The Bubble*, but he does not like to see it as merely a prison or an isolated lump of flesh and bone, rather as a living link with the world, more of a liberator than a filter; if love is an outflow of surplus energy it has something to do with the vital needs of the body. In most of his novels, from *Untouchable* to *The Bubble*, man is a central figure. All Anand's novels are about responsibility, involvement of creative tension and its resolution, profound humanism and moral values. He writes with the aim of helping to raise the untouchables, the peasants and the coolies to human dignity. Anand's novels show a happy blend of idealistic revolutionary socialism with a comprehensive historical humanism which is rare in the contemporary Indian novel. Anand consistently attacks hypocrisy, superstition, caste, and class prejudices, dealing with man as a social being with a moral purpose capable of self-development. His literary contributions map pre-independent and modern India, and universalise issues which concern every person, every community, and every country. He produces a tragic vision of life but also finds resolutions to the problems it presents, envisioning a world permeated with love and goodwill.

No other novelists of Mulk Raj Anand's time dared to present such a beautiful expression in their creations. It may therefore be concluded that Anand is, for the most part, very successful in depicting characters through which he seems to give importance to Indian culture and ethos. When he finds that Indian tradition is repressive, he seeks a way to alter it, and untouchability is one of the great examples of this type. Anand's heroes remain passive witnesses to all the social and psychological traumas heaped upon them by soulless social custom. Mulk Raj Anand's characterisation is not meant for characterisation only; it is meant to give a new turn or direction to Indian society.



“You’re alive!”: Reanimation and Remake in Tim

Burton’s *Frankenweenie*

by Antonio Sanna, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy

In his recent black and white film *Frankenweenie* visionary director Tim Burton has revived one of his first works and has tailored it together with several twentieth-century classic films of Hollywood. The 2012 feature-length film is a remake of the twenty-seven-minute short he directed in 1984 for Disney, which should have been screened as a companion to a re-release of *Pinocchio*. After some negative responses at the early screenings by the board of classification and some parents who considered the film as too dark and violent for children (Mayo 21), the short was shelved and reached viewers and fans of Burton’s work only through the DVD extras of *Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993). Rather than an adaptation like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) or a remake of a previous film like *Planet of the Apes* (2001), *Frankenweenie* is therefore an “autoremake”, or reworking by a director of his/her own material (Forrester and Koos 21). Following the tradition of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock (whose 1956 *The Man Who Knew Too Much* is a remake of the 1934 film of the same name), Burton not only offers a repetition of cinematic techniques such as sequences, transitions and individual shots, but also re-produces the precursor film’s thematic concerns and syntactic elements such as plot

structure and narrative units. This is a frequent practice in both older and contemporary cinema, especially if we consider, as Jennifer Forrester and Leonard R. Koos suggest, that “a master’s revisiting of old material falls into established art and literary world practices, with the latest edition welcoming comparison not only with the earlier effort, but with the artist’s entire oeuvre” (22).

Burton thus re-animates his own product and finally presents it to the general public. Reanimation has, in this case, a double meaning, particularly if we consider the film’s use of stop motion, a technique that allows inanimate objects to come to life and is therefore “very tied to *Frankenstein*”, as Burton himself has declared (252). In a certain way, with this film Burton takes the place of the Doctor from Mary Shelley’s 1818 novel, although he excludes from the main narrative the ethical and social implications regarding the reanimation of dead bodies as well as the thematic concern about the opposition between nature and science. Indeed, as was the case of the original short, “there is no sermonizing attached to young Victor Frankenstein’s re-animation of his dog, no trace of ‘things men should leave alone’, no moral about ‘tampering in God’s domain’” (Hanke 88).

The story depicts young filmmaker Victor Frankenstein (voice of Charlie Tahan), who lives with his distracted parents and his affectionate bull terrier Sparky in the suburban area of New Holland in a mid-70s America. After a tragic accident in which Sparky is run over and killed by a car, a heartbroken Victor decides to resuscitate his pet by putting into practice his new Science Professor’s (voiced by Martin Landau) lesson on the use of electricity on dead frogs. In a homage/parody of Shelley’s novel as much as of its cinematic adaptations from James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) and Terence Fisher’s

The Curse of Frankenstein (1957) to more recent productions such as Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), Victor digs up Sparky's corpse and reanimates it after recreating an elaborate laboratory in his attic. Complications for the local community arise when the protagonist's jealous classmates discover about the reanimation process and attempt the experiment themselves with their own dead pets, generating a series of monstrous creatures that terrorize the small town. It is the intelligent Victor who finally manages to defeat the monsters haunting the town fair thanks to the help of the undead (but never frightening) Sparky. Particularly hilarious is the depiction of Victor's classmates, a very heterogeneous group, which includes the Weird Girl (a reminder of Luna Lovegood in the Harry Potter series) and Nasson, who bears a striking resemblance to Boris Karloff, the actor who played the creature in Whale's *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) as well as the eponymous villain in Karl Freund's *The Mummy* (1932).

Undoubtedly, this is one of the director's most personal works, as Berardinelli has affirmed. Firstly, the story deals with themes that are certainly most dear to Burton: the exploration of life and death, the alienation of the central characters (especially, youthful characters) and the fragmentation of the body. Furthermore, Burton continually quotes his own previous works. Indeed, *Frankenweenie* utilizes many of the elements such as graveyards, full moons, dry trees (Sanna 182) and characters patterned with black and white stripes that helped to establish and consolidate the fame of the director, to shape his signature and unique visual style. Secondly, the presence and appearance of Mr. Rzykruski (an addition to the original short) directly quotes the American director's first six-minute short *Vincent* (1980), the story of a somewhat disturbed seven-year boy who fantasizes to

be actor Vincent Price (1911-1993) – the idol of young and teenage Burton and actual narrator of the short. Finally, the film further demonstrates the fondness for dogs that Burton extensively manifested throughout his career, from his contributed designs to the animated episode of Steven Spielberg's television series *Amazing Stories* entitled "Family Dog" (1986) to *Beetlejuice* (1988), *Mars Attack!* (1996) and *Corpse Bride* (2005). Such a fondness has been confirmed by the director's own words: "I had several dogs when I was a kid. That's always an important relationship. I think for most kids it's kind of your first relationship. And it's usually the best, it's the purest in a way" (258).

Burton's personal involvement with the narrative is also evident in his treatment of suburban life. The façade of normality typical of the colourless and suppressing suburban milieu (the director himself was raised in Burbank, California) crumbles quite soon after the reanimated Sparky, "the different" – what in Gothic fiction is considered as the threatening "Other" – is discovered. Precisely as is the case of the title character in *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the outsider is misperceived as monstrous by the dull and conservative inhabitants of suburbia. The unorthodox disrupts the tranquillity of such a (literally) monochrome life and is soon persecuted in a sort of witch hunt by a mob as unreasonable as that depicted in Whale's *Frankenstein* (a film that Burton has repeatedly quoted throughout his career through the image of a burning windmill).

Uncountable allusions are made to other films as well, from William Dieterle's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1939) and Noriaki Yuasa's *Gamera* (1965) to Joe Dante's *Gremlins* (1984) and Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) in what Amy Biancolli has properly defined as an example of "pure, retro-cinematic joy". *Frankenweenie* is therefore

a remake in the sense attributed to the term by John Frow, who considers such films as “remaking also the conventions of the genre to which they belong (qtd. in Verevis 63). Most unexpectedly and ingeniously, the cameo by Christopher Lee – present in all of Burton’s recent films, even though only through his voice as in *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) – is actually an extract from Terence Fisher’s Hammer film *Dracula* (1958), which presents the only live action sequence of the whole film.

According to Tasha Robinson, the scenes that have been added to the original 1984 story present a “moderate, restrained pace and volume” whereas Stephanie Zacharek considers them “noisy and boisterous [. . .] an affront to the gentle intimacy of Burton’s original idea”. We could however affirm that they definitely enrich the original discursive manifestation by creating a more coherent and compelling story, which is certainly richer in human emotions. According to Lou Lumenick, instead, this film represents the director’s return to “ghoulish basics”, especially after previous overproduced works such as *Dark Shadows* (2012). However, *Frankenweenie* definitely lacks the expressionist use of distortion and exaggeration that is evident in many of the director’s films, such as in the afterlife scenes in *Beetlejuice*, in the aggressive architecture of Gotham City in *Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992) and in the creepy eighteenth-century village in *Sleepy Hollow* (1999). Perhaps this is not one of the best films in the director’s oeuvre, especially if we compare it to the highly imaginative *Pee Wee’s Big Adventure* (1985), the sentimental *Big Fish* (2003) or the dark and tragic *Sweeney Todd* (2008), but it is full of merits. For instance, the animation is impeccable and viewers never lack the realism of CGI effects, even though, as Liam Lacey has evidenced, “Burton’s characters resemble insects as much

as humans, with oversized eyeballs, spidery limbs and, often, ball-like bodies”. The stop-motion effects – initially pioneered by Willis O’ Brien in *The Lost World* (1925) and *King Kong* (1933) and subsequently made popular by Ray Harryhausen’s work on films such as *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (1981) – are undoubtedly fluid and successful. Such a visual spectacle is all the more strengthened by the soundtrack created by Danny Elfman, who collaborated with Burton in all of his works except *Ed Wood* (1994). Elfman’s orchestral tracks perfectly alternate the sombre and sentimental tone of the piano and choral tracks supporting the touching scenes in which Sparky is dead to the fast-paced and sumptuous tracks (such as “Re-Animation”) that accompany the many glorious experiments. Noteworthy is the use of the organ in the track “Getting Ready” during the sequence of the cemetery in which the character of Nasson exhumes the mummified corpse of his pet Colossus with majestic eloquence.

Viewers cannot complain that this is a dark film. Although opinions are divided and some critics do not find this work suitable for children (Biancolli, Berardinelli), I agree with Robert Ebert’s and Joe Williams’ arguments that this is not a macabre film. Certainly, as Aurélien Ferenzci has noted about Burton’s work at large, “the extraordinary and the disturbing are never far part” (44). Nevertheless, *Frankenweenie* is mainly a fairy-tale story of love for one’s pet, a love that wants to surpass death. Such a thematic concern is often lightened by the director’s usual “mix of dark overtones with comic touches” (Page 22). As Connie Ogle has underlined, the film “blend[s] the macabre and the heartfelt in a perfect, if oddball, union”. The mixture of comedy and horror, obtained through

the frequent use of visual gags and verbal jokes, is in fact as powerful and convincing as in previous films by Burton and is particularly emphasized by the system of references to the Universal and Hammer horror films. Those spectators who recognize the explicit quotations – what Umberto Eco describes as the “intertextual dialogue” (qtd. in Verevis 23) – will certainly be enthusiastic about this work. The final result is a very sweet and moving story: all viewers will easily empathise with Victor, because of his personal experience of frustration at not being understood by his parents, because of his sense of alienation from the surrounding society, but, most importantly, because all of us have deeply cared for and loved a pet that will always have a place in our hearts.



Victor rejoices in the successful reanimation of Sparky. *Courtesy of Walt Disney Studios, 2012.*

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book reviews...

JOHN BUTLER

Kim Namcheon, *Scenes from the Enlightenment: A Novel of Manners*. Charles La Shure, Tr. Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2014

*The Old
and
The New*

This is the second book I have ever reviewed by an author who suffered execution for his writing, the first one being the Philippine writer José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*; Rizal faced a firing squad in 1896. Like Rizal before him, Kim Namcheon

(1911-1953) found himself and the results were, for on the wrong side of the Kim, ultimately tragic. It is authorities because of his rare to read a book written writings; in 1953, he was by a North Korean, but as "purged" by the new North the work was published in Korean government along 1939 it can hardly be termed with other former members a novel of the North, as of the Korean Artists Korea was still united, albeit Proletarian Federation, an under Japanese rule. The organisation to which Kim Japanese had moved into had belonged under the Korea insidiously, beginning Japanese occupation of in the 1890's when they Korea. He had already been engineered the assassination arrested by the Japanese of the nationalistic Queen twice, and the Federation Min and had tried to bully had been disbanded by King Kojong into ceding them quasi-colonialist power. The king responded by declaring himself emperor and making every effort to peacefully resist Japanese encroachment; he was eventually forced to abdicate, as was his rather weak son, Sunjong, and the masters changed, Korean Empire more or less

petered out when the latter abdicated in 1910, the year before Kim was born. He thus entered the world as Japan started to formally consolidate its power on his hapless country, and so, as Charles La Shure's introduction explains, "Kim spent most of his life as a citizen of the Japanese Empire, a native of a land that no longer existed."

The novel is about transition, and was originally entitled *Taeha*, which Professor La Shure tells us means "great river;" indeed, there are many references in the book to the River Biryu, which perhaps, as rivers often do, serves as a symbol of life. As Heraclitus famously pointed out, "you can never put your foot twice into the same river," and the Biryu flows inexorably on as the lives of the characters change, visually representing "the

author's desire to produce a family chronicle of grand scope," as professor La Shure writes, "not unlike a roman-fleuve." This may be a quibble, but when I hear the term 'roman-fleuve' I think of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a massive production of seven volumes and three thousand pages; *Scenes from the Enlightenment* is one volume and three hundred and fifty-two pages. What it does share with the roman-fleuve genre is that it spans a considerable amount of time and traces a transition in the social structure through the study of one or two families or groups. Perhaps Professor La Shure retitled the book based on some short stories which featured the same characters because he felt that it was closer to the "novel of manners" written by such familiar figures (to us) as Jane Austen, smaller

productions, but ones which feature generational and social shifts portrayed with a sometimes not-so-gentle irony.

Kim sets his story back in time, just before the fall of Sunjong's erstwhile empire; Kim does not tell us the exact year, but we know it was after the Russo-Japanese War (1905) and perhaps a few months before the formal end of Korea as an independent state in 1910. The changes undergone by the characters in the book had, in fact, been taking place for some time, and so the exact time-frame becomes less relevant than the nature of the social and ideological changes. Korea had been for centuries a country which followed a Confucian philosophy with its strict insistence on hierarchies and such ethical concepts as absolute filial piety from one generation

to another. Money was taking the place of family lineage and social status as a basis for power, which meant that the people on the margins perceived the possibilities that might be extended to them if they could achieve a more socially egalitarian system. Thus Kim presents readers with two opposing characters, Bak Rigyun, who claims aristocratic ancestry, and Bak Seonggwon, the self-made businessman, who ironically shares the same surname and claims the same ancestry, however distant. Bak Rigyun and his brother measure their worth in terms of what

their family once *was*; Bak Seonggwon, "a fearsome and ruthless moneylender," bases his on what he is *now*. Bak Seonggwon is known as "Assistant Curator Bak," which is described as "a respectful title," but Bak Rigyun scoffs that this "is just an empty title bought with money, a bought title!" Pitifully he tries to preserve the old family monument situated just outside the ironically-named Visiting Immortal Gate, "as it stood there awaiting its own demise—just like their hollow boasting that they were *yangban* [Korean nobility]," but that would take

money, which Bak Rigyun hasn't got. B a k Seonggwon, the modern man who yet rejoices in old family pretensions and titles which he cannot discard, d e m o n s t r a t e s a typical schizophrenia when his son gets married; he asks a "traditional" schoolmaster, Gu, to head up the groom's wedding procession, but he has one of the "enlightened" members of the community, his brother-in-law Choe Gwansul, serve as "groom's man." He is thus making some attempt to reconcile the old and new, but the result is hilarious; Gwansul

has a moustache which he likes to twirl and carries a "new-style cane," which he finds difficult to wield whilst riding on the traditional mule in the procession. He also refuses to wear "a respectable horsehair hat, like S c h o o l m a s t e r Gu," preferring a Western-style flat cap, sports "new-style glasses that rubbed his nose sore," as well as Western socks which some gawking children declare are "made of leather." The serious undertone to all this is that Bak Seonggyon, for all his modernity, cannot quite abandon Confucian customs and rituals,



Dano Festival in Korea today

nor can even he, with his economic clout, escape entirely from tradition; he needs that title, bought or not, to fully maintain his respect in the community. When he becomes Vice-President of the athletics meet at the school, which is part of the traditional Dano Festival still celebrated in Korea today, he regains that respect. But modern

life creeps in. Two boys cut their hair and comb it Western-style; the Japanese storekeeper imports box after box of exotic western goods, and when a bicycle appears in the village everyone wants to ride it, and some are content merely looking at it and marvelling.

The novel also contains a love-plot, which,

in contrast to the humorous treatment that Kim gives to the social aspects of the story, those which indeed make it a novel of manners, has a tragic outcome. Korean society during the time in which Kim's novel is set was very patriarchal, with women, especially younger ones, treated as mere chattels. This is not so say that they were

necessarily ill-treated on an individual basis (there are, at least, no wife-beaters in Kim's novel), but wealthier men have concubines, and those who own land or employ people seem to take upon themselves a Korean version of *droit de seigneur*, in which a social inferior's wife may be treated as fair game when the husband isn't around. This happens in the case of one of Bak Seonggyon's sons, although we are told that the woman, although little more than a mere servant, chafes at her arranged marriage. Kim allows the woman to express her misgivings both about her marriage and her "master's" son's advances, and the outcome is tragic.

Kim's novel gives readers a good idea of what it must have been like to live on the cusp of transition from a Confucian, almost feudal society to a modern

one, and how difficult it must have been for people to make compromises between the new and the old. The gently satirical passages poke fun at such things as hats and hair-styles, but these are outward expressions of something more profound and unsettling. Bicycles don't seem that big a matter for us now, but what must it have been like for people who had never seen one or who had never experienced riding one? Behind the hats, clothing and bicycles comes the whole mechanism of westernisation, and with the surface changes comes a shift in consciousness which will never go back to what it once was. Kim has amply succeeded in conveying this sense of displacement mixed with hope. And we know, from the vantage-point of the twenty-first century, what happened to the northern part of Korea a

few decades later.

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The Dano Festival today



JOHN BUTLER

Michael Schuman, *Confucius and the World He Created*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

Confucius and the common good

Bertrand Russell once remarked that he didn't write about Confucius because he found the Chinese sage "boring." If Lord Russell had lived long enough to have read this book, he would definitely have changed his mind and gone out to buy a copy of the *Analects*. Russell was not a fan of non-systematic philosophers, being himself a mathematician and a man with a razor-sharp logical



Tomb of Confucius in Qufu, China

mind, thoroughly western in outlook. He believed that philosophy began with the Pre-Socratics in Greece, somehow forgetting, or ignoring, the fact that Confucius (c. 551-479 BCE) was actually an older contemporary of Parmenides of Elea (c. 520-460 BCE) and Heraclitus (c. 535-475 BCE), perhaps the two best-known Pre-Socratics, and one of only two Chinese philosophers (the other is his intellectual successor, Mencius) to be

granted the dubious privilege of having his name transliterated. Unlike the Pre-Socratics, whose works exist only in fragments, Confucius's thoughts may be read in the *Analects*, which, as Schuman tells us, "probably contains more original material from Confucius" than any other book, even if he did not write the whole thing himself. And neither Parmenides nor Heraclitus can be said to have created a world, as Schuman claims Confucius did. This book goes a long way to establishing the Chinese sage as an important and influential thinker, someone whose ideas need to be studied by anyone who wants to understand China, not just its past, but its present and probably its future as well. People who ignore Confucius, it would seem, do so at their peril; "twenty-

five hundred years after Confucius first expounded his ideas," Schuman tells us, "they remain ensconced within the societies of East Asia, having survived endless political upheavals, economic metamorphoses, and a torrent of foreign doctrines." There is this little man on the front cover of the book, dressed in a voluminous robe, shuffling along with his mouth half-open and an armful of scrolls—that is the great sage, unimpressive, perhaps, yet somehow sure of himself, and not, it turns out, the least bit boring.

Michael Schuman's intentions in this wonderful book are quite straightforward. We need to know exactly what Confucius's teachings were, and this can only be done by peeling away the centuries of interpretation, adaptation, and outright,



Confucius

sometimes purposeful entirely. Tyrannical misreading to which the emperors and maniacal Red Guards couldn't destroy him, the sage was subjected after his death. He was revered and and he still shuffles quietly reviled, even exhumed and along in the conscience scattered to the four winds, of today's China as well but he never disappeared as surfacing in the ideas

of politicians, educators and business leaders from Seoul to Singapore. Even the present communist government in China has enlisted him, and Schuman has a chapter entitled “Confucius the Communist.” Outside China, Korea, particularly, is an interesting case-study for Confucius scholars, as there were ties to Confucianism lasting all the way to the end of the Korean monarchy and beyond. It is no exaggeration to suggest, as John Huntsman, a former American ambassador to China, states on the back cover, that “China is incomprehensible without this intellectual framework.” The Chinese, we sometimes find to our cost, do not “think like us,” and some understanding of what they do think like can only be gained, Schuman believes, if we have some understanding of Confucius. Have the Chinese gone back to what Confucius taught before he was distorted? Was he really a misogynist? Did he really teach that filial piety must take precedence over everything else? Did he support authoritarian governments? Did he even believe in human rights? What about his views on spiritual matters? Schuman asks and answers all these questions; he engages with Confucius and he makes us engage with him too. At times the writing is a little too chatty, but Schuman is, after all, making the point that Confucius is alive and well today, and needs to be explained not in abstruse philosophical terms, but in terms with which readers can actually come to grips.

The book is divided into three parts. Schuman begins with the historical context and a detailed explication of Confucius’s

life, times and philosophy. Each chapter examines a different aspect of Confucius and each part is presented in exactly the same way. We have Confucius the man, sage, king, oppressor, father, teacher, chauvinist, businessman, politician, and communist. The last three categories deal with Confucius in the contemporary world, and how he has made a comeback in the China of today. All these “incarnations” of Confucius add up to a complex figure, but the epilogue, entitled “Seeking the Real Confucius,” puts the man firmly in perspective. For Michael Schuman, Confucius is far from a dry old reactionary (or one of the “olds,” as the Red Guard scornfully named him as they tried to root him out of China’s conscience) but “a voice of boundless humanity and

unswerving determination. . . He would not submit to the will of immoral men or abusive regimes.” Confucius believed in humanity; there is no doubt that he thought that we all had innate goodness in us. He was no pawn of rulers, and at all times he stressed benevolence and sincerity over money, power, or birthright. If we were to compare him to a Western figure (and we inevitably incline to do this), it would be Socrates, although Confucius did not meet the same fate.

The three parts of the book show the incredible versatility of Confucianism, how it penetrated every level of human life in China (and Korea), but nonetheless remained rooted in principles everyone could understand, but that few, it seemed, actually followed in the aspect that mattered,

namely how to govern China successfully. As the chapters proceed, Schuman shows clearly how Confucius’s ideas became distorted, misinterpreted, and put into the service of various kinds of oppressors, much as the Nazis adopted Nietzsche or fundamentalists of various stamps have hijacked Jesus and Mohammed, the latter being comparisons which Schuman mentions more than once. What strikes the reader is the sheer endurance of Confucianism in the face of the monumental changes in society and the distortions of rulers; the reason for this, Schuman tells us, is the sheer adaptability of the philosophy, which he believes “can provide what China is missing” today. Whether Schuman is engaging in optimistic exaggeration remains to be seen.

Schuman explains

Confucius’s teachings in clear language without “talking down” to the uninformed reader, and what he comes up with is actually quite an attractive and profound philosophy, not the jokey “Confucius say” of popular imagination and fortune cookies. Confucius stressed sincerity, knowledge, and good actions, all of which may be arrived at through study and the emulation of moral exemplars. For Confucius, humans are always more important than property; a story is told, for example, that when he was informed that a stable had burned down he asked whether anyone was hurt, not whether the horses were injured. Schuman also explains how Confucius emphasised the importance of formal study, in particular the study of the classics, not as a dry exercise, but as a way of showing contemporary

Chinese, who lived in a very volatile world full of dynastic warfare and uncertainty, that humans could be rational and at one time showed a propensity for virtue rather than vice, a resource into which they could tap with the proper guidance. It is true that Confucius paid a lot of attention to such things as rites, which seems foreign to us as we have abandoned most of them, but which, for him, were part of the way a good government ruled, and which provided concrete proof of stability as well as emphasising people's place in society. Confucius never said that people should blindly follow rules, either, but that they should sharpen their skills in judgment instead. Even in the case of filial piety, a son could disagree with his father, even correct him, as long as he used a respectful

approach; filial piety did not mean unconditional obedience, and this was transferred to the larger sphere in the relationship between rulers and their ministers. Confucius often found himself at odds with employers for chiding them or disagreeing with them, which resulted in a rather peripatetic lifestyle for him, as we see in the first part of the book.

No reader could do better than Michael Schuman as a contemporary guide to Confucius. Reading this book prompted the reviewer to take another look at the *Analects*, and will also lead to a re-reading of Confucius's great successor, Mencius. Confucius emerges from these pages a real human figure, not an icon from the past, and his philosophy is attractive and alive, too. It's to be hoped that Michael

Schuman might consider a book on Mencius, who is less well-known in the West, but who deserves the same treatment as his master. Confucius may not have viewed the world quite as we do, but Schuman shows us that his philosophy worked because it appealed to sincerity, loyalty, sense of duty, and ethics directed to the common, rather than individual good, qualities which the sage believed, optimistically, that we all had. We need to hope, in this day and age, that he was right.



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SUE MATHESON

Swanson, Doug J., *Blood Aces: The Wild Ride of Benny Binion, The Texas Gambler Who Created Vegas Poker*. New York: Viking, 2014. 355 pp.

A Wild Ride Indeed

An investigative reporter for the *Dallas Morning News*, Doug J. Swanson has been named the top reporter in Texas twice and also been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing. *Blood Aces: The Wild Ride of Benny Binion, The Texas Gambler Who Created Vegas Poker*, is his sixth book and his first work of nonfiction. In it, he follows the career of Benny Binon,

the racketeer, entrepreneur, killer, philanthropist, and family man who helped introduce glamour, poker, and violence to Las Vegas.

Other books about Binion have been written, notably Jim Gatewood's *Benny Binion (The Dallas Vigilanties and the Texas Hold'em Poker)* (Mullaney Corporation 2013) and Gary W. Sleeper's *I'll Do My Own Damn Killin': Benny Binion, Herbert Noble and the Texas Gambling War* (Barricade 2012). But if you are interested in Vegas (and who isn't?) *Blood Aces* is a must-read. Once begun, it is impossible to put down—painstakingly researched its 355 pages, containing a prologue, twenty six chapters, and an epilogue, broken neatly into three parts, are riveting and readable. The anecdotes about Binion's life and livelihood are so outrageous

and so unpredictable that you simply have to keep turning the pages...if only to find out what could have happened next. Chilling, thrilling, and downright unbelievable at times (but every word is true, I swear it), this book will entertain and educate you. Best of all, it will astound you: it is not often that a common thug ends his life as a civic treasure.

Born in Pilot Grove, Texas, on November 20, 1904, Lester Ben Binion came from an impoverished family. With a grade two education, he began his career in North Texas as a young horse trader before building a gambling empire in Dallas during the Depression. By the time he arrived in Vegas with a tommy gun and a trunk full of cash in the late 1940s, Binion had become a stone cold killer and a mob boss

who was also celebrated as a tender-hearted, generous husband and father of five children.

As Swanson points out, Binion's celebrity status in North Texas followed him to Vegas. There he rubbed shoulders with men like Clyde Barrow, Bugsy Siegel, and Howard Hughes. He was the businessman who brought high-stakes dice games to Las Vegas. In Vegas, gamblers still play the game that Binion made respectable—No Limit Texas Hold'em. Respected poker player Doyle Bunson has said, "No one in his right mind messed with Benny Binion" (3). Binion looked like a "doughy rural-route cherub" (3), who played the part of a portly casino owner dressed in cowboy boots and a cowboy hat. His friendly, well-met, just-off-the-farm persona made him someone you "couldn't keep from

liking" (2), as his friend and associate R.D. Matthews points out. Benny, however, was one of the "most feared and successful racketeers of his day" (2).

Blood Aces is liberally sprinkled with jaw-dropping, irresistible, folksy Binionisms, among them his observations, "I ain't never killed a man who didn't deserve it" and "My friends can do no wrong and my enemies can do no right." As one reads, people are rubbed out as a matter of course in Vegas. Binion is usually found at the bottom of these killings. Even competing with Binion from another state was a dangerous thing to do as Mildred and Herbert Noble would have testified (if they could have). Yet, throughout the mayhem and the murder, Binion led what seems to have been a charmed life, emerging

physically and legally unscathed from attempts on his life and his attempts on others, evading the authorities who spent years chasing him, and serving only a short time in prison for tax evasion.

When Binion died on Christmas Day in 1989, Swanson points out, in Vegas Benny "had become the most beloved gangster of them all" (304). It is still possible to visit Binion's on Fremont Street in Vegas (the family no longer owns it) and eat a steak at Binion's Ranch. Binion's statue can be found at South Point's 4,600 seat equestrian center inside the resort where a plaque identifies him as one of the city's founding fathers. Before you visit Vegas, I highly recommend reading this book. *Blood Aces* is the best hidden history I've come across in years. It's a wild ride indeed.

SUE MATHESON

Leya, Ella. *The Orphan Sky*. Naperville, Illinois: Sourcebooks Inc., 2015. 355 pp.

Fascinating, intelligent, and touching

Published in 2015 by Sourcebooks, *The Orphan Sky* by Ella Leya is a coming-of-age novel set in Azerbaijan, set at the crossroads of Turkish, Persian, and Russian cultures functioning under Communism in the late 1970s. As Deborah Rodriguez points out, *The Orphan Sky* has "everything a reader could want: the thrill of young romance,

the tension of spying, and a window into a fascinating culture, along with a glimpse into the captivating past of Azerbaijan."

At the age of fifteen, Leila Badalbeili, a child prodigy, discovers that she wants more out of life than music and devotion to the Party can give her. She falls in love with Tariq Mukhtarov, a young painter on whom she is expected to spy and inform, and spends the rest of the novel reconciling her desires for freedom and emotional fulfilment with her strict Moslem upbringing, her parent's and piano teacher's expectations of her, and her political heritage.

If you know little about Azerbaijan but are interested in learning more about the country and its culture, this book is an excellent place to begin and

is also an engaging read. As Leila notes, Azerbaijan has "always played an important role in world affairs due its unique geographical position," serving as "the gate between the mysterious faraway East and prosperous Europe" (43).

Because Leila is caught between two cultures, she finds herself castigated as a woman for wanting to marry a man whom she loves and used as a political pawn when touring, presented as being representative of her country, its art and its culture. Created by an Azerbaijan woman, Leila is a conflicted character, grounded in an Eastern culture, whose contradictions and attraction to the West ring true.

Like her protagonist, Leya grew up in Baku, Azerbaijan in the 1970s



Ella Laya, singer, composer and author.

when the state was part of the USSR. Like Leila, Leya's family was a part of the upper middle class: her mother, a pediatrician, and her father the head of the engineering department in the subway system. Like her fictional child prodigy, Leya began studying classical piano soon after she was old enough to walk. Leya's own transformation from being a dedicated Lenin Pioneer to a young person fascinated

Leya, who received asylum in 1990 and now lives in Laguna Beach, California, and London, grew up speaking Russian and Azeri. She acquired her English in school. A singer

and composer, she finds that her writing process in English is similar to composing music. For readers who are also lovers of classical music, *The Orphan Sky* is an enormous treat. Leila's music supports her development throughout the text, introducing and interpreting moods and conflicts. Rodriguez even notes that she "could hear

the music while reading this extraordinary book."

For Leya, words and their musical expressions are a truly universal language. Her real language coaches, she says, were Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald. Thus, it is not surprising that the rhythms of her writing belong to jazz, resulting in a complex and very satisfying experience for the reader. I intend to read *The Orphan Sky* again—multifaceted, this story cannot be absorbed in just one sitting.

According to Leya, her inspiration for writing *The Orphan Sky* is the Maiden Tower legend which was part of her childhood. Her mother took her and her sister when Leya was about six years old to see the tower for the first time and told her daughters the story about a Shah who decided to marry his own daughter, needless

to say, against her wishes" "[h]oping the Shah would change his mind, the girl who was secretly in love with a young knight, asked her father to grant her one wish before their wedding: build a tower that would reach the sky. The Shah didn't change his mind.

When the construction was finished, he confined his daughter in the tower until their wedding night. But the knight killed the cruel keeper and rushed into the tower to free his beloved. Hearing heavy steps echoing through the tower and thinking it was her father coming for her, the princess waved her arms like wings and threw herself into the Caspian Sea. A heartbeat later, her knight reached the top of the tower. All he saw was his maiden's veil carried away by the wind" (354).

Not only a scathing critique of the treatment of women in Azerbaijan in the 1970s, *The Orphan Sky* also offers its readers hopes that the status of women like Leila in the country must change because of will that women in that country itself. "I became determined to save the princess," Leya says, noting that revising the Maiden Tower legend prompted her to continue writing *The Orphan Sky*. "I kept going back to Maiden Tower, time after time, climbing its steep stairs, hoping to change—to fix—the ending of the legend. Many years later, I finally did it in my novel, transforming the princess into a magical Fire Bird, giving her and her knight another chance" (354).

Leya's revision of the Maiden Tower legend in *The Orphan Sky* begins when Leila's father decides

to marry her (when she is eighteen) to Farhad, a man who will be "in one of the highest offices in the Azeri government. Maybe even in the Kremlin" (139), even though the man mistreated his daughter. Discovering that she has been living in a golden cage, Leila spends the summer of 1979 living life to its fullest, "searching for new ways of expression and freedom, unveiling the ambiguities between music and art, friendship and love" (142).

During this period, relationships between male and female characters in *The Orphan Sky* are not drawn in black and white. Leila continues to love her father whose affair with her best friend leads to his death and her family's public embarrassment. Later, Leila also continues to love Tariq when he too betrays her.

Leila's relationships with women are also complicated and conflicted. The most poignant of these is undoubtedly the daughter-mother relationship. At first, Leila's mother insists on the importance of the necessity of a traditional marriage for her daughter. Towards the end of the story, the respected doctor only wishes that her daughter be set free.

Leya's treatment of political corruption within *The Orphan Sky* is also well worth considering. As Leya observes, she has been fortunate to live and travel around the world, because "[e]very place adds another dimension, another spark to the creative process" (354). Thus her depictions of Leila's indoctrination sessions as one of Lenin's Pioneers and her experiences of the KGB are multi-

layered and thoughtful. Art, however, quickly becomes and remains the vehicle by which Leya offers her critique of politics and the state. After reading *The Orphan Sky*, it seems that Aristotle was correct: the State is at risk when artists are numbered among its citizens. They simply ask too many questions and, like Leya herself, must discover and explore worlds outside the culture into which they were born.

A handsome softcover boasting 348 pages of beautifully written narrative and offering a conversation with its author after the story, *The Orphan Sky* is the first novel about Azerbaijan written in English by an author born in Baku and published in the United States. You should not hesitate to pass this book on to others. It is fascinating, intelligent, and touching.

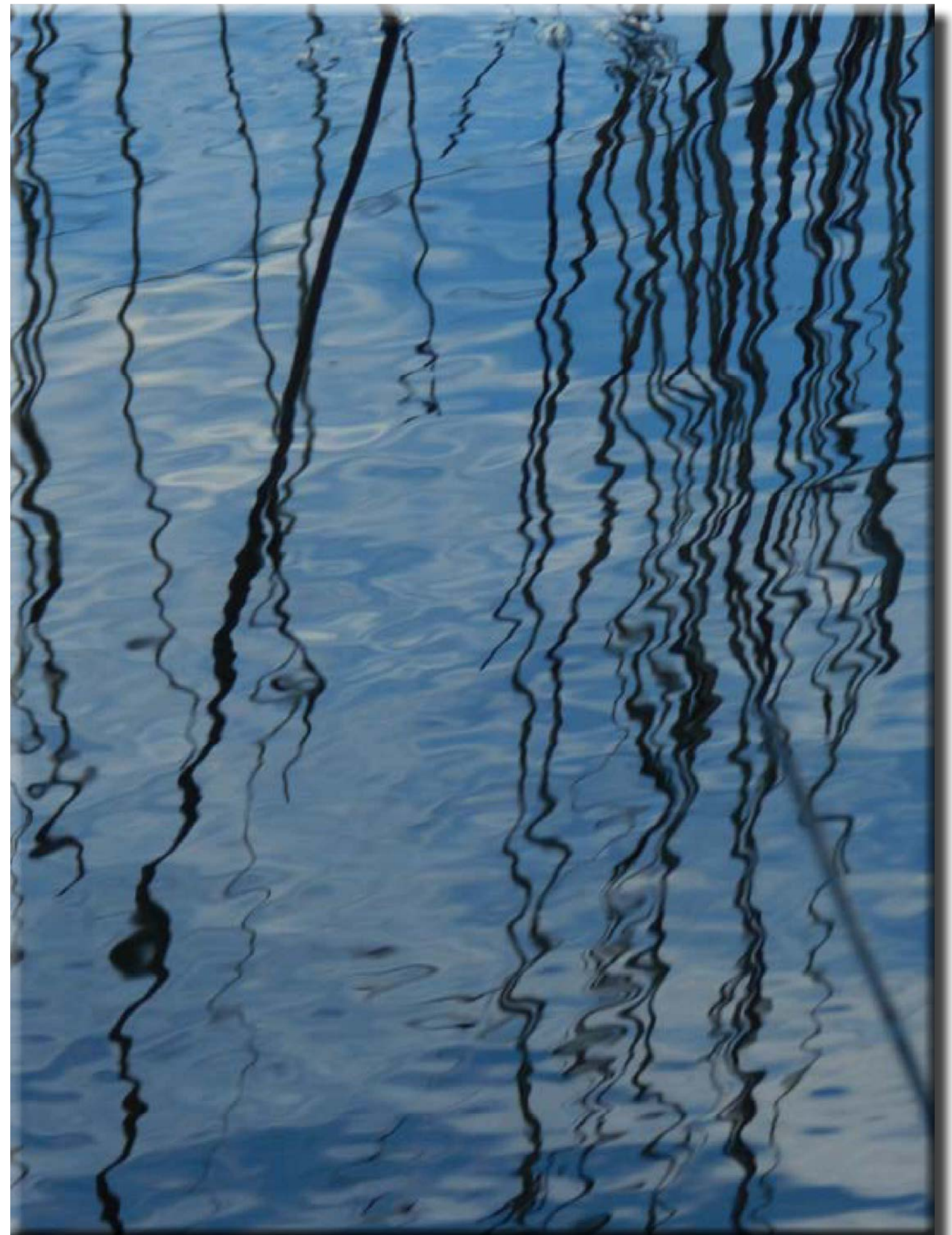


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE
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Antonio Sanna completed his Ph.D. at the University of Westminster in London in 2008. His main research areas are Victorian culture, Gothic literature, horror films and postmodern culture. His publications include articles on *Dracula*, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *King Solomon's Mines*, Victorian ghost stories, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Ridley Scott's *Legend and Hannibal*, Bret Sullivan's *Ginger Snaps: Unleashed*, Patrick Tatopoulos' *Underworld: Rise of the Lycans*, the *Alien* quadrilogy, the *Harry Potter* films, the *Twilight* saga, the *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* franchises and the TV series *Twin Peaks*. He has also contributed to the compilation of *The Dictionary of Literary Characters* with entries on Thomas Harris's *Hannibal Lecter* novels and Edgar Allan Poe's short stories. Currently, he is working as a teaching assistant at the University of Cagliari, Italy.

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