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the quint

contents

EDITORIAL

EDITORIAL

Merry Christmas once again from *the quint*. Can you hear the sleighbells are ringing in this, the first issue of our eighth volume? Now eight years old and growing rapidly, the quint is looking forward to another interesting and insightful year. This Christmas, national and international writers have joined *the quint*. Fall may have disappeared under the soft cover of our Northern winter but our interest in regional and global matters have not. An eclectic stocking of diverse offerings—arresting articles, stunning poetry, splendid photography and useful reviews—this *quint* is for the discriminating reader who is looking forward to curling up beside a fireplace with new ideas and a cup of something hot (and preferably mulled). Showcasing articles and art from Canada, Tunisia, the United States, Australia, China, and Italy, our twenty ninth *quint* begins with Jim Gough, Bill Mackay, and Bruce Wallace's thought-provoking article about Canadian colleges and the new knowledge economy. Hagar Ben Driss' "Occupy the Carribean: Re-Locating the self in Derek Walcott's Poetry" then examines spatial anxieties and issues in Walcott's work. Following Driss' sensitive investigation of Walcott's poetry, Jennifer Sijnja's "'Unfit for consideration': the meaning of suicide in Evelyn Waugh's Vile Bodies" possibilities of meaning attached to suicide and death in the work of Evelyn Waugh. A fascinating study of the often conflicted responses to slavery by slaves themselves, Valorie Tucker's "Slave Violence: Resistance and Desperation" provides us with food for thought about the complex relationships between slaves and masters in the antebellum South. Melanie Belmore's "Tomson Highway's Kiss of the Fur Queen: The Trickster Dual Representation—Colonization and Decolonization at the Birch River Indian Settlement School" is a thoughtful examination of Tomson Highway's treatment of issues of hybridity and adaptation seen through an empowering Aboriginal lens. Then Gabriel Quigley's "'This fateful convergence': *Welt* and History in Auerbach's 'Philology of World Literature'" asks the reader to consider European preoccupations concerning globalism and global homogeneity. Ying Kong's perceptive and nuanced discussion of Zhang Yawen's autobiographical study of the Chinese Dream in "A Cry for Life: A Writer Warrior" is a must-read review. Ending our December offerings, Antonio Sanna's "Contemporary Anxieties and the Future of Humanity: Joss Whedon's *Avengers: The Age of Ultron*" discusses a film that has made over a billion dollars and was made for "the devout."

Of course, no *quint* is complete without its creative complement. We are again privileged to showcase Jefferson's Holdridge's skillfully condensed and incredibly powerful lyrics, and, to present, for the first time in *the quint*, Lash Keith Vance's beautifully structured verse. Our visual offerings are a special treat for the holidays: we are honored to display a selection of photographs by Northern artist, Virginia Goulet.

I should not keep you from this issue of *the quint* any longer. Here's to good reading and a long, warm, and wonderful holiday season! We at *the quint* wish you and your loved ones a very happy Christmas together and all good things in 2016. *the quint* will be back in March with more offerings, just in time for Easter.

Sue Matheson
Editor

WILD ROSE

PHOTO: VIRGINIA GOULET

Educating 21ˢᵗ Century Innovative Learners in Canadian Colleges

by Jim Gough, Athabasca University, Edmonton, Alberta; Bill Mackay, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta; Bruce Wallace, Alberta Association of Colleges and Technical Institutes

Part 1

I: Knowledge Acquisition does not meet the 21ˢᵗ Century Challenge: Learning Innovation Skills

In the new knowledge economy, Canada needs citizens who are community builders driving economic, scientific, social and cultural prosperity so that "or economic and political processes are intimately entangled with the production and use of ingenuity."[1] Building a culture of innovation in Canada's private sector has been identified as one of the biggest gaps in Canada's innovation system.[2] Governments have been encouraging post-secondary institutions to develop new and stronger partnerships with industry and business to be competitive in the global knowledge economy.[3] Our post-secondary institutions are focussed on and good at providing graduates with job-related skills; however, the workplace skills required in a knowledge-based economy include: critical

and creative thinking, problem solving, communication and document comprehension.[4] We will not pursue the important issue of students' communication and documentation skills and their basic reading and comprehension skills. At least some of these skills are often lacking in students entering a variety of college courses and programs. However, we acknowledge that this challenge is clearly connected to developing critical thinking, problem solving and innovation skills.

It is within the context of developing critical thinking, problem solving and innovation skills that basic literacy competencies play a central role in learning. For example, in a standard introductory college literature course informational content (plot, character identification, relationships, use of literary devices) can be complemented by asking students to imagine a "what if" scenario. To test critical thinking skills, it may be possible to ask students to use their understanding of the characters in the text to predict possible consequences of their choices, if the book were to go on longer into the future. This makes use of an accurate portrayal of the character, an understanding of what is possible for the plotline, and critically evaluating these two to solve the problem of future possibilities, thereby innovatively inventing a plausible new twist to the story. In an introductory science course, it is possible to have students map or document in a journal the critical thinking and problem solving strategies they use throughout the science course in solving particular scientific or mathematical problems. At the end of the course, students can then self-reflectively and self-critically assess the value and efficiency of the strategies they used in order to modify their use, change their use or retain their use given its effectiveness on an evaluative scale. The sharing of this information at the

1 Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Ingenuity Gap* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001), 3.
2 Science Technology and Innovation Council. 2010. *State of the Nation 2010: Canada's Science, Technology and Innovation System*. 86 pages.
3 M. Olssen & M.A. Peters, "Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism," *Journal of Education Policy*. Vol 20.3 (2005): 313-345.
4 ACCC. 2011. *Canadian Colleges and Institutes-Advanced Skills and Innovation for Economic and Social Development in Rural and Remote Communities*. 12 pages. Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

end of the course will allow students to critically evaluate each other's strategies. This can be effective if it is an integral part of the course and not an after-thought addendum.

To instructors and academic administrators we can ask: Are we preparing our graduates with the skills necessary for the knowledge economy – to be innovators and discoverers?[5] At the college level at least part of the answer seems to lie in inquiry-based collaborative learning.[6] In this paper, we provide some support for our view that connects a revision in the structure and relationship of learning in colleges. We support the connection between informed critical thinking, its effect on efficient problem-solving and its relationship to increased innovation in the classroom. As well, we offer suggested strategies as examples of what can be done in various disciplines and trades in colleges across this country.

Today through computers, mobile phones and multi-media tablets (with apps) we have the greatest access ever to the most extensive amount of information possible. Educational institutions across Canada are encouraging the increased use of these devices both within the classroom and as an adjunct connection to classroom instruction. The thought seems to be that if students already have familiarity and daily access to the use of devices that can provide ease of retrieving information, then the effective habits developed with the use of these devices can be made use of in formal and practical course instruction. It is probable that delivery-style information dissemination education is made more effective with the use of these devices and that there is a place for education defined as providing accurate information. However with the continued use of these devices our graduates are still often largely without the skills necessary to critically evaluate the information available, or to make good critically based decisions using this

information. Knowing how to use technology and knowing how to use it as a *means* towards achieving certain practical or applied knowledge transferring skills is not always the same exercise. For example, it may be possible to do the exercises in a statistics course equally effectively using a computer program or a hand held calculator. Knowing how to use the computer program doesn't make one necessarily better at the skill of solving statistics problems. However, without being pessimistic, it may be possible, for example, in on-line courses to design Skype-type critical dialogue projects, initiating debates between student and between students and instructor, integrating these with the informational components which are often the central focus of such courses. As well, voice or chat room communications can engage critical conversations and debates and may be equally effective, and do not require the temporal synchronization of participants.

As well, focusing our attention on technology can call attention to the technology itself and obscure the learning tasks to which it is supposed to facilitate the most effective solution. The instrument can become the end of a process not the means towards another end. As a facilitator technology needs to be transparent and not the focus of attention.[7] The engagement of students learning cannot be a focus on the personality of the instructor, the integration of technology in the classroom or the variety of instructional models employed.[8] Rather learners need to have a deep engagement in learning involving a way of thinking. So, there persists a widening gap in critically effective information use. For example, some of us have discovered that many students in our courses consider the information retrieved from the internet – for many of them the Holy Grail - and not

5 We posed this question in a series of focus group meetings in selected colleges in Alberta based on an earlier draft of this briefing paper.
6 Karl A. Smith, *Inquiry-Based Collaborative Learning,* 1999. http://www.nciia.net/proceed_01/smith%20handouts.pdf

7 Michael Hyde, *Openings: Acknowledging Essential Moments in Human Communication (*Texas: Baylor University Press, 2012), 28.
8 Some tests of instructor competency, however, rely heavily on the student's uncritical and potentially biased or at least subjective perception of the instructor's personality, whether he or she is open to change, amiable to meeting outside of class for extra help, and so on.

open to any critical doubt as to its reliability, credibility or authority.[9] The gap needs to be filled by developing the skills in questioning, analysing and evaluating information that are crucial to making effective decisions. This can be accomplished by a system-wide change in worldview and culture across the post secondary system in Canada.[10]

In collaboration with community-wide system stakeholders, we can move away from teaching students who are passive recipients of job related information to students who are actively engaged in decision-making, problem-solving and creating.[11] When confronted with a conflict in expectations in a service- oriented course, a conflict between the client's expectations and the expectations of the professional association and the actual practitioner himself or herself, role playing can function to critically identify the attitudinal components that make certain kinds of behaviour offensive and unprofessional. Students participating in an experiential learning setting can change their perspective on what kind of behaviours match professional expectations and which do not. Tacit professional knowledge is often not made explicit in classroom discussion while the workplace can make tacitly expected behaviour explicit. Inquiry-based learning values creativity and critical thinking skills to make effective use of information which in turn inspires innovation[12]. Valuing (a) creative critical thinking must always be balanced against students who (b) deliberately, and for no apparent purpose other than embarrassing the instructor, go out of their way to challenge the authority and factual

claims of an instructor. There is a balance in inquiry based learning, which suggests the need to manage the differences between challenging authority and creative critical thinking. If the former is channelled into the latter, then this can create the conditions for an effective and efficient classroom discussion. Colleges with mentoring systems where new instructors are mentored by senior instructors can have the effect of identifying the significant differences between (a) and (b), allowing new instructors to more easily facilitate critical thinking into their course curricula.[13]

II. Engagement of Critical Thinking and Decision Making Strategies in Post-Secondary Institutions

In order to become good problem solvers and innovators when they enter the work force, our students need to develop a disposition toward critical thinking. This is not simply a matter of teaching an isolated skill set but rather teaching a way of thinking. For example, after a review of all their programs a report by Stanford University determined that critical thinking needed to be a component of all courses educating students for the challenges of the 21st Century and the University of Guelph, in Ontario has made a similar declaration.[14] Students need to learn the cognitive skills necessary for good critical thinking as part of their post-secondary experience. However, the development of critical thinking skills in students during the first two years of post-secondary education

9 Jim Gough, "A Critical Evaluation of Bibliographic Web Sources" in *The College Quarterly* (August/Summer 2008) at http://collegequarterly.ca.

10 Although all of our on-site research is based in the province of Alberta, we believe these findings have applications across colleges in Canada.

11 For our purposes, we categorize the diverse set of programs in the Alberta Post-Secondary system as falling under one of the following: (i) Apprenticeships, Trades and Technologies, (ii) Specialized skills occupations, (iii) Applied Degrees, (iv) University degrees.

12 J.L. Lane & J.M. Cawley, "Issue Reaction: Inquiry-Based Learning in the College Classroom" in *Innovations in Undergraduate Research and Honors Education: Proceedings of the Second Schreyer National Conference 2001*, Paper 21. W. Franklin. *Inquiry Based Approaches to Science Education: Theory and Practice*. www.brynmawr.edu/biology/franklin/InqiryBasedScience.blog.

13 This is suggested in Jim Gough and Judith Butterworth's *An Introduction to Teaching in Philosophy*, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, 1985, in the section on "White Noisers" where we offer more advice on how to manage varieties of difficult students.

14 Dan Barrett, "Stanford Remakes Curriculum, Following Trend to Focus on Critical Thinking vs. Disciplinary Content", *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* January 18, 2013. On page 7, the University of Guelph, *Portico,* Winter, 2013, informs that: "U of G aims to demonstrate student knowledge and achievement by adopting University-wide learning outcomes in critical and creative thinking, literacy, global understanding, communication, and professional and ethical behaviour"…claiming to make it."one of the first Canadian universities to adopt such across-the-board learning benchmarks for all degree programs and specializations."

is often weak, at best.[15] Some authors have argued that critical thinking skills can be taught, but acknowledge that instructors need to be trained in this skill, and most are not.[16] An important component in the development of critical thinking is through the mentoring of students by instructors who are knowledgeable *skilled helpers* about both current and emerging practices in their field. As one writer puts it:

> As people try to make sense of externally imposed changes, they are frequently at teachable moments as far as the process of becoming critical thinkers is concerned. As people begin to look critically at their past values, common-sense ideas, and habitual behaviours, they begin the precarious business of contemplating new self-images, perspectives, and actions. Skilled helpers… help to make connections between apparently disparate occurrences and assist people in reflecting on the reasons for their actions and reactions. They encourage people to identify the assumptions underlying their behaviours, choices and decisions.[17]

In mentoring students, instructors model the dispositions that they wish students to emulate. We need to be clear about what we mean by mentoring, in order to avoid confusions. Mentoring, as we stipulate its use, is not the same as tutoring to one student or small groups of students. Instead mentoring is a practical demonstration of skills that can be communicated to large or small groups of students and does not require one-to-one interaction between students and instructors. Apprenticeship programs are based on the mentoring of practical skill implementation and tacit knowledge, knowledge often

only acquired from a senior practitioner of the trade, whose experiences are crucial to understanding how to perform the skills of the trade. College instructors faced with larger class sizes may not be able to engage in individual tutoring but they can engage in mentoring. For example, social service programs, nursing programs, bu3p0siness programs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have one common feature. Often the most effective learning in these programs takes place during practicum placements with a mentor or supervisor. Learning in the workplace is effective as the classroom knowledge takes life and the professional and practical skills make sense.

Some post-secondary institutions are involving their students in such experiences as part of their programs (see ACCC reports[18]). The 2012 ACCC report addresses the topic of improving productivity in society through incremental innovation in Canada's small and medium sized businesses (SMEs). These businesses are where colleges, technical institutes and undergraduate universities can have the greatest impact on the economy and quality of life in our communities.

To teach critical thinking to our students we need to have instructors who can model critical thinking and problem solving in practice. To model, in our sense, is not just to take on the role of a critical thinker but rather to engage in the practices and behaviour of critical thinkers as part of what an instructor does and who an instructor is identified as being. The teacher and the student need to develop and collaborate on *a way of thinking* in which "saying" and "showing" are integrated as in approach or way

15 R. Arum & J. Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Leaning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).
16 ERIC Clearing House on Teacher Education, *Critical Thinking Skills and Teacher Education (ERIC Digest*, 1998), 3-88. www.ericdigest.org/pre929/critical.htm.
17 Stephen D. Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*, (California: Jossy-Bass Publishers, 1987), 10.

18 ACCC reports on externally focussed applied research and innovation initiatives, 2010, 2011, 2012:
2012. *Colleges, Institutes & Polytechnics: Applied Research for Economic and Social Development;* 2011. *Productivity through Innovation: Applied Research at Canada's Colleges and Institutes*; 2010. *Partnerships for Productivity and Advanced Skills: The Role of Colleges in Canada's Innovation System. A background Paper.*

of engaging students with course content.[19] This can be done by training instructor mentors who are knowledgeable in critical thinking and problem solving skills. These skills can be transferred to their peers through multiple approaches, including: peer-to-peer mentoring within their discipline; joint participation in community-based experiences or incidents that enable multi-faceted experiences and best-practice exchanges regarding inquiry-based learning. Ultimately the goal of building a culture of innovation may be achieved. This should have the effect of developing trends towards the continuation of this culture, fostering the values of critical thinking and problem solving as they impact on the on-going development of this innovative culture. As Barnett's research concluded some years ago "Innovation flourishes in an atmosphere of anticipation of it. If the members of a society expect something new it is more likely to appear than if it is unforeseen and unheralded. The chance frequency will be augmented in proportion to the number of expectant individuals."[20] A culture of innovation is self-fulfilling when the *way of thinking* is shared by society or groups within it, with dispositional attitudes towards critically thinking about solving problems whose solutions are particular but with potentially global implications. Rather than imagining innovation results from the efforts of discrete individuals, it is more useful to consider how it happens in communities of like-minded individuals who collaborate and share interests.

III: Community Aligned Inquiry-based Experiential Learning

Inquiry-Based Learning offers opportunities to build strong relational ties with the communities the post secondary community serves. Providing students with opportunities to hone their critical thinking, problem solving and innovation skills is best done under the guidance of faculty mentors. These mentors employ real world problems as part of the curriculum, which requires an ongoing source of new and relevant problems from cooperating external clients/entities. In addition, the student gains an opportunity to acquire sector specific tacit knowledge[21] while engaged in workplace problem-solving that encourages a general disposition to open mindedness. While gaining a thorough understanding of the knowledge of current practices embedded in a sector specific elite or discipline, students and instructors need to be open to "a pluralism of alternative conceptions, both of individual disciplines and of the boundaries and relations between them".[22] This is to "serve as an antidote to a certain narrow-mindedness that is often endemic in an elite's (discipline's) conception of itself". Students will internalize those skills and dispositions that their mentors explicitly and systematically discuss with them.[23] There are a number of different levels at which students could be engaged in such activities:

1. Topic critical debating components of the course as part of the course curriculum

2. Critical reading and evaluation of knowledge-based sources both print-based and web-based

3. Community-service problem-solving learning experiences as part of a course

4. Innovation projects embedded in a course with the aim of supporting technological, social and organizational innovation.

5. Capstone project courses containing components for critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation

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19 This involves an integration and collaboration of what has been called the thinking-how and thinking-that approach to knowledge, that is identified in Jose Luis Bermundez's *Thinking without Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 36-38.
20 H.G. Barnett, *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change* (McGraw-Hill, New York, 1953), 56.

21 E.A. Smith, "The role of tacit and explicit knowledge in the workplace," *Journal of Knowledge Management* Vol. 5.4 (2001):311-321.
22 G.E.R. Lloyd, *Disciplines in the Making* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), 182.
23 R. Cosgrove, "Critical thinking in the Oxford tutorial: a call for an explicit and systematic approach," *Higher Education Research and Development* Vol. 30.3 (2011): 343-356.

Capstone project courses provide a learning opportunity for the student to solve some real world problem or advance a new opportunity for the benefit of the cooperating external clients/entities.

a. These project-focused learning activities could have a credit weighting of one or more full course equivalents, perhaps one course equivalent each semester in the final year of a program.

b. The students would work either singly or preferably in small groups on a specific project. Such projects require a managed strategy from the instructor to ensure that the students are aware of the equity conditions for project workload and contributions with voluntary monitoring an integral part of the contracted process.

c. Another engagement approach is to expand existing practicum components in the curriculum of current programs. Programs like trades and technical apprenticeship, design, social work, nursing, education, could strive to involve students in problem-solving and creativity pursuits in a workplace setting. This would strengthen their portfolio/resume providing enhanced employability. The on-site experience gained by students is complemented by the on-site experience of potential employers who see students not as distracted learners but participants in the development of solutions that have practical application in the workplace. So, any town or city can collect a list of collaborative projects to involve post-secondary students that their budgets are only capable of managing fully with the help of students. It isn't the labour that is important to the community but the initiative, creativity, enthusiasm and innovations proposed by students eager to get their ideas into practice. A vacant piece of land, for example, could be developed into a public park with the efforts of architectural design students, horticulture students, and sociology students collaborating to produce one result, while each of them uses the experience as a project component of their course work.

d. Successful post secondary courses have been developed which teach the skills underpinning critical thinking and problem solving.[24]

e. Post secondary institutions in Canada could develop programs to engage students under the supervision of faculty to provide needed services. Students could, for example, monitor air, water, and soil quality following appropriate critically determined scientific protocols, assess the flow of traffic along a highway, or evaluate the ease of access of citizens to social programs, and so on. For example, one successful project involves social work students conducting telephone polling to determine how effective and efficient a city's social services function is in serving their client base. Social agencies do not have the means within their budgets to pay the costs of such important polling activities, students learn firsthand from the users of social services how effective these services are to their clients, and the information gained is useful both to the agencies and to the students in learning valuable information related directly to the profession for which they are preparing. Critically evaluating this information serves to benefit the students, the college program, the agencies and ultimately the clients, who will ultimately be the end users of the services of these social work professionals.[25]

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24 D.F. Halpern, "Teaching for Critical Thinking: Helping College Students Develop the Skills and Dispositions of a Critical Thinker," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* No. 80, (Winter 1999): 69-74. and D.F. Halpern, "Teaching Critical Thinking for Transfer Across Domains," *American Psychologist*. Vol. 53.4 (1998): 449-455.

25 Elizabeth Radian, "Community Organization Practice: Rewards and Challenges", presented to the Association of College Educators in Social Services, ACCESS, Conference, June 4, 2004, Montreal, PQ., based on the use of a project in a Social Work course on Community Organization Practice, and "Teaching Social Work Students Research Using a Practical Partnership Approach", presented to the ACCESS Conference, June 14, 2006, Ottawa, Ontario, based on the use of a project in a Social Work course in Social Issues.

f. Another action, on this system inclusive continuum, may be instructor mentored applied research and innovation internships, either offered during the summer between academic years in a program or at the end of a classroom-based program during the academic year. These could be done in-house and/or in designated external locations/institutions over time. What individual instructors learn can be instructive and shared with other instructors in the same or even different programs.

IV: Faculty Development and Community Integration

Networking and knowledge sharing among educators has been identified as a weakness in our educational system.[26] One goal in training instructor mentors is to develop a better understanding of the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in fostering collaborative team work, creativity, and problem-solving approaches to learning in real world settings.[27] Also, faculty mentors need interdisciplinary experiences that are centered on serving stakeholders in our communities. The education program advisors, practicum coordinators and program advisory groups are key leaders that can serve as collaborators and enablers of inquiry-based learning. Program advisors from the communities where students will work can offer opportunities to learn about changes in the workplace that may be usefully looped back into the classroom instruction.

Workload configurations need to encourage post secondary course renewal. Specifically, curricula development investments are required to serve as a catalyst for critical thinking, problem-solving and innovation components that engage the collaborative talents of students, instructors and community leaders. College instructor workloads are typically heavily based on classroom, seminar or lab time with course preparation, marking/grading and research given low priority in any determination of paid workload. This is often unlike the workload found in universities with more time allocated for research and unlike the normal workload in high schools with often more time allocated to course preparation. The college instructor workload is typically quite college inclusive but wider community exclusive.

Interim Conclusion: It is possible, with the considerations suggested here, for post-secondary educational institutions across the country to lead a shift in focus from managing budgets and teaching job skills to become mentoring leaders in an interdisciplinary culture of innovation, enabling collaborative community building, increasing productive network building between education, communities, and industry.

Part 2

I: The Nuts and Bolts of Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Rigorous application of the tools of critical thinking (CT) and problem solving is necessary in order to successfully adapt and adjust to the rapid changes that are occurring in 21st Century society. The essential aspects to consider in teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills have been well developed in the literature. Some aspects of critical thinking and problem-solving involve tacit knowledge that is best obtained through mentored practical experience. This section consists of an overview of the essential aspects of critical thinking and problem solving presented in point form.

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26 Ibid.
27 OECD. *21st Century Learning: Research, Innovation and Policy*. OECD Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), 2008. 12 pages.

II: The process of integrating the teaching and learning of critical thinking skills

There are certain traits and strategies that characterize critical thinking and approaches to learning the skill of critical thinking, which are different from learning explicit knowledge and skills which are transmitted from instructors to students in our post secondary institutions. These important traits and strategies are as follows:

1. CT is both a state of open-mindedness (aptitude cognitive forming skills) to new possibilities and a disposition to behave (action guiding skills) positively or creatively to change, so that understanding is transformed into decision making.[28] The psychologist Jerome Bruner, over fifty years ago, identified two streams in education within which: "Education seeks to develop the power and sensitivity of the mind..the educational process transmits to the individual some part of the accumulation of knowledge, style, and values that constitutes the culture of a people..and..it must also seek to develop the processes of intelligence so that the individual is capable of going beyond the cultural ways of his social world, able to innovate.."[29] It is this "going beyond" that open-minded critical thinking promotes.

2. CT involves an attitude of attentive listening and a perceptive seeing which makes CT a practical activity in the context of real world issues or problems and not a distracted theoretical exercise in theory testing or evaluation.[30] Attentive listening and perceptive seeing are activities that may not be rewarded as part of many students' prior educational experience, so exercises in self-reflective attentive listening and perceptive seeing (critically and consciously aware of what we are the contents of our sense experiences)[31] may need to be initiated at the beginning of many courses that engage students in moving towards a disposition to critical thinking.

3. CT [with the combination of 1 and 2, above] enhances creativity, a process of bringing into existence something new; a new idea (Craig's Scientific Theorem[32], 1953), a new process (Expert Systems Technology), or a new artefact (work of art, product or entity) to improve our situation in the world. [33]

4. CT can best be taught by practitioner mentoring, in which the instructor models the dispositional behaviour to accommodate change and the psychological state of open-mindedness to new possibilities in his or her teaching practice. This is in contrast to the non-mentoring teaching of explicit knowledge or information –in the most effective way-- for the student to passively receive it accurately. In the latter case, the teacher is a technologist in principle interchangeable with new technological advances and developments, while in the mentor situation technology may be used but cannot replace the teacher/mentor relationship.[34]

5. CT integrates mentored information and evaluation in the curriculum of a course

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28 Diane F. Halpens, "Teaching Critical Thinking for Transfer Across Domains: Dispositions, Skills, Structure Training, and Meta-cognition Monitoring," *American Psychologist* Vol.53.4 (April 1998): 449-455. The Alberta Government has proposed a set of competencies for learning in the 21st Century that will provide students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit, which include: critical thinking and problem solving, as well as creativity and innovation, found at: http://education.alberta.ca/search.asp?=21st+Century.

29 Jerome Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 115-116.

30 "Critical Thinking Skills and Teacher Education," *ERIC Digest, 3-88.*

31 A.D. Woozley, *Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Barnes and Noble,1966), 20-23.

32 Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry* (CA: Chandler Publishing, 1964), 61.

33 Robert C. Scharff, and Val Dusek, *Philosophy of Technology* (Hoboken, New Jersey 2003), 25-28.

34 Richard Paul, "Critical Thinking in the Classroom," *Teaching* 18, (April 1988): 49-51.

or program to allow the student to go beyond (a) the ability to retain, repeat and accurately represent information to—(b) meet the challenge of the use of information in the analysis or evaluation of real world situation in order to better determine the best decision or solution on the basis of accurate information. The shift to mentored teaching can be introduced as early as the first or second year of any program and is not antithetical to the teaching of informational content.[35]

6. CT is a skill that is learned and is then used to determine whether or not knowledge is accurate, relevant, credible, reliable, sufficient or authoritative in supporting the best decision, based on the knowledge provided as well as probable outcomes. The positive outcomes of critical questioning (shifting to open-mindedness) of what is taken to be the case (unchallenged information) is essential to developing and effectively using critical thinking skills to solve problems and make effective decisions.[36]

7. CT transforms the instructor-student relationship from the student being a passive recipient of information, whether accurate or inaccurate, to the actively engaged student participating in creating new information, new decisions, new possibilities, based on a critical evaluation of information. This living the learning is connected to instructor mentoring of students in a projects/problems approach (as suggested in 4, above).

Interim Conclusion: Critical thinking is not a course specific isolated skill, a skill that is taught in traditional humanities courses. It is rather a disposition to engage in learning in a way of thinking that engages the learner in his or her learning.

III: Good Decision-Making and Problem Solving (DMPS): Effective and Efficient

There is a connection between CT and good decision-making or problem solving in that a good critical thinker should be capable of making good decisions. Making good decisions should make one better able to solve problems. The decisions/solutions that are developed using CT will be: relevant, realizable, well-formed, and consistent with the best foreseeable consequences.[37] So, it is now our task to show how these two skills work together collaboratively to help foster innovation. Critical thinking is the basis for good decision making that is effective towards achieving efficient problem solving.[38]

Some characterisitics of good decision making or good problem solving are:

1. Good decision making or problem solving, DMPS, is deliberative and follows a process that is reflective of practical possibilities as well as informed questioning. It is not based on any one or specific combination of intuition or unchallenged information. For example, one and the same claim may be part of either a personal opinion or the conclusion of an argument. In the latter case, unlike the former, the authority for a claim is not self-determined by the person voicing the claim but must be supported by reflecting and deliberating on possibilities opened up by

35 D.G.Allen, B.J.Duch and S.R. Groh, "The Power of Problem-Based Learning in Teaching Introductory Science Courses," in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, L. Wilkinson and G.W. Gijselaers (eds) No. 68, (1996): 43-62.
36 "The Misuse of Non-Argumentative Approaches in Practical Ethics Discussions," *The College Quarterly*, Fall, 2005, http://collegequarterly.ca.The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), since 1999, focuses on promoting and developing strategies in the school environment for student engagement, inquiry, critical thinking, and related themes. Information can be found at: http://education.alberta.ca/admin/aisi/aspx.

37 Robert Pinto, Anthony Blair, and Katherine Parr, *Reasoning* (Prentice-Hall, Ontario, 1993), 5-6.
38 Stephen Toulmin, Richard Rieke, and Allan Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1979), 50.

informed questioning.[39] Students will need to understand the difference between questions asking for specific information or a single response and questions which open up new possibilities or reveal previously unconsidered practical potentialities.

2. Good DMPS meets the rational challenge of justification so that the person making the decision and the audience or those affected by the decision or problem solution can understand why the decision or problem solution was offered over other possibilities, supporting or defending growth in learning and practical achievement.[40]It is possible to establish this in a class debating project or a role playing project where the student is pressed by the instructor to provide a rationale for some approach or problem solution. Our knowledge base is enhanced when we successfully meet the critical challenge posed by students questioning our justification or warrants. In one project a group of nursing students was challenged to justify with argumentation their profession's support for a single tiered public health service in Canada in the face of a challenge raised in the literature by an expert in the field of public health care ethics.[41] Students met this critical challenge working in groups to establish counter considerations and counter-arguments to the article's conclusion and support. They moved beyond the claim "this is what our nursing professors told us" and consistent with the role assumed for nursing professionals challenged the view presented to them on the basis of evidence and value based research considerations.

3. Good DMPS involves a successful integration of the theoretical and the practical. The decision maker or problem solver demonstrates in the decision made or solution proposed that he or she knows that something is the case (according to principle, theory or matters of fact). As well, she indicates that she knows how to apply accurate, reliable and authoritative information (translation of theory into practice) to achieving the best solution or accomplishing the best decision. [42] This can often best be accomplished, as noted earlier, by mentoring rather than lecturing or even simply encouraging a set of disconnected student conversations with the instructor, each exuding a picture of the student but little of the subject or skills required. It is also possible, for example, to establish a class project which is a competition among students in a class to determine who will act as an on-site consultant for a business that needs some creative individuals who can identify problems and propose some innovative approaches to solving these problems. This can be done in business courses, communication courses, information technology courses, and so on. It may be useful to ask students for advice about the business to be evaluated, with possible solutions proposed to various problems, early on in the course and then compare this initial advice to that given at the end of the course, when the student has acquired more critical thinking skills and can reflectively re-evaluate his or her initial advice.

4. Good DMPS avoid bias, prejudice or subjective considerations based on a personal

39 Jim Gough, "The Differences between Opinions and Argumentation," *Proceedings of the Argumentation and Its Applications Conference, Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation and the International Society for the Study of Argumentation,* CD Rom, 2001.

40 Penny Heaship, "Critical Thinking and Nursing," 1993, revised 2008, Thompson Rivers University, pheaship@tru.ca , and *The Statement of the Role and Tasks of Licensed Nurse Practitioners* by the College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, www.clpna.com.

41 Jim Gough, Jim "*Teaching Argumentation in a Philosophy Course for Baccalaureate Nursing Students,*" College Quarterly, Summer, 2011.

42 Breane Harris, 'What Job Doesn't Benefit from Critical Thinking?" June 10, 2010, http://critical-thinkers.com/2010/06/whos-job-doesn't-benefit-from-critical-thinking/ and Jim Gough, "Teaching Argumentation in a Philosophy Course for Baccalaureate Nursing Students," *The College Quarterly*, Summer, 2011, www.collegequarterly.ca.

point of view, society norms or ideological belief. Good decisions are made carefully and considerately providing access to the processes used. The approach is open to public scrutiny and testing, realizable, testable under scrutiny and sceptical considerations. This ensures the DMPS is open and can be replicated by anyone else with suitably informed skills. The earlier that a student can be engaged in real-world scenarios, the better the student learns to adapt her critical thinking skills to real world solutions and decisions.[43] For example, the well-known science writer and educator, Jay Ingram, host and contributor to the *Daily Planet* science program on the *Discovery Channel*, has noticed that the depth of social and cultural traits enmeshed in tribal membership that ignores sound scientific practice and outcomes identifying the real danger of climate change in favour of confirmation bias which unconsciously and psychologically persuades us irrationally of what is not the case.[44] In the classroom, scientific knowledge can be distracted from the experience of making real-world decisions but when this happens students may depart to prior non-scientific ideologies (tribal beliefs) in assessing the environmental impact of scientific phenomena like global warming. When the classroom situation maintains a way of thinking that exhibits an openness to public scrutiny and testing, then this distraction to non-science based ideologies to assess environmental science should serve to be diminished.[45]

and promote new discoveries, new solutions or decisions. This is the use of critical thinking skills in the effective transfer of knowledge to real-world incidents that—customarily, conventionally or traditionally—might not have been part of the scope of the initial inquiry.[46][47] The point is that there are no insignificantly small innovations as many innovations spawn new applications, open up new avenues for further discoveries and take us from a stagnation point in the present to future opportunities. The disclosure of new possibilities through innovation has the effect of breaking down barriers to a future that is unlike the past and the present in many significant ways.

6. Good DMPS is the most comprehensive possible decision or solution. The decision or problem solution is consistent with the most extensive set of information, knowledge and diverse set of skills applications possible.[48] The best of a graded series of several possible solutions is often industry-leading and innovative of change on a global scale, bringing the initially specific solution to a wider audience. Often students perceive hands-on problem solving as a significant achievement representing the culmination of what they have learned in a particular course or program—enhancing both their confidence and employability by diminishing the gap between classroom theory and workplace practice.

5. Good DMPS promote the future-directed tendency to be powerful or expansive in their consequences and outcomes, in such a way that they are creative, innovative

43 Tom Byrnes, "Critical Thinking in the Social Sciences," Valencia College, http://faculty.valenciacollege.edu/tbyrnes/postcritical.htm.

44 Jay Ingram, "Belief is Biased: It's vital to know how our values trump logic," *Alternatives Journal* (September-October, 2012): 116.

45 Jim Gough, "The Non-Argumentative Strategies of Global Warming Cynics," *Restoration Earth*, March, 2012.

46 Lynn H. Knight Curd, "Teaching Critical Thinking in the Social Sciences," in *New Direction for Community Colleges*, (Spring 1992): 63-73.

47 Francis Watanabe Dauer, *Critical Thinking: An Introduction to Reasoning* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), 276-279.

48 A list of some of these successful project supported by the AACTI Innovation Secretariat can be found in footnote xvii, above.
We are aware that there are some examples of this kind of initiative already in Canada but our focus is on developing this to a country-wide systemic initiative that will develop in such a way that it will over time continue to change the cultural landscape in Canadian colleges.

Interim Conclusion: Effective decision making and problem solving are not discipline specific. DMPS involves integrating skills of listening, perceiving, avoiding bias, opening oneself up to the challenge of justification in order to achieve the most comprehensive solution possible.

IV: Investment Strategy Recommendations

The focus of this paper has been on the integration of theory into practice. So, we now provide a set of investment strategy considerations to be critically evaluated as possible ways of realizing the potential of integrating critical thinking, problem solving and enhanced innovation into the classrooms of colleges in a variety of courses and programs. A new culture of innovation can occur within a post-secondary system. It requires the use of ongoing strategies that span the realizable possibilities within such systems, systems that often have limited access to research and innovation funding. The following suggestions offer adaptable ways of introducing change into the system-wide college culture of dissemination of information to change it to inquiry based learning in a system dominated by a culture of innovation. Incremental change can become institutionalized as long as we pay attention primarily to the critical analysis of the suggested strategies and not on the particulars of specific funding possibilities, which causes us to lose sight of possibilities based on a narrow concentration on existing funds.

(a) Investment consideration (based on considerations in Part 1, III: 1-5 and a-f): An innovation-oriented seed fund to pilot inquiry-based real-world experiences within curricula could be created within an institution or through the support of external funding. As this fund will be community building, creating networking relationships in a new culture of innovation, it should be financially supported by multiple stakeholders, including the institution itself. We cannot underestimate the importance of networking. The strength and commitment to develop a new culture of innovation requires the commitment of many individuals to give of their time, efforts, and especially interest in support of innovation initiatives. Networks help support a culture of innovation through their support of innovative projects and processes. Networks provide the basis for an identity to be shared by practitioners of innovation across discipline, professional and workplace borders. They encourage cross fertilization of ideas and provide important support for individual's initially tentative efforts. They help to reinforce ideas for projects that may not initially be fully formed or well-articulated. In Canada, the example of a successful attempt at establishing such a network is the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities annual conference, a federation of independent professional study groups who combine their individual conferences at one location every year to facilitate a conversation among specific practitioners and among different members of different disciplines dealing with central social and political issues of the day. The conference is often given a theme that will appeal to interdisciplinary approaches and conversations. As well, there is often an attempt to make sure that the timetabling of particular conferences does not overlap with the timetabling of other organizations to allow members from one group to participate in the activities of another group. This example of cross-fertilization of ideas could happen at other groups, trades for example, when the issue is collaborating on the best building solutions, or health care, when the issue is holistic collaboration of health care services focussed on the best treatment of patients, and so on.

(b)   Investment Consideration (based on considerations in Part 2, II, 1-7): Create a post secondary professional development and system development strategy that is instructor-led at the system level. This suggestion is consistent with the successful AISI investment program supported by Alberta Education since 1999 at the elementary and secondary school level. This investment will include: community of practice development that encourages per-to-peer networking, building external community connections, best-practice workshops, and interdisciplinary project pursuits. Such pursuits require a commitment to collaboration, collaboration between colleagues within a discipline or trades practice, across disciplines and between faculty and students. Critical thinking and problem solving are not discipline or trades practice specific but these skills cross and straddle institutionalized borders between disciplines and trades. The revision of courses, the change in attitude to what skills are taught in an existing course, often mean that some instructors will resent the added workload and the necessity for additional training required to become mentors of critical thinking. This is why the development system needs to be instructor-led and not top-down administration required.

(c)   Investment Consideration (based on successful projects supported by AACTI Innovation research grants identified in footnote xvii): Liaison with business, municipalities, cities and towns within the province of a college to identify community based projects that could produce matching or partnership funding opportunities to benefit both the post-secondary system and its external communities. For example, the federal government had a green fund initiative that distributed grants to municipalities to help them fund greening initiative projects. Greening initiatives can be developed using these funds to monitor the effluent from sewage treatment plants, under the supervision of experts, create community-based greening groups within a municipality to advise on the use of vacant and underused land and water resources within a city or town. The participation in such group projects should be as diverse as possible across generations, age groups, and stakeholders, to help support initiatives and innovative strategies. As well, some diploma programs have community-based, constituency-based program advisory groups. These groups could operate as an effective communication conduit between instructors and funding possibilities from companies whose members have real world workplace experiences, advancing the knowledge-base and funding-base for instructors outside the usual confines of an institution.

V: Concluding Remarks

Colleges in Canada are in a good position to incorporate cross-provincial initiatives to introduce a shift to a culture of innovation, integrating inter-disciplinary critical thinking in effective problem solving to create innovations across the integrated system. This can then have the good effect of moving the college experience to one of 21st Century leadership in educational opportunities as well as community building. In developing a culture of innovation, based on sound critical thinking and problem-solving skills, the breadth of the community, the infrastructure of the community, and the membership of the cultural initiative cannot be artificially limited to a single institution in a particular place at a particular time. Creating such a community consortium is often difficult when many public colleges are in competition with each other over limited student funding, for example competing for a limited set of ESL students in a particular geographical location occupied by more than one college. Collaboration could have the disadvantage

of impeding one's competitive advantage over one's college rivals, within one province or across provincial borders. However, in the end, the goal should be to achieve the best system of post-secondary education in Canada which best prepares students for the challenges of the 21st Century. If the Canadian college post-secondary system is improved towards students and instructors developing a different way of thinking, then the growth of knowledge and cross-institutional connections, the incorporation of well-established critical practices into the conceptual frame of emerging problems will enhance each member of the set of interconnected institutions in a system, allowing some to emerge as doing some things differently from others. The overall advantage is in cooperative collaboration not isolated and independent competition.

TIGER LILY

Lightning Bug

"

Or firefly, both are the same

Insect, if not the same music

And place. Interchangeable

In certain regions. The first name

Of dense inland forest and thick

Swamps of the Delta.   The second

Cape Cod, the Plains, Black Hills,

Rocky Mountains and the beckoned

And beckoning west, the Sierras,

Nevada and Madre, valleys and desert.

No difference in syllable

Just the darkness their flashing fills

Or leaves empty. Without light

In Western states (like Richard Serra's

"Tilted Arc" that breaks the square)

Fireflies are unseen at twilight,

While lightning bugs assert

Themselves in tremulous chiaroscuro

Against the trees that they are there

Warning of their poison and boldly

Seductive. Their substance Caravaggio

Is said to have used. No wonder

For if not true, it remains coldly

Suggestive of lightning without thunder,

The brute magnificence of the master,

The agony of transcendence and desire

Of consummation and disaster

That dies in a darkening star-like dance.

Which is neither lightning nor fire

Nor disenchantment nor romance.

—Jefferson Holdridge

Occupy The Caribbean: Re-Locating the self in Derek Walcott's Poetry

by Hager Ben Driss, University of Tunis, Tunis, Tunisia

"To be at all- to exist in any
way – is to be somewhere, and to be
somewhere is to be in some kind of
place."
Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place*

He wanted a history without any memory
Streets without statues,
and a geography without myth.
Derek Walcott, "The Schooner Flight"

Issues of place and emplacement have preoccupied Derek Walcott almost all throughout his poetic career. It is not surprising, then, that he opted to talk about his beloved Caribbean in his Nobel Prize lecture "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory" (1992). This lecture marks a moment of geographical triumph as he declares to the whole world that he is a place maker as much as place is a maker of his poetry, for the act of writing poetry is inextricably enmeshed with an act of creating place. His work transforms space, an abstract realm, into place, an experienced and felt dwelling. Indeed, much of his poetry attempts to redefine the geography of the West Indies and especially his island, Saint Lucia. His texts insist on providing a new cartography while challenging the (neo)colonial spatial representations of his land. Construed as *terra nullius* in colonial travelers' writings or exoticized in tourist brochures, the West Indies remain the locus of misrepresentations under the cartographic custody of a foreign eye. Accordingly, Walcott engages place as a weapon of retaliation, a subversive geographical maneuver.

Based on a selection of Walcott's poems from his *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (1986), this paper proposes to investigate the poet's creation and appropriation of his island. As he relocates himself in a newly mapped territory, he transforms the island, hitherto epistemically violated, into a personalized topography, a place of creation and new knowledge production. Informed by a geocritical approach, my analysis of Walcott's poetry focuses on the poet's spatial anxieties and his strategies to occupy a land associated with nothingness, hence my title "occupy the Caribbean".

The Vow

Derek Walcott's lifelong/"lovelong" ("As John to Patmos") story with his island started with a vow:

But drunkenly, or secretly, we swore,

disciples of that astigmatic saint,

that we would never leave the island

until we had put down, in paint, in words,

as palmists learn the network of a hand,

all of its sunken, leaf-choked ravines,

every neglected, self-pitying inlet

muttering in brackish dialect ... (*Another Life*, 194)

He took this solemn vow a long time ago with his childhood friend, Dunstan St. Omer. The two young boys swore to immortalize their island, St Lucia, in two artistic ways: painting and poetry. Being the "disciples of that astigmatic saint", their painting mentor, Harold Simmons, who inculcated in them the worship of their island, endows the vow with a religious urgency. Indeed, Walcott's poetic and spatial pact goes beyond a private or a "secretly" taken vow to become a Roman-like *votum publica*. In the Roman vota tradition, public vows "began with the solemn pledging of a vow (*muncupatio*) which was recorded in writing like a contract, and which ended only with the fulfillment (*solutio*) of the previously specified offering on expiry of the term stated in the *votum*" (Derks 115). Compared to this tradition, Walcott's entire poetic oeuvre, turns out to be a contract in which he pledges himself to the Caribbean islands. Even though he did not fulfill the first part of the vow for he left the island, he continued to celebrate its landscape in absentia. The tragic death of his friend has transformed the vow into a burden, a duty he must fulfill to honor the memory of St. Omer. In his autobiographical poem *Another Life*, he attests to the inspiring spirit of his friend:

Forgive me, if this sketch should ever thrive,

or profit from your gentle, generous spirit.

when I began this work, you were alive,

and with one stroke, you have completed it. (282)

Walcott's dedication to landscape is not a mere romantic predilection. His topographic project engages a spatial experience wherein landscape is confirmed as place. "Lands are, in final analysis, placescapes," asserts Edward Casey, "they are congeries of places in the fullest experiential and represented sense. No landscape without place" (*Re-Presenting Place* 271). This is how the young Walcott, who soon realized that he "lived in a different gift/its elements metaphor" (*Another Life* 201), exchanged the brush with the pen. The result, however, is almost the same as his poetic sketches of St. Lucia conjure a sense of place in its full vivid immediacy. "Midsummer, Tobago" best captures Walcott's endeavor to transcribe his island into a visual reality:

Broad sun-stoned beaches.

White heat.

A green river.

A bridge,

scorched yellow palms

from the summer-sleeping house

drowsing through August.(333)

The elliptical quality of these lines succeeds in creating a visual saturation similar to that created in a painting. Like strong strikes of a brush, the verbless short sentences defy linguistic correctness to gratify a visual encounter with the described landscape.

Places in Walcott's poetry, however, are not mere visual encounters or metaphorical occasions, they are emotionally charged- gestures of love. In his poem "Islands", Walcott powerfully interjects: "But islands can only exist/if we have loved in them." Yi-Fu Tuan calls such a "strong effective bond between people and place or setting" (92) *topophilia*. Walcott makes a lavish use of the word 'love' whenever he describes his island. The two following lines present a pertinent example: "And do I still love her, as I loved you?/I have loved all women who have evolved from her" (*Another Life* 230). The thrice-repeated 'love' is even more stressed by the effective alliterative sound 'v' permeating the two lines. Such a generous, unrestrained love acquires a sensual, erotic dimension:

> For I have married one whose darkness is a tree,
>
> bayed in whose arms I bring my stifled howl,
>
> love and forgive me! (*Another life* 282)

In Walcott's love story with place, the island becomes a mother, a lover and a wife.

Walcott's strong emotional rapport with his island, already announced in his vow, culminates into an epiphany he describes in *Another Life*, a piece that celebrates his strong ties to his island:

> ... I dissolved into a trance.
>
> Then uncontrollably I began to weep,
>
> inwardly, without tears, with a serene extinction
>
> of all sense; I felt compelled to kneel,
>
> I wept for nothing and for everything,
>
> I wept for the earth of the hill under my knees,
>
> for the grass, the pebbles, for the cooking smoke (185)

Much later, interviewed by Edward Hirsch, he explains this "sentimental" and "mystical" experience as a moment of poetic revelation linked to place: "I felt this sweetness of melancholy, of a sense of mortality, or rather immortality, a sense of gratitude both for what you feel as a gift and for the beauty of the earth, the beauty of life around us" (*The Paris Review*). This moment of complete fusion with landscape will be reiterated in other parts of his autobiographical poem, announcing thus an extreme case of topophilia in which the poet becomes a living embodiment of the land.

Several parts of *Another Life* show Walcott's easy navigation between land and body. He dissolves in space and morphs into a place, an "I-land." In "A piece of land Surrounded", Marlene Nourbese Philip introduces the term "I-landness" to describe the Caribbean geographic dynamics. A topographic placement of the self can only be achieved through the transformation of "islandness" into "I-landness" (45). In Chapter 21 of *Another Life*, Walcott revisits that moment of epiphany he described earlier in the

poem. Here, he clearly portrays a strong moment in which he merges into the island:

> And on that hill, that evening,
>
> When the deep valley grew blue with forgetting,
>
> Why did I weep,
>
> Why did Kneel,
>
> Whom did I thank?
>
> I knelt because I was my mother,
>
> I was the well of the world,
>
> I wore stars on my skin,
>
> I endured no reflections,
>
> my sign was water,
>
> tears and the sea (281)

The reiteration of 'I' acquires an incantatory effect signaling a rite of passage- a passage into subjectivity. This geographical incarnation announces a moment of liberation as well as re-appropriation.

Appropriating the Land

Much of Walcott's poetry engages remapping as an act topographic resistance. He has made it a point to correct the geographical stereotypes imposed on the Caribbean islands, either discarded as *terra nullius* or exoticized as a touristic space. In an interview by Simon Stanford, he explains his responsibility as a poet to redefine the geography of the Caribbean: "It's the Caribbean writers and artists who made attention happen to the Caribbean, that aspect of the Caribbean, not just the touristic aspect of it." Walcott started his project of transforming the abused space of his island into a place of his own with a haunting anxiety: "... no one had yet written of this landscape/that it was possible" (*Another Life* 195). His poetry will not only make place "possible", but more importantly, it will make place happen.

Walcott's early writings inaugurated his "geopoetic" combat wherein geography, as an epistemic tool of classification and categorization, is subverted: "here is a life older than geography," he claims in *Another Life* (196). Combining poetry and geography to provide "a higher unity - geopoetics" (White 174) is already evident in one of Walcott's earliest poems "Prelude", a text he wrote at the age of seventeen around 1947 and significantly opens his 1986 *Collected Poems*:

> I, with legs crossed along the daylight, watch
>
> The variegated fists of clouds that gather over
>
> The uncouth features of this, my prone island.
>
> Meanwhile the steamers which divide the horizons prove
>
> Us lost;

Found only

In tourist booklets, behind ardent binoculars;

Found in the blue reflection of eyes

That have known cities and think us here happy. (3)

The personal pronoun 'I' which opens the poem is another instance of transforming the landscape into an inner experience. For "a place has to become an inner landscape for the imagination", claims Italo Calvino in *Hermit in Paris*, "to start to inhabit that place, to turn it into its theatre" (qtd. in Westphal 150). The posture of the persona crossing his legs along the daylight not only presents a body-landscape continuum, but also offers a comfortable accommodation to a place claimed as one's property: "my prone island."

The 'I', however, does not stagnate in its grammatic role; it embraces also an epistemic capacity. It becomes an 'eye' that can "watch", gather knowledge, and consequently acquire power. Indeed, the watching I/eye opening the poem is juxtaposed to the panoptic gaze of unseen eyes surveilling his island "behind ardent binoculars" or reifying it in "tourist booklets." Walcott's early poem engages the gaze in its Foucauldian meaning to restore power over his place, epistemically aggressed by "the blue reflection of eyes", a metonymy of colonial interventions in the Caribbean. This poem equally registers Walcott's continuous resistance to the production of his island as an "imagological space", a culturally-constructed zone informed by "the differential relationship between the looker and the looked-upon, between the gazing culture and gazed-at culture" (Westphal 111).

Walcott's poem "Islands", which displaces the colonial record of his Caribbean islands, best exemplifies his determination to restore his right as a place producer:

Merely to name them is the prose

Of diarists, to make you a name

For readers who like travelers praise

Their beds and beaches as the same (52)

The poet's geopoetic project is to redress such a simplistic foreign topographical representation. His islands, indeed, need a poet's voice, not mere scribblers as he contends in the same poem:

... I seek,

As climate seeks its style, to write

Verse crisp as sand, clear as sunlight,

Cold as the curled wave, ordinary

As a tumbler of island water

His deliberate use of the verb "seek" dislodges those "diarists" and "travelers" as he becomes the real explorer, a traveler in a virgin-like land/poetry. Rewriting his islands relocates him as the ultimate custodian of his own geography.

Walcott engages the figure of the place maker as a major strategy to appropriate

land. He draws on different texts, biblical, historical and mythical to shape this figure creator whom he describes at length in "The Figure of Crusoe." Crusoe, "the namer", is a figure that incarnates "Proteus ... Adam, Christopher Columbus ... , Daniel Defoe", and even God, who controls his creation (35-36). Such a complex figure synthesizes in one ultimate goal: to occupy the land as he clarifies while commenting on his Crusoe poems: "Whether that tool is a pen or a hammer, you are building in a situation that's Adamic; you are rebuilding not only from necessity but also with some idea that you will be here for a long time and with a sense of proprietorship as well" (*Paris Review*). The deterritorialized figure of the castaway (Crusoe) or the exile (Adam) is utilized to claim the ownership of the islands. The fluidity of this persona provides Walcott with a great freedom to place or displace him the way he wishes. While in "The Castaway" he embodies Robinson Crusoe, "the second Adam since the fall" (69), he dislodges him in "Crusoe's Islands" as he interpolates Friday as the figure whose descendents succeed to occupy the island:

> Now Friday's progeny,
>
> The brood of Crusoe's slave,
>
> Black little girls in pink,
>
> Organdy, Crinolines,
>
> Walk in their air of glory
>
> Beside a breaking wave (72)

The two figures, incongruous as they may seem, serve one metaphorical purpose: transforming space into a place of dwelling. Accordingly, Crusoe, the namer, cedes place to Friday, the dweller.

The same idea is articulated in an early poem "As John to Patmos" initially published in *25 Poems* (1948), his first collection of poetry. Like "Prelude", this poem shows Walcott's premature concern with questions of placement and territorial belonging. Both Crusoe and Adam merge this time in another Biblical figure, John the Divine, exiled to the Greek island, Patmos. As an exile, dislocated from his historical homeland Africa, Walcott finds in John a peer burdened with a mission. The poem ends with a pledge reminiscent of that early vow he records in *Another Life*:

> As John to Patmos, in each love-leaping air,
>
> O slave, soldier, worker under trees sleeping, hear
>
> What I swear now, as John did:
>
> To praise lovelong the living and the brown dead. (5)

To glorify and praise his island form the core of Walcott's geopoetics. For not only does he occupy the land, he also presents a new aesthetics of place. The island now acquires "sense" as "people demonstrate their sense of place", confirms Yi-Fu Tuan, "when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations" ("Space and Place" 410). In his poem "Names", Walcott presents an acute sense of place as he establishes a competing relationship between the Caribbean landscape and the European historical

monuments:

> These palms are greater than Versailles,
>
> for no man made them,
>
> their fallen columns greater than Castille,
>
> no man unmade them (308)

The island is not only embodied, renamed and reinvented, it is also weaved in the texture of Walcott's poetry. He creates porous zones between the poem and the landscape: "Evening opens at/a text of fireflies" (311), he declares in "St Lucie." The opening line of the poem presents names of villages: "Laborie, Choiseul, Vieuxfort, Dennery" (309). The act of naming here is not only an act of reappropriation, but also an aesthetic gesture of poeticizing place. The same strategy of creating a new geo-aesthetics is reiterated in his poem "A Sea Chantey" introduced with a significant epigraph extracted from Baudelaire's "L'invitation au voyage": "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté/Lure, calme, et volupté." Like "St Lucie", the names of places in this poem occupy full lines:

> Anguila, Adinie,
>
> Antigua, Cannelles,
>
> Andreuille, all of the I's
>
> Voyelles, of the liquid Antilles (43)

The spellbinding effect produced by accumulating names, endows place with a sacred grandeur. The ending of "A Sea Chantey" echoes the poet's assertion in "As John to Patmos": "This island is heaven" (5):

> The music uncurls with
>
> ...
>
> The litany of islands,
>
> The rosary of archipelagoes,
>
> Anguilla, Antigua,
>
> Virgin of Guadeloupe,
>
> ...
>
> The amen of calm waters
>
> The amen of calm waters
>
> The amen of calm waters. (46)

Praising the land in Walcott's poetry, however, goes beyond its aesthetic function especially in his later texts. The glorification of place has acquired a vindictive aspect related to his famous feud with V.S. Naipaul.

The argument between Naipaul and Walcott revolves around different geographical perceptions. While Naipaul perceives the Caribbean as a void space, branded by nothingness, Walcott perceives his islands as a place inhabited by love. Even though both

converge in perceiving these islands as *terra nullius*, they diverge in their appreciation of this fact. Walcott's metaphorical use of the islands as belonging to no one is based on his deep-seated conviction in occupying it. Naipaul, however, discards it as a space with no history, "unimportant, uncreative, cynical" (*The Middle Passage* 47). Walcott's response varies between aggressive vituperation, a challenging irony, and a poetic vindication of the Caribbean. His poem "The Mongoose", in which he lampoons Naipaul, offers a pertinent example of his prolonged quarrel with the writer who disparaged his homeland:

> So the old mongoose, still making money
>
> Is a burnt out comic, predictable, unfunny
>
> ...
>
> The mongoose keeps its class act as a clown
>
> it can do cartwheels of exaggeration
>
> Mostly it snivels, proud of being Asian
>
> Of being attached to nothing, race or nation
>
> It would be just as if a corpse took pride in its decay
>
> After its gift had died and off the page its bales exude the
> stench   of envy, "la pourriture" in French
>
> Cursed its first breath for being Trinidadian
>
> Then wrote the same piece for the English Guardian

Walcott seems to take Naipaul's notorious description of the Caribbean islands as a personal insult. Disparaging the West Indies, Walcott's motherland, amounts to insulting his own mother. Asked by Edward Hirsch to comment on his declaration in *Midsummer*: "to curse your birthplace is the final evil," he says: "I think the earth that you come from is your mother and if you turn around and curse it, you've cursed your mother" (*Paris Review*). He vents his discontent with Naipaul's 'curse' in his essays, interviews, and poems.

To reduce Trinidad into a mere "dot on the map of the world" (*A Middle Passage* 38) jeopardizes Walcott's cartographic effort to create not only a place, but also a home. He couches his answer to such a geographical nullification in a defiant irony:

> ... like all of us uprooted figures, he [Crusoe] had made his home, and it is
> the   cynical answer that we much make to those critics who   complain
> that there is   nothing there, no art, no history, no   architecture, by
> which they mean ruins, in   short, no civilization, it is 'O happy desert.'
> We live not only on happy, but on   fertile deserts. ("Crusoe's Island"
> 40)

Walcott presents this "happy desert", a sarcastic subversion of Claude Levi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiqies* (1955), as the locus of creativity. "Nothing will always be created in the West Indies," he asserts in his essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?", "because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before" (9).

'Nothing' becomes the West Indian man's burden - a duty to upset the ventriloquized

white man's discourse. Indeed, Walcott emerges as a dissident geographer who engages a counter-hegemonic cartography. What he finds particularly outrageous is Naipaul's acquiescence and propagation of Western geographical stereotypes. Naipaul sustains Froude's conviction that "since history is based on achievement, and since the history of the Antilles was genetically corrupt ..., a culture was inconceivable and nothing could be created in these ramshackle ports" (Walcott, "Fragments of Epic Memory"). In his Nobel Prize speech, Walcott addresses both Western and West Indian writers and novelists who represented the Caribbean as a gloomy and bleak space. He condemns their limited vision as "a misunderstanding of the light and the people on whom the light falls." Once again, his response to the charge of nothingness adopts a defying and ironic tone: "to be told you are not yet a city or a culture requires this response. I am not your city or your culture. There might be less *Tristes Tropiques* after that." Naipaul's disparaging declarations will also float in several poems. Each poem functions as an evidence that nothingness is a place of creativity.

Naipaul's "nothing" reverberates in numerous poems. Walcott's iterative use of the word shows a real concern to subvert it. His poem "Air" starts with an epigraphy by Froude whose words are mimicked by Naipaul: "There are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own." The poem creates a gothic-like space in which the "omnivorous jaws" of the forest "not only devour all/but allow nothing vain" (214). It ends with a highly mocking tone celebrating nothingness: "There is too much nothing here" (114). Nothing is orchestrated as a defensive tool, a warning against spatial intrusion. Nothingness is also hailed as a positive condition. In "The

Castaway", for instance, his twice-repeated "nothing" shows a prerequisite condition for the castaway, the Crusoe-Adamic figure, to occupy emptiness:

> The salt green vive with yellow trumpet flower,
>
> A net, inches across nothing.
>
> Nothing: the rage with which the sandfly's head is filled (57)

In an ironic twist, "nothing" becomes visual, almost concrete and palpable. The poem, reminiscent in its linguistic economy of "Midsummer, Tobago", provides a portrait of "nothing." The irony is pushed further in the poet's definition of "nothing" as what fills up a sandfly's head. His definition shows his Adamic power of naming, too. Power is basically generated from this nothingness as he is the only one able to transform void into life, silence into sound:

> If I listen I can hear the polyp build,
>
> The silence thwanged by two waves of the sea,
>
> Cracking a sea-louse, I make thunder split. (58)

Walcott's "The Castaway" affords an interesting case of "topopoetics", "a mode of reading that moves away from the *representation* of place in literature to a direct presencing of place or sensation of place" (Moslud 32). This acoustic making of place generates a "corporal experience ... or sensuous geographies" (Moslud 30). Walcott, then, does not represent place; he rather makes it present. He rectifies the charge of absence or nothingness as he engages an act of "re-presentation" which is, according to Malpas,

"a mode of emplacement" (*The Place of Ladscape* 7).Walcott ends his autobiographic poem *Another Life* with this specific idea of emplacement. Addressing his dead friend St. Omeros whom he calls Gregorias in this poem, he triumphantly declares:

> We were blessed with a virginal, unpainted world
>
> With Adam's task of giving things their names
>
> ... with nothing so old
>
> that it could be invented (294)

Appropriating place through naming and creating is also accompanied with an urgent need to redefine spaces. This is how the sea becomes in Walcott's poetry a place of history.

Redefining Spaces: The Sea as a Place of History

Walcott vents his hostility towards history in both his essays and poetry. He regards it as an act of epistemic fraud and a violent intervention. History, he maintains, is a mere "written" document, "a kind of literature without morality" for "everything depends on whether we write this fiction through the memory of the hero or the victim" (*What The Twighlight Says* 37). Accordingly, he discards history as a fixed truth and replaces it with a new dynamics of historicizing based on a history that builds and destroys itself in a perpetual movement of writing and erasure. This palimpsestic model is shaped on West Indian Kamau Brathwaite's notion of "tidalectics", defined by Mary E. Morgan as "a way of interpreting our life and history as sea change, the ebb and flow of sea movement" (169-170). Walcott engages the sea as an agent of history with the power to write and

unwrite. A pertinent example is offered by "Codicile", a poem that raises anxieties about language and identity. "Codicil" ends with an image of an erased text: "... this clouding, unclouding sickle moon/withering this beach again like a blank page" (98). The blank page, a challenging nod to Naipaul's charge of historical nothingness, functions as an invitation to rewrite one's history.

The same idea is reiterated in "Koening of the River", a good illustration of fictionalizing history. The poem interpolates Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and subverts its discursive strategies to write history from the "side of the hero." Once again, Walcott opts for a spectacular end:

> ... Koening clenched each fist
>
> around his barge-pole scepter, as a mist
>
> rises from the river and the page goes white. (382)

Derek Walcott embraces the idea of an ongoing different and deferred history that undermines the colonial historical power of freezing memory.

Walcott, however, does not stop at the movement of the sea waves which metaphorically regulate the Caribbean history. He proposes a new cartography wherein the sea becomes the locus of memory. As he promotes the sea as the place of history, he redresses Naipaul's myopic geography: "You want to hear my history? Ask the sea" (282), he defies Naipaul in *Another Life*. His poem "The Sea is History" is probably the best illustration of presenting the sea as the habitat of history. The poem unfolds as an answer

to an inquisition raising doubt over the existence of the poet's history: "Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?/Where is your tribal memory?" The answer comes sharp, with no shade of hesitation: "in that great vault. The sea. The sea/has locked them up. The sea is history" (364). The metaphorical transformation of the sea into a storeroom, a safekeeping place, testifies to Walcott's subversive vision of space. The sea becomes an integral part of the islands and consequently considered as a place, the home of memory.

Conclusion

Derek Walcott's pact with place started with a private vow and culminated into a triumphant public speech. His Nobel Prize address announces the fulfillment of his childhood pledge to materialize and immortalize his island. He engages place as an act of resistance and retrieval. Accordingly, his poetry acquires strength from his efforts as a cartographer and historiographer. Both the geography and history of the Caribbean were colonial productions. His poetry has endeavored to provide a new topography as well as a new vision of history. Place, then, is inscribed within an ethos of commitment, an ethical responsibility. Walcott believes that it is the Caribbean artist's duty to re-present the West Indies. Borrowing the concept of "presencing" from Heidegger, Sten Pultz Moslud explains that "the work of art does not represent but makes present" ("The Presencing of Place in Literature" 32). This is what Walcott's poetry has ventured to achieve: an act of presencing or a volition of making. The responsibility, however, is not restricted to the poet for the reader has a share in it. Indeed, Walcott thinks that poets now "don't give delight to readers, they give responsibility" (Interview by Simon Stanford). I consider, therefore, that the geocritical approach I have used in my reading of Walcott's poetry is a part of my responsibility as a reader. Studying the question of place and emplacement is very important to understand "the nature and quality of our existence" (Tally 8). Occupying place, in the sense of appropriating it, acquires not only an ethical responsibility; it is also an ontological query. Indeed, 'I have a place, therefore I exist" reverberates all over Walcott's poetry.

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PETUNIAS

PHOTO: VIRGINIA GOULET

'Unfit for consideration': the meaning of suicide in Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*[1]

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The incidence of suicide in Evelyn Waugh's fiction, both early and late, in many forms – actual suicides, attempted suicides, faked suicides, and more protracted processes of self-destruction – is great enough that it ought not to be ignored. Focusing most closely on the act in 1930's *Vile Bodies*, this paper will attempt to prove that there is a meaning in suicide, and in death, that validates the empty world that Waugh presents. Any attempt to understand the novel without investing the suicide with meaning is essentially empty.

The depiction of suicide demands a response, and Jonathan Greenberg asks, '[c]an ethical and aesthetic responses to a representation [of suffering] be separated, and what happens if they conflict with each other?' (xiii) The question of separation, though, need not be asked in regard to this text. Reader response presumably follows a path lacking in sentimentality: if the narrator cares not a whit for the characters, why should we? For Waugh's literature is not moral philosophy. In Immanuel Kant's thought,

[w]hat constitutes suicide is the intention to destroy oneself….We shrink in horror from suicide because all nature seeks its own *self-preservation*… how then could a man make his freedom which is the acme of life and constitutes its worth, a principle for his own *destruction*? (cited in Seidler 442, emphases added)

In *Vile Bodies*, these drives are subverted. If self-preservation comes at the cost of a relinquishing of identity, freedom can be found only in its destruction. Kant's ethical and aesthetic response to suicide is one of horror, but we respond to the suicide(s) in the text only on an aesthetic level. The sociologist Emile Durkheim suggests that there is

for each people a collective force of a definite amount of energy, impelling men to self-destruction. The victim's acts which at first seem to express only his personal temperament are really the supplement and prolongation of a social condition which they express externally (299).

Waugh's text sits well on Durkheim's foundation because any condition is a social condition and any victim is necessarily a victim of social forces. But a sociological explanation can go only so far, and to make the case as convincingly as possible – to make clear that there is meaning to be found in Simon's suicide – requires not a philosophical, sociological or even moral basis, but a literary one. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Burnt Norton', as well as the literature produced by the contemporary Futurist and Imagist movements, create this foundation. On a most elementary level, the text reflects Friedrich Nietzsche's '[a]ll good things were formerly bad things; every original sin has turned into an original virtue' (113). But this is less significant than the way

in which *Vile Bodies* both affirms and denies Modernist sentiment, through the construction and destruction of identity and the balance between self-preservative and self-destructive drives.

In the novel any philosophical distinction between action and character is almost nullified due purely to the fact that there is an almost complete lack of the latter. Action is all we have to invest value in; we cannot find morality in personality, because personality eludes us, but to invest actions with any such moral quality, too, is problematic. From the lack of personality stems a fundamental lack of morality, or of any moral framework through which we can make sense of the action. The drive for self-preservation is suppressed, at best, but really replaced by self-destructive tendencies that result most obviously in the three deaths contained within the text. The surprise is that meaning lies at the end of this self-destructive drive.

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To understand Simon Balcairn's suicide is to presuppose an important distinction between the *action* of self-destruction and the self-destructive *character*. Waugh reacts against the Nietzsche's essentially Aristotelian maxim that '"[a]n action is perfectly devoid of value: it all depends on who performs it"' (cited in Nehamas 192) through a superficial treatment of character that leaves the reader with no choice but to re-invest actions with value. Nietzsche 'wants to introduce, at least as a major consideration, the question whether a person's actions, whatever their moral quality, together constitute a personality' (Nehamas 192-93) – but any hint of personality

that emerges from the mass of vile bodies that is the Bright Young People is only a by-product of their social (that is, physical) movement. To look for morality in personality is misguided; the moral quality of the actions is more apposite. We find value in the act:

> Then he turned on the gas. It came surprisingly with a loud roar; the wind of it stirred his hair and the remaining particles of his beard. At first he held his breath. Then he thought that was silly and gave a sniff. The sniff made him cough, and coughing made him breathe, and breathing made him feel very ill; but soon he fell into a coma and presently died (Waugh, *VB* 89-90).

The repetition of 'then' both in and preceding this passage drives the action of the suicide until its logical and bluntly-stated end. Our access to Simon's thoughts is mediated by the narrator, whose control over the linguistic rendering of the process is reinforced by the series of commas in the long, final sentence. Respiratory functions, usually life-sustaining, subvert themselves in the self-destruction process – 'breathing made him feel very ill' – in a way that suggests that the drive for self-preservation is far from cardinal. Durkheim cites the case of a suicide who recorded his own observations of his final moments: '"I do not consider that I am showing either courage or cowardice; I simply wish to use my few remaining moments to describe the sensations felt during asphyxiation and the length of the suffering"' (Brierre de Boismont cited in Durkheim 281). In *Vile Bodies* it is the narrator, rather than the suicide, who is the one to describe the sensations felt *by Simon* during asphyxiation, and the length of the suffering. He dies, and

the last Earl of Balcairn went, as they say, to his fathers (who had fallen in

many lands and for many causes, as the eccentricities of British Foreign Policy and their own wandering natures had diverted them; at Acre and Agincourt and Killiecrankie, in Egypt and America. One had been picked white by fishes as the tides rolled him among the tree-tops of a submarine forest; some had grown black and unfit for consideration under tropical suns; while many of them lay in marble tombs of extravagant design) (Waugh, *VB* 90).

Simon voluntarily kills off the Balcairn name, nullifying the tradition indicated by the deaths of the previous Balcairns 'in many lands and for many causes'. The balance between 'the eccentricities of British Foreign Policy' and the 'wandering natures' of the men implies a level of attachment to society that is also tempered by autonomy and individual agency in what appears to be an archaic form. Geography becomes meaningful in a way that it is not anywhere else in the text: the comparison between the deaths 'at Acre and Agincourt and Killiecrankie, in Egypt and America' and the bored listing of the endless partying occurring at 'almost naked parties in St. John's Wood…parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and disgusting dances in Paris' (Waugh, *VB* 104) is made in such a way that it points to the value that lies in only one of these sets of facts. In comparison to the ends of his ancestors, Simon's seems like a dull end to an insufferably dull life: his textbook death-by-asphyxiation pales in comparison to that of some of his ancestors, who 'had grown black and unfit for consideration under tropical suns.'

In Durkheim's framing of suicide as a social phenomenon he includes three main types (egoistic, altruistic, and anomic); Simon's suicide, resulting as it does from excessive individualism (that is, from a lack of cohesion with the social body),

falls into the category of egoistic suicide. Durkheim accounts for the self-destructive tendencies in man by way of reference to the social environment:

> If…as has often been said, man is double, that is because social man superimposes himself upon physical man. Social man necessarily presupposes a society which he expresses and serves. If this dissolves, if we no longer feel it in existence and action about and above us, whatever is social in us is deprived of all objective foundation. All that remains is an artificial combination of illusory images, a phantasmagoria vanishing at the least reflection; that is, nothing which can be a goal for our action (213).

The ties that bind Simon to the rest of the Bright Young People are irrevocably broken when he is first blacklisted from and then thrown out of Margot Metroland's party. He no longer expresses and serves the society he was once a part of; there is no longer any objective foundation for his social activity (if there ever was at all), and he is forced to live a phantasy: while still at the party, Simon is shown "*bowing across the room to empty places and to people whose backs are turned to him*" (Waugh, *VB* 82, original emphasis). Waugh voids Durkheim's explanation of the doubling of man by suggesting that social man *is no more than* physical man; existence is only that enacted by the body, and social movement, therefore, is physical movement. More problematic is Durkheim's suggestion that 'new moralities originate which, by elevating facts to ethics, commend suicide' – moralities which 'symbolize in abstract language and systematic form the physiological distress of the body social' (214). In Wittgensteinian terms, 'although all judgments of relative value can be shown to be mere statements of facts, no statement of fact can ever be, or imply, a judgment of absolute value' (6). Simon is evidently a victim of one of these new moralities; the

elevation of facts to ethics is one still based on relative value, but a new morality born out of 'the physiological distress of the body social' is perhaps enough to trick Simon into making a judgment of absolute value. Sociologically speaking, '[o]f course, suicide is always the act of a man who prefers death to life' (Durkheim 277), but there is more to the act, in this novel at least, than the result of this most loaded of choices.

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The suicide of a fictional contemporary of Simon's is much more of a Modernist suicide than Simon's could ever have been, given the literary inclinations of his creator. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Septimus Smith, having realised that the world is devoid of meaning, and faced with the immediate prospect of institutionalisation, throws himself from a window. His suicide is revisited in Clarissa Dalloway's consciousness, imagined from another perspective, but seen almost in its actuality:

> He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. But why had he done it? …Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* 156).

The first three sentences appear to be completely objective observations, with a scientific manner both suggested and reinforced by the simple '[s]o she saw it'. From the description of circumstances (which is really all we are given in Waugh) is a swift and lyrical move to an attempt to understand them (which is what we do not get at all in Waugh). Clarissa identifies the meaning in death, and in doing so makes it a legitimate subject for contemplation. The body and the act recalled provoke an attempt at understanding what it all means: death is defiance, communication, and embrace; Clarissa, as a potential 'meaning maker', senses a 'sudden rent in [society's] cultural fabric', and through contemplation contributes to the mending of the tear (Nesbet 835). In *Vile Bodies*, on the other hand, once Simon's death has been transcribed, the sixth chapter is quickly brought to a close and the seventh opens with business, as usual:

> Then Adam became Mr Chatterbox.
>
> He and Nina were lunching at Espinosa's and quarrelling half-heartedly when a business-like, Eton-cropped woman came across to their table, whom Adam recognized as the social editress of the *Daily Excess*.
>
> 'See here,' she said, 'weren't you over at the office with Balcairn the day he did himself in?'
>
> 'Yes.'
>
> 'Well, a pretty mess he's let us in for. Sixty-two writs for libel up to date and more coming in. And that's not the worst. Left me to do his job and mine. I was wondering if you could tell me the names of any of these people and anything about them' (Waugh, *VB* 91).

The referential and retrospective '[t]hen', following as it does a conversation occurring, presumably, concurrently with Simon's death, and keeping up with the pace at which the suicide was narrated, indicates the relentless speed of these characters' lives; maybe they do not think because they can spare no time for thought. In this, the first, isolated line of Chapter 7, we might find a clue to the rest of the novel. Cause is only implied, and effect is presented without feeling. Mr Chatterbox finds another host,

and the time lapse *between* cause and effect, following the isolated sentence, contains hints of the social malaise that is to be amplified in the second half of the book. Even the quarrelling is only half-hearted. There is no search for meaning in the suicidal act, no indication of any void created by Simon's suicide, and the only real tear in the social fabric is one of inconvenience. But in this society there is no real religion, no true morality, and certainly no empathy, so we should not be so surprised that this is the way the novel continues. The event is referred to only as a marker in time, or merely as one event in the progression of meaningless events.

> Simon, like Septimus (we will later find out), can reason:
>
> 'If I miss this party I may as well leave Fleet Street for good…I may as well put my head into a gas-oven and have done with it…I'm sure if Margot knew how much it meant to me she wouldn't mind my coming.'
>
> Great tears stood in his eyes threatening to overflow. (Waugh, *VB* 73)

With impeccable reasoning, Simon starts his logical equation with a conditional '[i]f', and concludes it rationally: *if* A, *then* B. It would appear that there is no way of defeating this prepared conclusion, which is perhaps why there is an awful truth to Simon's declaration that he is at the end of his tether (75). Maybe Simon is the only one who stops to think; if (egoistic) suicide is an intellectual phenomenon (Durkheim 258), then, it is reasonable that he is the only one to commit it. Simon and Septimus can reason, but Simon, in addition, can feel, and in a rare description of emotion the narrator has tears – more real than those suggested by the Carrollian epigraph – in Simon's eyes, 'threatening to overflow'. Later, to Simon's plaintive "I do so wish I

were dead", Adam, surely not wholly unfeelingly but rather embarrassedly, responds with "[d]on't cry…it's too shy-making" (Waugh, *VB* 74). Adopting the speech mannerisms of the Younger Set, Adam discourages Simon from showing emotion: Waugh's denial of affect is the reason behind Adam's refusal to attribute meaning to Simon's evident and worrying suicidal tendencies.

Septimus Smith exhibits these same tendencies, and Alan Warren Friedman sees Septimus's suicide as anticlimactic, 'merely the disposal of a body whose inhabitant, embodying the insanity society refuses to confront in itself, can never wholly return from the war.' This is a direct result of his 'obsession with having ceased to feel, to survive affectively' (212). But the title of *Vile Bodies* itself destroys the idea of the separation of inhabitant from body in the novel, for there is no inhabitant separate from the physical body, which feels only as a physical body can feel. And the idea of body *doubles* is not irrelevant. While Septimus is recalled through Clarissa, it takes the presence of another character named Simon – a body, doubled – for Agatha to remember who the first one was. Adam mentions Simon's name, in connection with his suicide; Agatha, in an instance of nominal misrecognition (based perhaps on a lack of a physical form to tie any identity to), assumes he is referring to another institutionalised patient, until she is corrected:

> 'Oh, *that* Simon. I thought you meant *Simon*.'
>
> 'Who's Simon?' (Waugh, *VB* 158, original emphases).

Misunderstanding follows misunderstanding due to the confusion resulting from the doubled Simon. It is not enough for Waugh to replace him as Mr Chatterbox; Simon

(the second) is a numerical boost to the Younger Set at a time when they most need it – "[h]ow people are *disappearing*, Adam" (158, original emphasis) – and a reminder (physical, of course) of the existence of Simon (the first). It could be through the reincarnation of Simon that we find the balance of Simon's and Agatha's deaths.

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> In the teashop among the tables and the chattering waiters the appalling fear came over him – he could not feel. He could reason; he could read… he could add up his bill; his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then – that he could not feel….
>
> It might be possible, Septimus thought, looking at England from the train window, as they left Newhaven; it might be possible that the world itself is without meaning (Woolf, *MD* 75).

Where in *Vile Bodies* society is reducible to an automobile race, in *Mrs Dalloway* it is society in the form of a teashop that prompts the fear in Septimus. Waugh's roaring motors become Woolf's chattering waiters; the passage is balanced with the mention of the teashop and the mention of the world, and Septimus's view of England, too, on a larger scale reveals to him a potential truth that the majority of characters in *Vile Bodies* remain oblivious to, maybe because they are ignorant of the divorce between reason and emotion, but mostly because they display signs of neither. Nietzsche supposes that

> the *formation of a herd* is a significant victory and advance in the struggle against depression. With the growth of the community, a new interest grows for the individual, too, and often lifts him above the most personal element in his discontent: his aversion to *himself* (135, original emphasis).

But this aversion is never rendered explicitly. We never find the characters contemplative and alone. With no room for deliberation[n], this is more inertia than it is aversion. According to Helmut Thielicke, the only truth that Nihilism has to declare is that 'ultimately Nothingness prevails and the world is meaningless' (27). The characters in *Vile Bodies*, unlike Woolf's Septimus Smith, are probably not aware of this truth. To Agatha in the institutional bed, the nurse's repeated *nothing*s are intended to be reassuring, but actually tap into the truth; is Waugh declaring a truth that is as devoid of meaning as the world that it is a truth about? But we must be able to locate meaning *somewhere* in the novel.

It can hardly be said that the narrative is plagued by death, but the novel itself does tend toward self-destruction; Waugh wrote that '[i]t all seems to shrivel up & rot internally and I am relying on a sort of cumulative futility for any effect it may have' (cited in Myers 13). The body count is high enough, and two deaths out of the final three significant enough, to suggest that perhaps meaning can be found only through a cessation of frenzied, futile action. It is my contention that Simon's death is the still point upon which the novel turns – a slowing down of the action, and a stillness out of which the speed the novel requires to finish is created (a speed which, on the way to the end, destroys Agatha too). An attempt to invest Simon's death with meaning is helped by a turn to T. S. Eliot, for the idea just stated is one informed by "Burnt Norton":

> At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
>
> Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,

But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,

Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,

Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,

There would be no dance, and there is only the dance (15).

Simon dies, and the narrator, uncharacteristically, switches to past tense. Simon '*went, as they say, to his fathers*' (Waugh *VB* 90, emphasis added), and for the remainder of the paragraph there is no *present* movement. In retrospection, or in the past, lies meaning – and it is just enough to prompt the realisation that meaning is what we have been denied up until this point. Agatha's death later in the novel comes close to repeating this, but meaning exists only in the *moment* of death, and not after it, when the living characters make only flippant references to the deaths of these two.

A significant death could thus be an inversion of meaning: Agatha's death is less meaningful than Simon's because we do not see the moment of it; Flossie Ducane's is even less meaningful again because it is narrated only retroactively; and the fourth death, that of the unnamed man who loses two bets with Adam at the beginning of the narrative, was, according to Jacobs, 'cut as presumably being too emptily cruel' (xxxi). An extension of the sentence that appears in the novel (36) is found in the *Vile Bodies* manuscript, in which the young man dies: 'Next day he bought a second hand motor bicycle instead and was killed at the corner at Staines as he was starting for a visit to the country at the following week end' (24). In this unpunctuated and unadorned description of death, Waugh could have reached the limit of meaning. It is not in life but in death that anything matters, but this is not redemptive, for the

meaning is still only fleeting. Simon's death is one of only a few points in the novel in which the past warrants a mention, and the narrator's brief meditation on the various fates of Simon's forefathers gives him a past and establishes him in a tradition which maybe, finally, makes him a character of more substance than the rest of them – and consequently, though perhaps surprisingly, a bigger loss. This small paragraph is the closest the novel comes to a point '[w]here past and future are gathered', and falls short only because the future, in this text, never warrants as much consideration as the present. And of course it is *not* fixity, but it is 'neither arrest nor movement', and '[n]either from nor towards'. It is neither more nor less than the still point of the turning, frenzied world. But to find meaning in the suicide of a gossip writer, in these circumstances, is comical. It is not Eliot, but classic early Waugh.

There is one other still point in the novel: the description of Shepheard's Hotel. Like the meditation after Simon's suicide episode, it is a brief respite from present action, but unlike the meditation, it remains in the present tense: 'one can go to Shepheard's parched with modernity any day, if Lottie likes one's face, and still draw up, cool and uncontaminated, great healing draughts from the well of Edwardian certainty' (Waugh, *VB* 30). This sense of timelessness, of stasis that is *not* the opposite of dynamism but is something much more reassuring, suggests a nostalgia for a more meaningful past. Simon's still point – the novel's *true*, and temporal, still point – perhaps is the pause required to keep the novel itself from self-destructing: Waugh affords his creation the opportunity for reassessment, a privilege that does not extend to either Agatha or Simon. In this episode the unusual retreading of the past

is one haunted by a reminder of the present: the dead body that is not written but is unforgettably and motionlessly there. The suicidal act is physical, but the physical product of the act never exists. After a brief and darkly humorous exchange between Lord Monomark and Lady Metroland – "I'll raise him tomorrow first thing" (90) – the action resumes: 'Then Adam became Mr Chatterbox' (91). Restraint cannot be forced, but the party in the *captive* dirigible is linked to Simon's demise and destruction, funded as it is on the proceeds of the libel cases generated by Simon's last column. This is pure cause and effect: from Simon's suicide note follows a flurry of action, temporarily constrained but followed, of course, by further action. There is movement in the digression on Simon's fathers, but it is past action made meaningful by present inaction, and recalls (though not in quite the same way) the opening of 'Prufrock':

> Let us go then, you and I,
>
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
>
> Like a patient etherised upon a table (Eliot 11).

In this moment in this poem, and in the moment in *Vile Bodies*, stillness and movement are not as diametrically opposed as we would perhaps once have believed. For the rest of the novel, though, the more appropriate link is with Imagist poetry. The primacy of presentation is unambiguous in F. S. Flint's *Cones*:

> Here a branch sways
>
> and there
>
> a sparrow twitters. [...]

> The quiet in the room
>
> bears patiently
>
> a footfall on the street (77).

The poet's preoccupation with verbs suggests a world in flux – not frenzied, like the world in *Vile Bodies*, but constantly pulsing with movement: a branch is swaying, a sparrow is twittering, and even quiet – an abstract concept rendered here in concrete form – is patiently bearing a sound from the street. Similarly, throughout *Vile Bodies*, there is a constant sense of an object acting or being acted upon, and the extinguishing of the *life* force does not at all contribute to the cessation of force.

The still point has been suggested earlier in Waugh's fiction, when, in *Decline and Fall*, the architect Otto Silenus tells Waugh's hapless hero Paul Pennyfeather that life is '"like the big wheel at Luna Park"' where the aim is to reach the '"point completely at rest"' at the centre of the wheel (282-83). In *Vile Bodies*, the drive to reach the centre is, on the whole, *intentionally* neither a self-preservative nor a self-destructive one. I do not believe that the characters in *Vile Bodies* actively seek the centre: a point completely at rest is the kryptonite of the characters, and, fittingly, it can only be reached by self-destruction. If they were to seek stillness, it would of course be through movement, but the shock of stasis after having known nothing but dynamism would either be too much, or fatally underwhelming: 'And when we do get to the middle, it's as if we never started. It's so odd' (Waugh, *Decline and Fall* 283). Michael Gorra cannot see Waugh delighting in the 'flux and change' represented by the big wheel, but sees him longing 'instead for one spot of immediate stability from

which to see the whole mechanical world revolve, a place exempt from the limitations of the life he describes'; this point, or its absence, is not insisted upon in *Decline and Fall*, but certainly is in *Vile Bodies* (206) - but it can only be reached through self-destruction, and there's the rub.

> These living characters, then, appear never to be still:
>
> There were two men with a lot of explosive powder taking photographs in another room. Their flashes and bangs had rather a disquieting effect on the party, causing a feeling of tension, because everyone looked negligent and said what a bore the papers were, and how *too* like Archie to let the photographers come, but most of them, as a matter of fact, wanted dreadfully to be photographed and the others were frozen with unaffected terror that they might be taken unawares and then their mammas would know where they had been when they said they were at the Bicesters' dance, and then there would be a row again, which was so *exhausting*, if nothing else (Waugh, *VB* 45, original emphases).

This exposure of the group's mentality reveals the divorce between thought and posture, which in turn indicates the emptiness at the heart of their existence, but there is a surprising suggestion of stillness amongst the chaotic action of the passage. The interests of photography lie in capturing single (or individual) moments, and some of the characters are '*frozen* with unaffected terror', but these suggestions of stillness are contained within an extended sentence, out of control and driven by commas and conjunctions, punctuated with explosive powder, flashes, and bangs. This is the turning world of which the moment after Simon's death is the still point. And it is in the language of both the narrator and the characters that the frantic nature of the turning world is captured. Adam sends a wire to Nina, which reads: '*Drunk Major in refreshment tent not bogus thirty-five thousand married tomorrow everything perfect*

Agatha lost love Adam' and says of it, '"[t]hat seems quite clear"' (Waugh, *VB* 148). The chain of causality in this sentence – Adam finds the Drunk Major, therefore he is 'not bogus', therefore Adam will be paid the thirty-five thousand pounds he is owed, therefore he and Nina can get married tomorrow, and therefore everything is perfect – is stopped, almost subverted, by 'Agatha lost'. The chain is hard to discern; the lack of punctuation of course indicates the unceasing blend of one experience into the next, with neither time nor space for contemplation.

And even if distance were attainable, there is no wisdom to be gained from it. Like Septimus's view of New Haven from the train window, an aerial view of London prompts realisations of meaning, or alternatively of its absence, in the following two perspectives, from Virginia Woolf and Nina Blount:

> [A]s one rises up into the sky, as the sky pours down over one, this little hard granular knob, with its carvings and frettings, dissolves, crumbles, loses its domes, its pinnacles, its firesides, its habits, and one becomes conscious of being a little mammal, hot-blooded, hard-boned, with a clot of red blood in one's body, trespassing up here in a fine air; repugnant to it, unclean, anti-pathetic. Vertebrae, ribs, entrails, and red blood belong to the earth (Woolf, 'Flying Over London' 207).
>
> Nina looked down and saw inclined at an odd angle a horizon of straggling red suburb; arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others empty and decaying; a disused canal; some distant hills sown with bungalows; wireless masts and overhead power cables; men and women were indiscernible except as tiny spots; they were marrying and shopping and making money and having children. The scene lurched and tilted again as the aeroplane struck a current of air.
>
> 'I think I'm going to be sick,' said Nina (Waugh, *VB* 168).

To physically remove oneself from one's immediate frame of reference is certainly

to gain perspective, and we see this in both of these passages. But there are crucial differences. Nina's flight reveals life in all of its mediocrity: the limit to existence is 'marrying and shopping and making money and having children'. Woolf's flight, presented as real and later revealed to be imaginary, does not deal with limits, but instead locates the finite in the infinite. While the essential elements of a human being are out of place in the fine air, this reminder of the physicality of existence, that human beings are made of red blood, vertebrae, ribs and entrails, prompts an awareness of being. The placement of the flesh and blood within the ephemeral creates meaning in the same way that movement occurring within stillness does.

<div align="center">❖❖❖❖❖</div>

Durkheim believed that, at the end of the nineteenth century, there was an excessive indulgence towards suicide. The only corrective to an act which so offended morality was, by his reasoning, severe punishment which, however unfortunately, could 'not be tolerated by the public conscience. For as we have seen, suicide is a close kin to genuine virtues, which it simply exaggerates' (370-71). The *representation* of suicide, in *Vile Bodies*, does not offend morality. Waugh manages to avoid explicit moralising by presenting the act so matter-of-factly that there is really no need for an ethical response. Indeed, the fast-paced action of the novel leaves the reader very little time with which to contemplate, or indulge, the suicide. Durkheim's construction of suicide as 'a close kin to genuine virtues' echoes Nietzsche's inversion of original sin and original virtue. After the limits of humanism have been reached, the lines between sin and virtue become increasingly less well-defined. The text itself tends towards

self-destruction, but unlike the characters, finds brief moments of contemplation and retrospection that deter destruction. These moments are deaths, and of course death is inversion. The still points are both physical and temporal; it is certainly Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' that suggests the idea, and we cannot ignore the fact that it is only by understanding Waugh's text and its sentiments in relation to a greater set of Modernist texts and sentiments that we can find the meaning in suicide.

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Battlefield

I was dumb with silence, I held my peace,

even from good; and my sorrow was stirred.

Psalm 39

Yellow jackets aren't one of the gentle bees,

Pollinators who also live underground.

Yesterday, one lit on a strategic perch,

And waited tensely till the grasshopper crossed

Half the breadth of the ramp. It hovered to seize

The moment and so begin the miniature duel,

Almost out of sight and without a sound.

(Like the yellow jacket, death warrants the poem.

There is no intercepting its entry or search

No matter how invasive, destructive or cruel.

Arriving suddenly it flies without home

Encircling the air as though nothing had been.)

But the insect fought hard and mightily tossed

The wasp on its back, again and again

Which stabbed and stabbed. How could its sting

Not kill outright? It hurts us like the devil.

Yes, the yellow jacket was sure it would win,

Fearing nothing, insects, animals or men.

The fighting was fierce, but never was level.

So valiant, the grasshopper had to succumb.

The wasp claimed the prize and went on the wing.

Strangely the battlefield was peaceful and dumb.

—*Jefferson Holdridge*
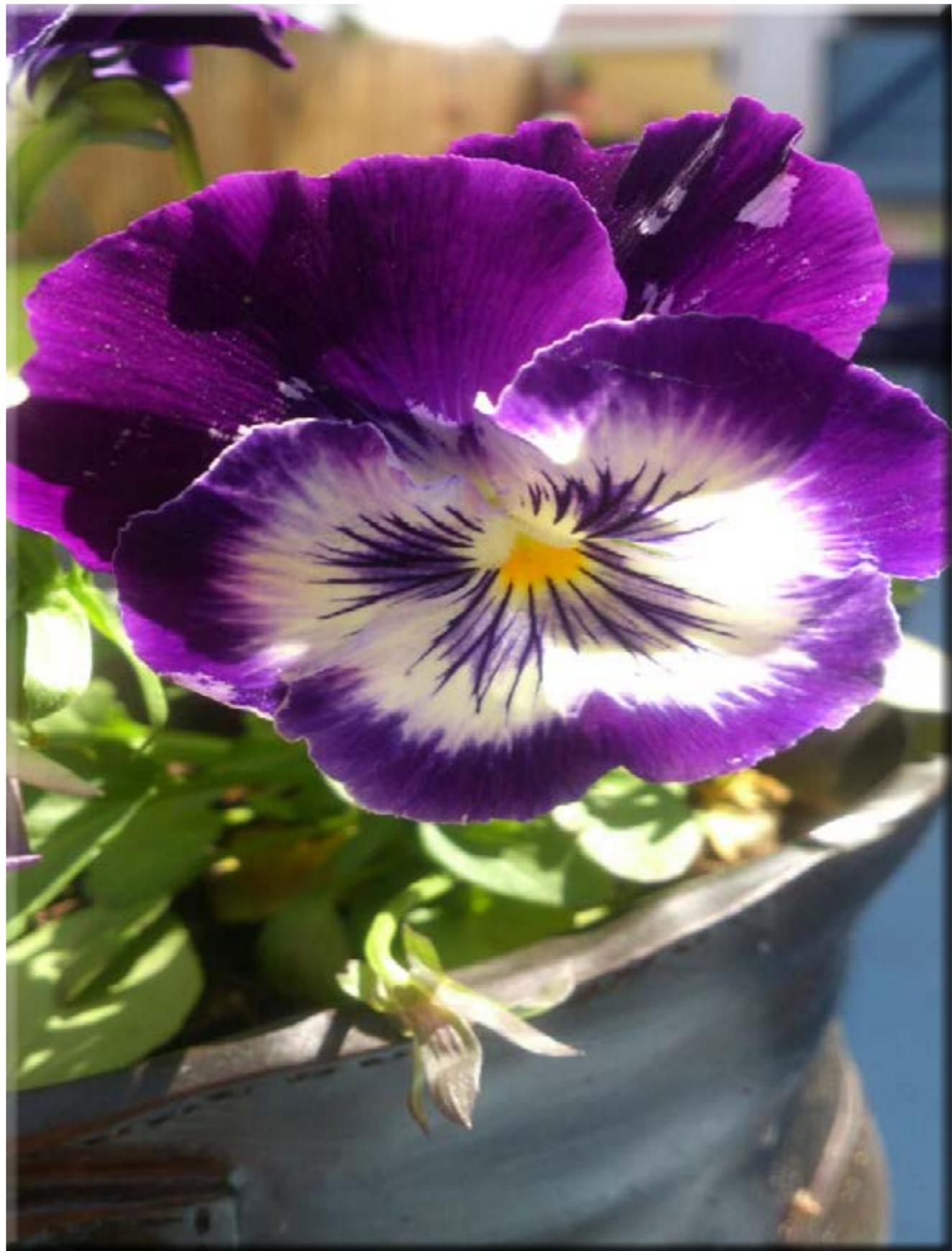
PANSIES

Slave Violence: Resistance and Desperation

by Valorie Tucker, Old Dominion University, Norfolk Virginia, and Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton, Virginia

Antebellum southern culture believed slavery to be their natural right, which they protected by law and through violence. By the Civil War, the practice of slavery was over a century old and fully entrenched in the southern way of life. The southern economy was a heavy burden largely carried on the backs of laboring black slaves, which made their continued enslavement essential for whites who passionately debated and defended the institution when attacked by abolitionists in the United States and abroad. The value of a single slave's body and labor placed substantial wealth into the hands of white masters, and southern plantation owners were not willing to abandon slavery because of arguments for the human rights of slaves. Indeed, the very practice of slavery depended on the dehumanization of slaves. Dehumanization defended slavery against opponents and further perpetuated the practice—in essence, it was both the cause and result of slavery. History paints a picture of two different kinds of slaves, which dominates general historical understanding. On one hand, there was the docile, degraded plantation slave who toiled hopelessly in fields, subject to the harsh abuses of masters with absolutely no recourse to better their lives. Most important, they were helpless, submissive, and complacent in their status, possessing no sense of self from which to defend against abuse.

On the other hand, narratives from ex-slaves such as Frederick Douglass and Solomon Northrup, and accounts of slave revolts such as Nat Turner's violent rebellion in 1831 give us stories of exciting escapes from slavery. The narratives and reports of slave revolts are heavily dramatized acts of resistance, inspirational, sometimes violent, and very popularly known. Somewhere in the middle of the docile and the extreme lie countless slaves who each had their own unique experience in servitude. Far from being helpless and docile, creative, intelligent, and desperate slaves chose to defy the social and legal system that subjugated them. They found ways to resist their oppression and dehumanization, and by doing so asserted their independence and humanity. The tensions produced between restrictive state and federal law, and the abuses of slave masters, against slaves determined to resist, assert their independence as people, and have a hand in their own self-determination created a dynamic of violent oppression against which slaves resisted.

To recover the experience of slaves, a heavy reliance on slave narrative and oral history is necessary. Slaves giving testimony of their experiences to wider audiences go as far back as the early eighteenth century. Already by 1703 slave narratives were being produced. The publication of *Adam Negro's Tryall*, a recount of a court case in which a slave named Adam took his owner to court over promises of freedom (Tackach, 16-17). Since then, slave narratives have created a powerful genre of literature. Yet narratives are not without their problems. They are heavily reliant on memory, which in itself can be faulty. Narratives were also often times written for abolitionist publication. In some cases, the accuracy of detail had to be sacrificed to ensure a fugitive's safety, which John W. Blassingame said "undermined the credibility of the accounts" (71). As a result, the authentic experiences of slaves become narratives that are characterized by a relative

formulaic outline of events: the experience of slavery as a "hell on earth," accentuating the horrors that no doubt defined the life of a slave, from which the sufferer finally experienced a personal crisis, aware of their own humanity and desire for liberty, that compelled them to escape North (Andrews, 47-48).

The Federal Writers' Project (WPA) interviews remain one of the largest resources for slave history. The WPA volumes contain thousands of interviews of ex-slaves conducted from 1936 to 1938. Historians have identified a number of problems with the WPA interviews. The interviewers were mostly white, and ex-slaves may not have felt free to be candid about their experiences, or may have given answers tailored to what they thought the interviewers wanted. The cultural divide between ex-slaves and white interviewers created a barrier to frank discussion of abuse, sexual assault, and resistance, though not to the total exclusion of all discussion of those topics. Certainly, many interviewees were quite candid about their experiences, abuse, and resistance. Conducted seventy years after the end of the Civil War and emancipation, the ages of the bulk of the interviewees are such that they were mere children when the war broke out and had limited experiences in slavery and flawed, childlike memories. Those old enough to remember slavery as adults were by then at an age when, according to David Henige, they suffered "frailty, fading memories, and a desire to please" (116-117). For those reasons Henige called the WPA interviews "an opportunity lost" (118).

Others have since come to the defense of narratives and oral history. Narratives and oral history are a way, according to David K. Dunaway, to correct "an imbalance in historical records" because it allows those who are illiterate or uneducated, and therefore cannot leave written records behind, to have an historical voice (12). Paul D. Escott

asserted that just as people today remember critical moments in their life, so too would slaves have keenly remembered some of their most vital experiences (7). Historians should not so readily dismiss the value of memory by automatically assuming that memories grow inaccurate with age, or that a flawed recollection has no value whatsoever. The WPA interviews were conducted with a set series of questions, certainly, but slaves still shared many memories and experiences important to their years in enslavement. William Dusinberre distinguished three types of stories that come through in the interviews: first hand or second hand, tradition, and folklore. The two forms most questionable are tradition and folklore. Tradition, according to Dusinberre, is creditable because though the interviewee may not have been present for the discussion, they were still aware of its prevalence. For example, quite a few of the slaves interviewed mentioned the rubbing of brine, salt, pepper, and red peppers over open wounds after a whipping. Though the interviewee may never have, in fact, experienced or seen it, it was a tradition of which they were aware (9-10). Folklore can be identified and discredited with careful readings of the interviews. Implausibility and the repetition of the same story by many of interviewees can raise suspicion as to a story's likelihood, for example. It is doubtful, for instance, that a slave woman truly did live in a cave for seven years after escaping her master, during which she had children born covered in hair like wild animals, as one legend recounts.[1]

It is more difficult in many other cases to discern the truth, but not entirely impossible. Nonetheless, the inclusion of both tradition and folklore in the interviews by the ex-slave reflected the ex-slave's perception of their experiences, be they real, made up, or retellings of the experiences of others made personal.

Ultimately, the use of narrative and oral history is vital to understanding the slave's own understandings and feelings about their enslavement, and to the reconstruction of slavery's history as a whole. We must appreciate the historical voice of ex-slaves just as they present it for what it is and what it gives, and not dismiss it based on what it is not. Within the considerable variety of experience, no matter the weaknesses and obvious fictions, are many truths. Ex-slaves spoke of the loss of family, abuse, harsh working conditions, and their own means of remaining human within a world that refused to recognize their humanity. Through the mediums of both narrative and oral history, slaves described their attempts to escape, rebel, and resist their condition. Resistance did not necessarily mean the acquisition of freedom, and neither was freedom every slave's incentive to resist. Slaves alleviated the terrible conditions of their lives through small every day acts of resistance, as well as through more overt forms of dramatic rebellion, in order to exert their independence. Resistance gave slaves a sense of humanity and authority that would make their condition more psychologically and perhaps even physically tolerable, no matter how temporary the satisfying result or the consequent punishment. As human beings locked in an unbearable situation, sometimes slaves chose to assert their independence and self-ownership through violent means, against either others or themselves.

Just as historical sources present a duality of the passive versus the violent slave, white slave owners also created a duality in their own conception of the institution. Thomas Jefferson warned that the hostilities between whites and emancipated slaves would be such that it would result in the "extermination of one or the other race" (138). Whites could not endure suggestions of equality, threatened as they felt their livelihoods and very lives were by an entirely free black population. It was in the best interest of whites

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1 For examples of this story see the accounts of Leah Garrett and Julia "Aunt Sally" Brown in Patrick Minges, ed., *Far More Terrible For Women: Personal Accounts of Women in Slavery* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 2006), 22 & 75.

to preserve slavery and deny slaves their humanity through cruelty, deprivation, and the denial of all legal rights. Some pro-slavery advocates looked to biology to justify the institution, and they insisted that blacks were mentally inferior to whites and that their "want of capability to receive a complicated education renders it improper and impolitic that he should be allowed the privileges of citizenship in an enlightened country" (Colfax, 26). Whites need not look past anything more than the color of skin to mark the inherent worth of a man and thereby dictate his status in the world. Those of African descent, seen as naturally inferior and barbaric, would in fact benefit from the influence and control of paternalistic whites.

Whites defended slavery with a paternalistic ideology that emphasized instances of positive relations between the races and insisted, "the violence of slavery was a matter of generally benevolent human relations gone awry," and it was "bad masters who gave slavery a bad name, not an inevitable feature of the system itself" (Johnson, 217-218). William John Grayson insisted that slavery benefitted blacks because, unlike white workers in the North who had to provide for themselves, slaves had everything provided for them by their masters. To Grayson, this created "more permanent, and, therefore, kinder relations between capital and labour" (vii-viii). Further, slavery helped cultivate the potential of blacks because "it has made him, from a savage, an orderly and efficient labourer" (x). Slave owners took comfort in their conviction that they were doing what was best for black men and women, and indeed civilization. Whites also took pride in the loyalty of their slaves as sign of their submission, and therefore of their acceptance of, and happiness within, subservience. Betty Quesnesberry of Arkansas, a former slave owner, recalled to her WPA interviewer a story of her old "Mammy." According to Mrs. Quesnesberry, a man from St. Louis once expressed an interest in purchasing her "Mammy" as a cook. To prove "Mammy's" personal loyalty and love, Mrs. Quesnesberry called "Mammy" out and asked her if she would like to be purchased by the man, who promised the incentive of paying her substantial wages for being his cook. Mrs. Quesnesberry relished in the reply her "Mammy" gave: "I don't want to leave you, Mrs. Betty, to go anywhere" (Minges, 38). Whites enjoyed instances such as Mrs. Quesnesberry's in order to counter abolitionist claims that the institution was fraught with abuses that kept slaves in bondage against their will. It was because of paternalism that white slave owners proclaimed to their abolitionist foes, "the people of the South feel the most perfect security in the full assurance that they possess not only the willing obedience but the strong attachment of their slaves," protected by the loyalty of slaves and by God (*The Staunton Spectator*, November 29, 1859, 2).

In contradiction to the assertion that slaves were willing participants in their bondage, whites were nevertheless aware that slaves would seek an escape from the system, or would find their own small ways to resist. Knowing that slaves would attempt to resist masters and the larger institution itself cast doubt on the white assumption that blacks were best and happiest when placed in servitude. According to ex-slave Charity Bowery, her mistress McKinley sent her away when her son was sold to a new master because the mistress "did not want to be troubled by [Charity's] cries" (Blassingame, 265). In another instance, a Mr. Lewis Sterling wrote to his son to warn him to prepare for the selling of group of family slaves, advising his son "you must do what you can to reconcile them" as they lamented the harsh realities of entering the slave market, uprooted from their families and communities (Johnson, 38). Clearly, both Charity's mistress and Mr. Sterling, like many owners, understood that their slaves were being put into situations that they were not happy with; situations that they would in fact resist in their own ways.

Recognizing the grief of their all too human slaves was not enough, however, to dissuade their masters from pursuing their own economic interests no matter what the slave had to suffer. Individual and personal methods of dealing with unhappy slaves aside, the preservation of slavery required legal protection for whites because paternalism could not mask the fact that slaves would continue to run away and rebel. For whites to establish control, slaves had to be treated as property, not as humans. This constituted not only the basic removal of slave rights, but also an altered state of being, an objectification, which denied slaves a voice of objection to their state. White slave owners fought to entrench this ideology into society and into slaves. Yet slaves would cling to their humanity, their senses of self-worth, and continue to resist their masters and slavery.

Some slaves outright sued for their freedom as a means of resistance. In 1821, a slave woman by the name of Tempe sued her master for freedom, citing abuse, lack of proper clothing, hard work, and the fact that she had worked previously in the North for another master. Tempe's case was successful and she was granted her freedom. (DeRamus, 139) Tempe was neither the first nor the last slave to sue for freedom and have it granted. As time went on, though, the legal restrictions on slaves tightened. After all, it would not suit the southern way of life to free every slave, legal or not. In 1857, Dred Scott sued his master for freedom, like Tempe citing that he had lived with his master for some time in the North. Unfortunately, by 1857, that rationale was no longer valid and Dred Scott did not win his case. At the end of the Dred Scott case, Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney stated that the framers of the constitution unquestionably believed that blacks were "beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations, and so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect" (*Dread Scott v. John F.A. Sandford*, U.S.

393,1856, 13). Fugitive slave laws in 1793 and 1850 gave slave owners legal recourse to collect runaway slaves from the North. Federal court decisions and federal laws stripped away slaves rights in order to limit slave attempts at freedom and resistance.

States also tried cases and passed laws to entrench blacks in their conditions of perpetual bondage and inferiority. As a result, the power of white slave holders increased as the power of slaves decreased. State laws were designed to create strict criteria for slave and slave master rights, which naturally benefited the master at the expense of the slave. According to a Louisiana state law, "The slave is entirely subject to the will of his master, who may correct and chastise him," though not to the extent of maiming, mutilating, or killing the slave. As collector and commentator on slave laws George M. Stroud noted, "no such limitation actually exists, or can by law be enforced" (22). Essentially, a slave master could mutilate or kill his slave if so desiring to. Though the law restricted such brutality, no court was going to find the owner accountable, and promises of protection were "almost, if not all together illusory" (Stroud, 27). A legal justification for violence was not unique to Louisiana, and the idea that it was well within a master's rights to punish characterized the mindset of the South. A South Carolina law specifically defined slaves as chattel to be bought or sold at a master's whim, and to be punished at a master's discretion. In addition, state laws instituted asserted that slaves had no right to own property or create contacts, could not testify in court against a white person, required passes to leave plantations, prohibited any slave gathering and even in some cases church services, and forbade slaves from learning to read and write (Stroud, 23-27; Jackson, 15). All of this intended to strengthen a master's hold on their slaves and reduce instances of escape and rebellion.

Court cases did occur that questioned the rights slaves had to rebel against their masters and against the appointed officials of masters, overseers. In the case of Jim vs. the State of Georgia, 1854, Jim was arrested and found guilty for the murder of a young white overseer. During the incident, the overseer moved to strike Jim. In retaliation, Jim raised an axe and struck the overseer. According to Jim's testimony, the overseer begged Jim to stop, but Jim continued to hit him with the axe until he delivered a final and fatal blow to the head. Of particular interest to the state was the exact status of Jim as a slave, and what right he had to defend himself against the attack of the overseer, thus to resist the attack. The Georgia court decided, "policy and humanity, both, demand this law (the implicit obedience of a slave to the master) of submission in the slave," which required slaves to "submit, as a child submits, to the correction of its parent, and trust to the law for his vindication." It was up to the master and to the state to judge the crimes of the overseer, and therefore the slave had no right to defend himself (*Jim [a slave] v. The State of Georgia, no. 80, 1854, 541-543*). Unless, as the case stated, Jim felt that he was in fear of his life. Yet, as Stroud maintained, this clause would have acted as nothing more than a mere illusion of protection and rights. The judgment of course meant that Jim as well as other slaves were expected to endure any punishment, no matter how brutal, and seek recourse through the master afterward. For slaves, the right to defend oneself did not apply. In a similar case, a North Carolina slave, David, was charged with murder after he intervened in the attempted whipping of his wife, Fanny, which caused the overseer to drop his guard and receive a fatal blow by David's wife. The court record stated "that the law of slavery is absolute authority on the part of the owner, unconditional submission on the part of the slave. The master may punish his slave at will… the overseer had full authority to punish the woman for her insubordination… and resistance to his rightful privilege was rebellion in her." (*State of North Carolina v David [a slave], 1857, 356.*) Consequently, both Fanny and David were guilty of murder.

Regardless of the legal restrictions white society sought to impose on their slaves, blacks were well aware of themselves as people. Numerous slaves in the WPA interviews spoke of instances in which slaves murdered masters or overseers. Carrie Davis of Oklahoma told the story of a slave named Townsend who was whipped every day for a month by the overseer, Scott. Having had enough, Townsend turned on the overseer and "did Scott worse dan Scott ever done him. Dere just wasn't no more Scott when Townsend got through wid him" (Baker and Baker, 101). Another ex-slave, Mollie Watson, confided that "all de hands ganged up on [the overseer] an' beat him till he died." (Baker & Baker, 425) The master of a neighboring plantation, according to ex-slave Plomer Harshaw, put chains on a slave man and forced him to work all day in them as punishment. As a result, after the workday was complete, the chained slave found his master rocking his baby on the porch where he "chopped [his master] with an axe while some of the negroes in the yard looked on" (Baker & Baker, 188-189). Just as significant as the slave man's murder of his master was the fact that the other slaves merely "looked on" and did nothing in defense of their master. None of the storytellers told of any resulting legal action, and in most cases the story ended with statements that the murdering slave got away and was never seen again. Without court documents to verify these occurrences, it is impossible to know if any or all of the accounts truly happened. Nevertheless, as the cases of Jim and David prove, there were a plethora of cases in which courts and newspapers attested to the violence against, or the murder of, owners and overseers. In 1754, a slave named Sacherisa was sentenced to burn at the stake for setting fire to her Master's Charleston, South Carolina home (DeRamus, 57). In Cambridge, Maryland, a slave simply known

as Henny was found guilty of the murder of her mistress, Elizabeth Insley. In 1831, Henny and her mistress had argued over breakfast because the mistress had refused to give Henny sausage. The angry mistress then whipped Henny for her insubordination. In retaliation, Henny threw lye into the mistress's face, stabbed her, and then put her body in a closet. *The Cambridge Chronicle*, reproduced in the *Baltimore Patriot*, reported that the court charged Henny with first-degree murder and executed by hanging on May 13, 1831 (DeRamus, 3; *Baltimore Patriot, May 18, 1831, 3*).

Not every slave was driven to resist with such extreme violence against owners and overseers, though others were certainly compelled to react to abuse with physical force, outright resisting the laws and social customs that determined they had no such right to do so. Ms. Silvia Dubois 1883 told an interviewer, Cornelius Wilson Larison, about an altercation she had with her mistress around the year 1802-1803. Silvia and her mistress had a contentious relationship because the mistress was very violent toward Silvia. As Silvia told it, "she'd level me with anything she could get hold of—club, stick of wood, tongs, fire-shovel, knife, axe, hatchet, anything that was handiest," and one time "she leveled me with a fire shovel and broke my plate [skull]" (64). One day while setting up for a party the mistress hit Silvia. Silvia returned the attack and struck her mistress, sending her flying against the door with a "terrible smash, and I hurt her so badly that all were frightened out of their wits, and I didn't know myself but that I'd killed the old devil" (Larison, 65). Fortunately for Silvia, the mistress was only hurt and therefore Silvia was neither executed nor burned at the stake. In another instance, William Lee, who claimed to be the slave of John Lee (the cousin of General Robert E. Lee), said that one day he decided that "Marser and Mistress warn't gwine beat me." The next time his mistress went to whip him, William resolved to resist the punishment. His mistress had

a particular way of whipping by placing the head of the slave between her knees. In an act of desperation and fear, and determined not to take any more abuse, William picked his mistress up by grabbing her around the legs and threw her to the ground. (Perdue, Barden, & Phillips, 194) Frank Gill, an ex-slave from Vicksburg, Mississippi, escaped a whipping as a young boy by tugging the long coat tails of his master to trip him. While his master floundered on the ground, Frank found refuge with his mistress who would not let her husband harm the slave (Williams, 21). As amusing as these stories sound, almost comical in their imagery, they collectively represent something grave: a desire by those both young and old, male and female, not to endure the abuse proscribed by law and society. No matter the cost, and as with the case of women like Henny the cost could be great, slaves throughout the South were not passive, submissive receptors of abuse. They could indeed be powerful actors in their own lives, acting with authority, acting with resistance, and asserting their human right not to be unduly abused and violated.

For slaves, the desperate desire to escape their servitude could also drive them to desperate violent acts. A group of six Virginia slaves, led by Frank Wanzer, hatched an escape plan in 1855. During the Christmas season, many slaves travelled to visit family and friends, so there was heavy migration of slaves throughout the areas the group of escapees planned to move through. Wanzer determined that during this season, their traveling and presence would raise no suspicions among white strangers. Traveling together by cart, the mixed crew of male and female slaves escaped all the way to Hood's Mill, Maryland. At that point, a group of whites asked to see their papers, which none of the escaped slaves possessed. Attempts to talk their way out of the situation failed for Wanzer. Drove to desperation, the escaping slaves drew their pistols and "and declared

they would not be 'taken!'" The whites then pulled their own guns out, pointing toward the slave group. The standoff, as told by William Still, was a tense moment: "One of the white men raised his gun, pointing the muzzle directly towards one of the young women, with the threat that he would 'shoot,' etc. 'Shoot! shoot!! shoot!!!' she exclaimed, with a double barrelled pistol in one hand and a long dirk knife in the other, utterly unterrified and fully ready for a death struggle" (Still, 124-126; DeRamus, 109-118; *Provincial Freeman, February 2, 1856*). The whites backed down from the fight and the runaways were able to continue their journey. A newspaper account reported that all made it safely out of the situation, though the article first states that there were six runaways, and then proceeds to claim that seven made it to safety. Betty DeRamus says that there were a few late coming stragglers with the group who were shot and killed, agreeing with William Still's account of the event. There is no direct consensus on how many were there and how many survived, but the resulting body count is not the point. What is important, rather, was a runaway slaves's willingness to fight and indeed die to maintain their freedom.

Slaves did not exclusively react by killing or harming their owners in response to direct abuse or threats. Slaves also inflicted violence on themselves in order to avoid punishment, avoid further abuse, or to avoid being placed back into the slave market. Acts of self mutilation, self harm, and suicide expressed just as much as the violence against whites how desperate some slaves were to resist, and the lengths a slave would go to in order to have some say in their lives. Alexander Hamilton, an ex-slave living in Canada, confided, "I knew one man to cut off the fingers of his left hand with an axe, to prevent his being sold South. I knew of another who on hearing that he was sold shot himself: I saw physicians dissecting this man afterward. I knew of a woman who had

several children by her master, who on being sold, ran down to the river and drowned herself: I saw the body after it was taken from the water" (Drew, 178). Nancy Rogers Bean told her WPA interviewer that she had an aunt who, when put up for sale by her master, chopped off her own hand in order to make herself unsellable and perhaps avoid being sold away from her family. (Baker & Baker, 49) Madison Jefferson, interviewed in 1841 in England, told the story of a boy who was being sold away from his mother with his five other brothers, who grabbed an axe and chopped off his own hand (Blassingame, 222). Self-mutilation was not the extent of it. Some slaves also found suicide a viable means of resistance. Though seemingly self-defeating, suicide on the part of the slave meant the removal of the control of the slave master, and also stole from the master his valuable property. It was an act of defiance and self-determination. One slave named Ednoull had been promised by his master that he would never be separated from his wife. When his master, Joseph Copes, decided to hire Ednoull out to another man in Baton Rouge, Copes' agent reported to Mr. Copes that it would be a bad idea because he was told by Ednoull: "If I send him [Ednoull] away from her it will not do you or anybody else any good." The agent interpreted Ednoull's statement to mean, "I suppose that he will kill himself" (Johnson, 34). Mrs. Fannie Berry of Virginia told in her WPA interview of her Aunt Nellie who was whipped by pattyrollers. Having had enough of the abuse, which she was helpless against, Berry's Aunt Nellie climbed up a hill and rolled down, killing herself (Perdue, Barden, & Phillips, 34 & 43). William Henry Towns of Alabama reported that many slaves escaped to the North, but most were caught and brought back. Some would kill themselves before "they would stand to be brought back," however. One, Towns claimed, jumped into a creek and drowned himself (Williams, 58).

Perhaps the most poignant acts of violence slaves employed to manifest their own

independence was violence and murder committed in order to save others from their own selling and abuse. In Lewis Clark's own narrative:

> There was a slave mother near where I lived, who took her child into the cellar and killed it. She did it to prevent being separated from her child. Another slave mother took her three children and threw them into a well, and then jumped in with them, and they were all drowned. Other instances I have frequently heard of. At the death of many and many a slave child I have seen the two feelings struggling in the bosom of a mother--joy that it was beyond the reach of the slave monsters, and the natural grief of a mother over her child. In the presence of the master, grief seems to predominate; when away from them, they rejoice that there is one whom the slave-driver will never torment. (76)

The most famous case of child murder was that of Margaret Garner, inspiration for Tony Morrison's novel *Beloved*. In 1856, Margaret managed to escape in a group of runaways with her children. Success was short lived and the group of slaves soon found themselves trapped in a cabin by slave catchers. Margaret decided then that she would rather her children die than be returned to slavery. Upon entering the home, the slave catchers found that, "a deed of horror had been consummated" when they discovered a child "weltering in its blood, the throat being cut from ear to ear and the head almost severed from the body." Two other children had wounds that were not fatal (*The Cincinnati Enquirer, January 29, 1856*). Condemnation for Margaret was not universal. Many felt that she had done the right thing. Abolitionist and friend Levi Coffin asked, "If in her deep maternal love she felt the impulse to send her child back to God, to save it from coming woe, who shall say she had no right to do so?" (565). Coffin stated that Margaret killed one child and wanted to kill the others because of her maternal love and desire to protect them. Understanding the fully degraded and inhuman condition in which slaves lived, Margaret sought to resist the institution the only way that she thought possible: death. Like those who fought, murdered, and maimed, it was a way for her to determine her own life, and to remove the power of white slave holders over her and her children.

The strength of the south relied on slave labor, and the institution of slavery depended on the perpetual enslavement of blacks. White slave holders created a legal and social system designed to perpetuate bondage by removing legal rights, institutionalizing violence, and thoroughly dehumanizing black slaves until they became nothing more than property with no rights whatsoever. Yet slaves did not accept this social system passively despite white attempts to force obedience and submission. Slaves employed many means of asserting their independence and humanity, seeking above all some measure of self-determination. The violence inherent in the slave system bred violence in return, and many slaves rejected servitude. Some went as far as to murder or assault their masters and overseers. Other slaves sought escape through mutilation and suicide. There were even slaves willing to harm to kill those they loved in order to protect them from further slavery. It proves that though society sought to oppress and subjugate them, slaves were nevertheless powerful actors in their own lives, working within a rigid system not easy to defy and very volatile.

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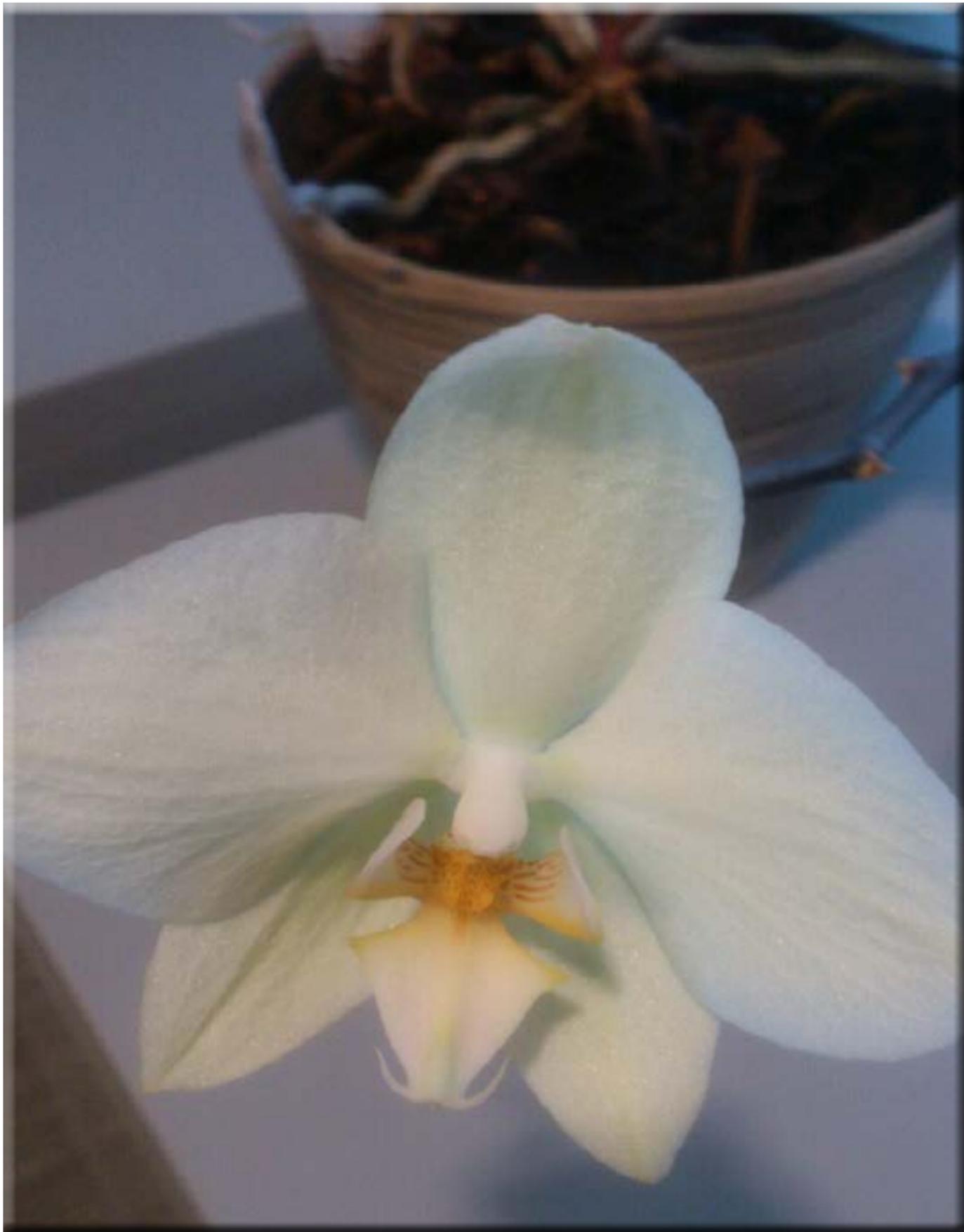
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Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen:* The Trickster's Dual Representation—Colonization and Decolonization at the Birch River Indian Settlement School

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Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (*Kiss*) portrays a trickster figure that symbolizes colonization and decolonization, and brings the Western concept of hybridity to mind. Niigonwedom James Sinclair discusses ideas about hybridity as ways of reclaiming Aboriginal Culture in his article "Tending to Ourselves: Hybridity and Native Literary Criticism" in which he says, "hybridity can be a theory that empowers Native writers to open up notions of their identities and grow, hopefully enriching the ways our stories can be told, examined and used" (Sinclair "Tending" 241). Highway's use of hybridity in *Kiss* is empowered through a Cree storytelling approach, the trickster narrative.

Sinclair, like other Indigenous literary theorists, begins "Tending to Ourselves" with a story. He uses a blue tarp to demonstrate an argument for a hybrid approach. In brief, Sinclair says:

Boozhoo.

I have a memory. One evening I helped prepare a sweat lodge […] we began

to remove the animal furs from the top, so we could fortify the structure of the saplings […] they were frozen to the wood, many of them ripped, creating problems in the roof – an obliviously essential element needed to keep the heat required […] Our elder laughed, opened up the back of his truck, pulled out a large sheet of insulated blue-padded plastic and placed it on top of the ripped furs. (239)

The blue tarp becomes part of the Aboriginal ceremony; the modern Western device acts as a substitute for the ripped fur. The substitution of the modern for traditional material is not assimilation to Western Culture, but rather an adaptation. The difference between assimilation and adaptation lies in having no choice and having a choice. As history has proven, assimilation does not allow for choice. Aboriginal peoples were not given the choice to their Culture, belief's, practices, and lives. Using adaptation, Aboriginal people can decide and choose what is needed in order to continue Aboriginal tradition, practices, ceremonies, and even their stories. Likewise, Highway's hybrid approach to the Fur Queen allows for the use of the trickster's duality as a method by which the residential school experience in the narrative may be understood.

Adaptation is found at the heart of the trickster narrative or trickster story. Sinclair recollects trickster stories being told to him as a child. He describes these trickster narratives as a "very old Anishnaabeg intellectual tradition" (Sinclair "Trickster Reflections I" 22). He goes on to say that these stories that once were "exchange[d] … in the winter" (22) are now being told "over kitchen tables, at universities, and – in my [Sinclair's] case – on living room couches" (22). Trickster narratives are passed down through generations,

although, at one time, the passing of these stories was done through oral tradition. Today the trickster has made its way to a written context. The oral traditional method of trickster storytelling has been adapted and used in literature, but whether a trickster narrative is told in an oral tradition or in a written context, it must have a "threefold" purpose (Keeshig-Tobias in Moses 110): "[the] first [is] to humour [the] second [is] to educate [and the] third [is] to heal" (110). Trickster narratives have changed from their traditional formats, told during certain times of the year, trickster narratives are told today anytime, anywhere and in literature. In short, this form of storytelling has evolved and adapted to the modern world. Sinclair points out that although the method of trickster storytelling has adapted, trickster should always serve an "educational, medicinal and community-building purpose" (Sinclair "Trickster" 21). Tomson Highways' *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is able to accomplish all three purposes.

As Deanna Reder remarks in the preface of *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversation,* a book she co-edited with Linda Morra: "the 'Indian is a European invention,' that no Indigenous person […] called themselves "Indian" before the arrival of Columbus […] no Indigenous community had "tricksters" – the term is the invention of a nineteenth-century anthropologist" (vii). Reder continues by saying, "Anishinnaabe told stories about Nanabush, the Cree told stories about Wesakecak, the Blackfoot told stories about Naapi, the Sto:lo told stories about Coyote [and] many Indigenous people in North America now refer to themselves as Indians, and many storytellers talk and write about tricksters" (vii). As Reder points out, Aboriginal peoples have adapted to the terms "Indian" and "trickster". Authors have not ignored the terms, "Wesakecak", "Naapi" or

"Coyote", but have disguised trickster in other forms. Writers have adapted the trickster in a written context, but the old traditional oral trickster narrative still continues. Utilizing concepts of hybridity, this paper examines how Tomson Highway uses the Fur Queen as a trickster in the written context and the residential school experience to discuss traumatic events that Aboriginal peoples experienced during the assimilation process.

The Fur Queen appears as a colonial image, when she represents the Western Culture during the Fur Queen Beauty Pageant scene. In "The Trickster Wink: Storytelling and Resistance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*" Rubelise daCunha connects the significance of the color white with Northern Manitoba and royalty:

> White is repeated many times throughout the novel in association with the Fur Queen. This color not only emphasizes the white atmosphere of snowy Northern Manitoba, where Weesageechak stories are told, but also signals that the figure of the Fur Queen is emblematic of the presence of the white colonizers in the continent, and will always remind the Okimasis of colonial experience. (daCunha102)

In this passage the repetition of white is linked to the north, in which the setting of the Beauty Pageant takes place, and to European colonizers, which the Fur Queen represents at this point in the text. The Fur Queen is presented as "Miss Julie Pembrook […] draped not only with a white satin sash but with a floor-length cape fashioned from the fur of arctic fox, white as day […] with a fox-fur tiara" (Highway 9). The Fur Queen is positioned early in the text in human form and a representation of the British Queen. As daCunha writes, "[t]he luxurious form that emerges has the image of a Queen, which is a reference to the Queen of the British Empire" (daCunha 103). The Fur Queen's representation of Western Culture is demonstrated through the whiteness and royalty that is associated with the British Queen, but the white fox fur that she wears also represents Aboriginal Culture. Furs were retrieved by Aboriginal people through trapping, an Aboriginal practice. The Fur Queen is therefore emblematic of colonization and decolonization. Highway's dual representation can be seen throughout the text, but the residential school scene is where the trickster is able to perform the "threefold" purpose of storytelling incorporating its "education, medicinal and community-building" aspect.

First, the residential school becomes a focal point in the text in illustrating the Fur Queen's dual representation. Rublise daCunha says, "Highway's Trickster in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be read within a coalitional politics that merges Cree storytelling and Western discourse in order to promote healing and redemption for those who have faced colonial oppression, represented in the novel by the residential school experience" (da Cunha 95). In short, Highway merges a trickster narrative with the Western approach of written literature.

In "Nanabush in the City" Nancy Wigston speaks with Highway, who says, "Indian children between six and 16 were forced to go to schools where they were 'missionized' by the Roman Catholics. It was an allout policy of assimilation. The intent was to turn Indian kids into white kids" (Wigston 8). *Kiss of the Fur Queen* demonstrates this policy of assimilation with Jeremiah being the Indian kid who goes to residential school and wants to be white. Jeremiah's loss of his Cree identity is a result of the traumatic events that occurred at the Birch River Settlement School. Prior to Jeremiah's departure to the

school he lived with his family in Northern Manitoba. He was raised in an Aboriginal traditional manner: hunting, trapping, fishing and living off the land. When Jeremiah is sent to the school his hair is cut, his clothes and language stripped away and he is sexually abused. Jeremiah's abuse is indirectly illustrated in the text; Gabriel, Jeremiah's brother, is the victim that illustrates the sexual abuse that occurred in residential school.

In the scene depicting Gabriel's sexual abuse, the Fur Queen's dual nature is heightened. The first night Father Lafleur visits Gabriel and on his second visit he rapes Gabriel. At first the Fur Queen acts as protector, the second night she neglects to protect him, signalling her shift from decolonization to colonization. "The implication of a "hybrid" identity is that it is always shifting, with positions continually informing each other through their presence and influence" (Sinclair "Tending" 242). The Fur Queen's contrary shift to the colonial position allows a bad thing to happen and thereby implicates her in the rape itself. Because of her dual nature, she neglects and protects, being at once a representation of colonization and decolonization.

When Gabriel goes to residential school, Jeremiah is beginning his third year. Father Lafleur meets Gabriel for the first time. During their first meeting, Father Lafleur feels a hunger for the boy. He sees Jeremiah and says to him "you've decided to come back for a third year" (Highway 69). When Jeremiah comes back Lafleur sees Jeremiah as coming back for more abuse; he says, "You've gained some weight" (69). Jeremiah has spent the summer with his family; he puts some weight on suggesting that his parents fed him well. During the residential school era, European colonizers believed that the Aboriginal family and community were not tending well to their children. When in the

matter, children were more harmed while forcibly attending residential schools. When Lafleur meets Gabriel, he "saves [him] from falling into the lake by clamping his hand onto the [his] thigh" (69). Lafleur's appetite has established when he sees Jeremiah has more meat on his bones, but when Lafleur grasps Gabriel's thigh, hunger sets in. Father Lafleur turns to Jeremiah and says, "So Jeremiah […] you've brought your little brother this time" (70). Later that night when the boys have gone to bed Father Lafleur's hunger for the boy leads him to slither into the dormitory. He makes his way to Gabriel's bed and sees Jeremiah sleeping beside him. He wakes Jeremiah and takes him back to his own bed, Lafleur doesn't want Jeremiah and his attention is now focused on Gabriel. Father Lafleur "turned back to Gabriel" (74) but then his eye was caught by the Fur Queen's photo. Mariesis, the mother, packs the photo of the Fur Queen in Gabriel's suitcase and tells him that the "Fur Queen will watch over you [and] will protect you from evil men" (74). The Fur Queen winks and the priest sees this, at which time he "slink[s] down [the] aisle towards the door" (74). daCunha says the Fur Queen's wink "signals complicity with Gabriel, [and] also works as protection" (daCunha 106). Present at this time, the image of the Fur Queen protects Gabriel and represents Cree Culture.

While Highway uses the trickster, the Fur Queen, to represent the dual experience of the colonized, he also uses the Weetigo figure to demonstrate colonial oppression. As the Fur Queen was "transform[ed] into a saint to protect the Okimasis brothers, Father Lafleur is transformed [...] into the Weetigo, an Indigenous evil figure who feasts on human flesh, a beast, a cannibal spirit" (daCunha 106). It is the Fur Queen's hybrid nature that allows for the Weetigo, Father Lafleur, to overpower the Cree Culture and

Gabriel falls victim. Basil Johnston's describes Weetigo as "a giant Manitou [1] in the form of a man or a woman, who towered five to eight times above the height of a tall man" (Johnston 221). The imagery of Weetigo is seen in the description of Father Lafleur when he approaches Gabriel's bed the second time. When Lafleur is raping Gabriel, Jeremiah awakens he looks over and notices that "Gabriel [is] not alone" (Highway 79). Jeremiah sees a "dark, hulking figure hovered over [Gabriel]" (79). The hovering illustrates Father Lafleur as a large figure. For a child lying on a bed Lafleur looks 'five or eight times' taller. The image Jeremiah sees of this figure "is in a silhouette" (79). The silhouette traces the outline of Father Lafleur. His dark shadow is described to be as black as "a crow" (79). The image of a "bear devouring a honey-comb or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh" (79) conveys the hunger of Weetigo, which Lafleur has already experienced for Gabriel. Then Jeremiah sees the sheets moving up and down; he knows what is happening because it had happened to him. A Weetigo is devouring Gabriel; he is being raped.

Gabriel's rape demonstrates the sexual abuse that children encountered at residential school and also symbolizes the act of colonization. In "From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics: Substantiating Survivance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*" Sam McKegney argues that Father Lafleur's actions become "the symbolic rape [of] Indigenous Culture" (McKegney 89) and daCunha also remarks, "[f]rom an Indigenous point of view, the Weetigo is the best representation of the beast of colonialism and capitalism that is going to threaten and devour Indigenous people, represented in the novel by the sacrificial victim: Gabriel, the dancer" (daCunha 107). Both McKegney and

daCunha read the rape as being a colonial attack that becomes a colonial oppression of Aboriginal Culture.

Residential schools were set in place to strip Aboriginal peoples of their culture and heritage. They were used to rid "get rid of the Indian problem. I [Scott] do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department" (Scott). Residential school stories share the commonality of the sexual abuse that occurred while children were at the school. Highway takes the sexual abuse that occurred at the schools and uses it as a metaphor to signify the destruction of Aboriginal Culture. Father Lafleur's actions metaphorically enact this destruction, and the Fur Queen's hybridity allows for this attack. She becomes a contrary through her negation of her Aboriginal nature: at first, the Fur Queen is a protector of Gabriel: this identifies her as an agent of decolonization. Then her contradictory nature makes her a representation of colonization. Because of the Fur Queen's hybridity, the Weetigo overpowers Cree Culture by using Gabriel as the sacrificial victim. Aligned with the Weetigo, Christianity became a vehicle for colonial oppression.

Niigonwedom James Sinclair's insight into hybridity and adaptability extends a significant and essential approach to the critical analysis of the Trickster in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. The Fur Queen's representation of both colonization and decolonization offers a duality, empowering the reader by reclaiming Aboriginal Culture while disempowering colonization. Highway's use of hybridity enables *Kiss* to establish reclamation by

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1 Weetigo has different spellings. The spelling will be in respect to the author's spelling. Great Spirit also called Kiche-Manitou.

incorporating Western philosophy into Cree perspectives. While incorporating Western perspectives, the Fur Queen disempowers colonization by using only the rhetorical tools that suit Aboriginal people. In *Kiss,* Highway uses the trickster in the written context to open up a discussion about residential school sexual abuse. This approach allows for Highway to incorporate the Western method of storytelling with the Cree trickster narrative. The new tools that are created out of this melding of forms are then applied to Aboriginal Culture and/or practices; in effect, these tools become Highway's 'blue tarp.' In *Kiss*, hybridity demonstrates an adaption made by Aboriginal individuals in the modern world. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* illustrates how Aboriginal people move past colonial oppression by adapting Western perspectives to suit their own cultural needs. By no means does this mean Aboriginal people have become assimilated as *Kiss* demonstrates. Assimilation was attempted through the residential school system and has failed. Aboriginal peoples are still in the process of freeing themselves from the trauma of the residental school era and are continuing to preserve their culture.

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AENEMONE

PHOTO: VIRGINIA GOULET

Transhumance

On top of steep Monte Faito

A goatherd sat carelessly balanced

On a jutting ledge with a skinful

Of wine and a sun-drenched face,

Turned from what once had been

Fertile valleys on the Bay of Naples

But were now seas of concrete

Built after the Second World War

In peace as the population exploded

And the vestiges of the ancient world

Were more fragmented than before.

After a time the goatherd stood

To nimbly follow the bells of his goats

Echoing through the windblown trees

To take the *tratturi's* right-of-way

Along the crossing grounds of human

And natural worlds, on the margins

Of the divine, like the *Pastori*

From the Gospels seeing the Star

Of Bethlehem light up the sky,

Hearing the Angel, "Be not afraid,

The Shepherd, lamb to the slaughter

Brings a Happy Paradise and laughter."

Shepherd and sheep studied each other.

The *Zampognari* follow their ancestors

Every Christmas down to the coast

To sing of His descent from the heavens.

King of the sky, without clothes or fire

Shining for the fading few who know

The sea, the stars, and the mountainside,

Migrants of summer and winter pastures.

—Jefferson Holdridge

"This fateful convergence": *Welt* and History in Auerbach's "Philology of World Literature"

by Gabriel Quigley, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario

In "The Philology of World Literature", Erich Auerbach reevaluates Goethe's conception of *Weltliteratur* for the twentieth-century. He departs from Goethe's formulation that *Welt* consists of a cultural milieu united by common sensibilities. Auerbach's understanding of *Welt* reverses this formulation by showing that the world of the twentieth-century is paradoxically homogenous and disparate. Auerbach explains this condition by pointing to the effects of modernization, "de-spiritualization", and increasingly aggressive assertions of national identity. Each of these factors show that different historical perspectives are necessary for retaining cultural uniqueness. By drawing on the Turkish context that Auerbach encountered during his exile, I aim to show how nationalism produces the global homogeneity that Auerbach describes. Auerbach explains that this world necessitates a new philological approach, one that brings together the historical narratives of different nations in a dually synthetic and diversifying way. Unlike Goethe's understanding of *Welt*, the world of Auerbach's *Weltliteratur* is standardized and divisive because it is made up of nations that paradoxically assert their individuality by effacing the historical narratives that make them different.

The German word *Welt* signifies the world of nations. In *Against World Literature*,

Emily Apter argues that the multiple meanings of *Welt* make it an "untranslatable", asserting "*Welt* gathers momentum to the point where it would seem that German is truly the language in which the word 'world' is most fully philosophized" (179). Apter emphasizes that *Welt* is frequently deployed as a "landgrab", since "*Welt* annexes semantic approximations like *Leben* (life) or *Heimat* (homeland)" (180). Because of these semantic associations, the meaning of *Welt* is bound up in questions of nationhood. Related to *Welt* is the word *irdisch*, which is usually translated as "earthly". These words overlap significantly in Auerbach's essay, in statements such as "our philological home is the earth. It can no longer be the nation" (264). One of Auerbach's aims in "The Philology of World Literature" is to move away from the *Welt* of nations by grounding a philology that is rooted in *irdisch*. By making the earthliness of the world the basis of a new *Weltliteratur*, Auerbach argues that the processes of standardization occurring with the rise of nationalism can be avoided. The world is a problem for Auerbach, since the nationalistic projects of the cultures that make up *Welt* paradoxically deprive it of its diversity.

Goethe conceives of Welt as a world that is both diverse and unified. Goethe began using the term *Weltliteratur* after encountering Chinese novels alongside Persian and Serbian poetry. In his essays on *Weltliteratur*, Goethe explains that the world is made up of diverse cultures, "every nation has idiosyncrasies which differentiate it from others and make it feel isolated from, attracted to or repelled by them" (225). In another essay, Goethe emphasizes that "one must learn to note the special characteristics of every nation and take them for granted, in order to meet each nation on its own ground" (Strich 1314). In Goethe's understanding of *Welt*, the world consists of nations that can only be understood according to their own premises. Goethe does not specify what makes these nations different from one another, merely asserting that they make the world diverse.

Goethe also asserts that they share a common sensibility, "we repeat however that there can be no question the nations thinking alike, the aim is simply that they shall grow aware of one another" (Strich 350) leading him to assert that "the world at large, no matter how vast it may be, is only an expanded homeland" (227). In the introduction to their translation of Auerbach's "Philology of World Literature", Edward and Maire Said argue that this common sensibility is humanistic: "the Saids note that Goethe used Weltliteratur to designate 'universal literature, or literature which expresses Humanitat, humanity'" (Against World Literature 231). The world's nationalistic differences and common humanistic sensibility encourage the exchange of literature from one nation to another. The importance of this exchange can be heard in Goethe's statements that "the characteristics of a nation are like its language or its coinage, they facilitate intercourse and even make it possible" (Strich 13-14). Goethe's concept of *Welt* is composed of different cultures that share a common humanistic understanding, which encourage the Weltliteratur of intercultural literary exchange.

Auerbach explains his understanding of Welt in contradistinction to Goethe's formulation by showing that the world is paradoxically homogenous and divided. Aamir Mufti points out in "Auerbach in Istanbul":

> the paradox of culture a century and a half after the age of Goethe was that while 'national wills' were everywhere 'stronger and louder than ever,' each nevertheless promoted 'the same standards and forms for modern life'.
> Auerbach thus distinguished the concept of Weltliteratur he was proposing from the earlier notion that was derived from Goethe. (124)

Auerbach gives contradictory descriptions of *Welt* in "The Philology of World Literature".

He begins by asserting "the events of the past forty years have broadened our horizons, revealed world-historical perspectives to us, and revived and enriched our ways of viewing the structures of inter-subjective interactions in concrete ways" (Auerbach 260). This passage would suggest that the world has maintained the Goethean variety of cultures that he describes in his accounts of *Weltliteratur*. Yet, Auerbach emphasizes that these cultures are kept apart by conflict. He explains that the responsibility of the world philologist is to "help us accept what is happening to us with greater composure, and allow us to not despise our enemies all too blindly, even when it is our mission to fight them" (257). Unlike Goethe's world, in which different nations happily enter intercultural exchange, the world that Auerbach represents in these passages is marked by the effects of war. The paradox of *Welt* emerges from the fact that despite these conflicts, "different cultures have begun to resemble one another much more rapidly and completely these days than a humanist of the Goethean persuasion might want to endorse" (257). These contradictory statements about *Welt* reveal "Auerbach's notion of 'unGoethean' World Literature" (Apter Against World Literature 210). The world is no longer composed of different nations united by some common sensibility, instead "world culture is in the process of becoming standardized" (257). Auerbach points to three interrelated factors that are responsible for this "fateful convergence" (Auerbach 257): modernization, "despiritualization", and nationalism. Each of these factors deprive cultures of their unique aspects by dissolving their historical narratives. In his analysis of these three factors, Auerbach explains how the paradox of a homogenous and divided *Welt* can occur.

Auerbach's explanation of how these separate factors lead to cultural homogeneity can be understood in the Turkish context that he encountered in his exile. When Auerbach describes the "nearly universal collapse of late-bourgeois humanist culture", he "surmise[s]

the following on the basis of [his] experiences in Turkey, [that] similar developments have occurred in other countries with ancient cultural traditions" (259). During his more than ten-year exile in Istanbul, Auerbach encountered the cultural reforms of the newly established Turkish Republic. Kader Konuk describes them in *East West Mimesis*:

> Ataturk believed that modernization necessitated Westernization. However, the founder of the new republic broadened the reach of earlier reforms and made an additional strategic step: he called on Turkish citizens to identify as Europeans…The reforms meant that there would be no more fez wearing, the Ottoman script was erased, religious schools were outlawed, the caliphate and religious courts were abolished, the alphabet was Latinized, and the Islamic calendar was replaced with the Gregorian one. (8)

This context provides a helpful reference for understanding the effects of modernization, "de-spiritualization", and nationalism on cultural identity. The Turkish republic is part of a *Welt* that is different from Goethe's since it "promoted sameness with Western Europe but simultaneously maintained a notion of national particularity" (Konuk 74).

Auerbach begins his explanation of *Welt* by indicating the effects of modernization. Modernization can be seen in the dominance of "modern forms of life" (Auerbach 253) and the loss of "ancient cultural traditions" (Auerbach 259). He points to pedagogical changes, the "collapse of…learning Greek and Latin and being familiar with Scripture… the center of gravity has shifted within universities and graduate schools. Modern literature and criticism are much more the norm" (259). While in Turkey, Auerbach witnessed the *humanist kultur reformlari* (the humanist culture reforms), that emerged from the writings of Ziya Gokalp. Gokalp, who "accepted a certain construction of temporality in which

tradition was interpreted as backward and modernity equated with progress" (Konuk 57), encouraged the translation of "hundreds of Western classics; the staging of Western plays, concerts, and operas; the compiling of dictionaries; a new journal on translation" (Konuk 54-55). These reforms aimed at modernizing Turkey by extracting a Turkish history from European influences, so that "in place of the insufficiently Westernized Ottoman would stride a modern Turk, someone who could cu ta jaunty figure in Europe itself" (Konuk 9). As Apter points out, these reforms produced the "'fantastical and ghostly' educational modernity in which [Auerbach] was a participant; charged as he was with creating a modern European curriculum built on the not-yet extinguished embers of Arabic and Persian" (209). By replacing the Arabic and Persian traditions of Ottoman culture with European ones, the new republic modernized Turkey at the expense of its own historical perspective. Turkish culture no longer came from a specific history. Instead, its history was rewritten as "European", effectively homogenizing Turkish culture with its European neighbors. When Auerbach refers to modernization, he is pointing to the ways that ancient cultures are effaced in favor of newer historical narratives. Modernization is one way that the standardization of the world is produced, since it involves the rejection of the traditions that make one nation different from another.

In addition to modernization, Auerbach explains how *Welt* is standardized by the loss of spiritual foundations. He states "the underlying spiritual foundations of individual national identity are in the process of fading away" (253). He continues to assert "these days, scientific research into the realities of the world crowds in on and controls our lives. This kind of research is our myth, one might say; we have no other myth that might be so widely accepted" (255). These two assertions draw from Vico's understanding of spiritual foundations. In "Vico and Literary Criticism", Auerbach explains Vico's claims

that "the metaphysics of these primitive men, their logic, their ethics, their laws, their politics, [and] their economy were all poetic, i.e., inspired by a religious and ritualistic imagination expressing itself in concrete poetic formulas" (9). Auerbach also refers to Vico's claims that primitive humans were creatures "who initially created his gods out of the chaos of nature…all of these things begin and end with the 'poetic,' that is, in the fantastic, sensuous, and formalistic nature of the first human being" (20). When Auerbach refers to "spiritual foundations", he means these "concrete poetic formulas" (9) that form the basis of national identity. These foundations are the imaginative myths that eventually consolidate into a culture's history. Auerbach's reference to "scientific myths" represents the opposite of these spiritual foundations, since they are myths that claim to be objective and universal. In Vico's terms, a "scientific myth" would have the quality of unchanging *verum*, instead of the *certum* of evolving historical truths. Auerbach illustrates that the spiritual foundations of individual cultures are dissolved by the dominance of scientific myths. A nation is deprived of the *certum* that make up its historical narrative when *averumis* asserted. The Turkish mobilization of secularism reveals the loss of spiritual foundations in favor of the "scientific myths" of modernity, since "secularism [was] essential for building a bridge between 'the downfall of the religious community' and the 'formation of the national soul'" (Konuk 57). Secularization took place by exchanging the *certum* of Turkey's Arabic and Persian traditions with a European identity that was scientific and forward thinking. Secularization was "de-spiritualizing" in two senses, since it discouraged religious freedom, but also deprived Turkish culture of its historical mythology.

Auerbach explains how nationalism is also a part of the standardization of *Welt* in the twentieth-century. He argues that "the calls for national self-determination are also

now stronger and louder than ever before" (253), yet "the 'world' of world literature… is growing smaller and becoming less diverse" (253). Both of these assertions connect with Auerbach's understanding of diversity. Auerbach explains that diversity has to do with the coexisting variety of cultures instead of nations. Cultures are held together by specific historical perspectives that are constructed from "the spiritual foundations" of their myths. Nations, on the other hand, represent the standardization of these different cultures. Auerbach explains that "everyone who defends the national will is in fact focused on reaching exactly the same goal, namely: modern forms of life" (253). He makes several claims in this passage, asserting that nationalism tends towards modernization, that the goal of modernization is the same for various nations, and that this nationalistic impetus towards modernization homogenizes their differences. Auerbach states more explicitly in a letter to Walter Benjamin, "nationalism in the extreme [is] accompanied by the simultaneous destruction of the historical national character" (Apter Translation 50). Nationalism is achieved at the expense of the ancient cultural traditions that both make up a nation's historical character and prevent the nation from being perceived as modern. In another letter to Benjamin, Auerbach describes the "'fanatically anti-traditional nationalism' that came out of Ataturk's 'struggle against the European democracies on the one hand and the old Mohammedan Pan-Islamic sultan's economy on the other'" (Apter Translation 49). Kemalistic approaches towards asserting national identity show that nation and culture are opposed, since the Turkish nation emerged from the dissolution of its historical culture. When Auerbach asserts "our philological home is the earth. It can no longer be the nation" (264), he is responding to the ways that nationalistic efforts deprive a nation of its cultural individuality. He makes it clear that nationalism is about modernization, which causes the emergence of a paradoxically homogenous and divisive

Welt made up of nations without distinct spiritual foundations.

Goethe and Auerbach advance different methods of world philology according to their different understandings of *Welt*. Auerbach explains that his understanding of world philology builds on the humanistic intentions and "historical perspective that was bequeathed to us by the historicism of the age of Goethe" (257). However, Auerbach also asserts that "the idea of history on which it is based is also not the same as the earlier idea of history —even though it has its roots in it and is inconceivable without it" (257). Auerbach's understanding of history is different from Goethe's because Auerbach emphasizes that cultures are more than nations. A culture depends on a historical narrative, and the loss of these historical perspectives means the loss of cultural diversity. Mufti explains that Auerbach's understanding of *Weltliterature* is "distinct from that earlier notion in one important respect: 'There is no more talk now…of a spiritual exchange between peoples'" (124). The diversity of cultures that Goethe finds in *Welt* no longer exists in the twentieth-century because the loss of spiritual foundations has homogenized the world's nations. Auerbach's world philology is directed towards preserving these final moments of difference, "to make people conscious of themselves within their own history" (Auerbach 264). Even though Auerbach departs from Goethe's Weltliteratur, his formulation of world philology maintains a Goethean appreciation for the world's diversity.

Auerbach concludes "The Philology of World Literature" by explaining how a synthetic world philology that preserves cultural differences can be achieved. He explains that a synthetic world philology requires specialists, a perspectival engagement with texts, and "commonplaces" where different cultures can be interpreted. He states "in order to complete the task of gaining intimate access to and giving shape to world literature, there must be at least a few scholars who command the material in its entirety" (Auerbach 257). Without specialists, the undertaking of world philology would become too daunting. Additionally, Auerbach explains how world philology should be guided by intuition and the correct *Ansatzpunkt*. Auerbach makes world philology the responsibility of the individual scholar, so that through this approach "one could ultimately study the history of the entire world on the basis of wherever it is that one starts" (Auerbach 263). This approach allows for the text to speak for itself, instead of its abstract classifications. By allowing the text to speak for itself, the philologist will be capable of perceiving the larger world that the text is a part of. Lastly, Auerbach describes the importance of "the rhetorical tradition and especially the *topoi*, or 'commonplaces'" (262). Auerbach echoes Vico's reflections "on the *senso commune*, the common sense, of all people, and thus on that which all of humanity has in common" (30). This*senso commune* is the innately poetic quality of humans, which is manifested in the narration of history. The *senso communeis* thereby connected with "the rhetorical tradition" (Auerbach 262), and provides the basis for interpreting cultural differences or similarities. Different cultures can be understood and compared through the various, fundamentally poetic ways that they represent themselves. When Auerbach uses the term "synthetic" for describing his world philology, he does not mean that this philological method homogenizes different cultures. Instead, synthesis occurs on the level of these commonplaces, where cultures are understood as similarly structured historical narratives. Through these steps, a synthetic world philology can be produced that also maintains diversity, by privileging the historical narratives of nations that make the cultures of *Welt* unique.

Although Auerbach defines the *Welt* of *Weltliteratur* in contradistinction to Goethe's understanding of *Welt,* the difference is subtle. Goethe describes the world

assimultaneously diverse and unified, whereas Auerbach's observations have shown the world to be homogenous and divisive. What differentiates these worlds is the role of historical perspective. Auerbach states "what we are we have become in the course of our history, and it is only in history that we can remain what we are, and develop. At this–our–moment in time, it is thus the task of the philologists of the world to demonstrate this truth in such a way that it penetrates deeply into people's minds and becomes impossible to forget" (256). Faced with nationalistic campaigns that destroyed the historical foundations which distinguished them, and by rampant modernization projects that denied antiquity, Auerbach explained that the world philologist must also be a historian. We are historical beings, and the various cultures that make up the world belong within different historical narratives. Auerbach's world philology is one that he coyly describes as "less active, less practical, and less political than its precursor" (256), but it is one that preserves the diversity of the world's cultures by privileging the historical narratives that make them unique.

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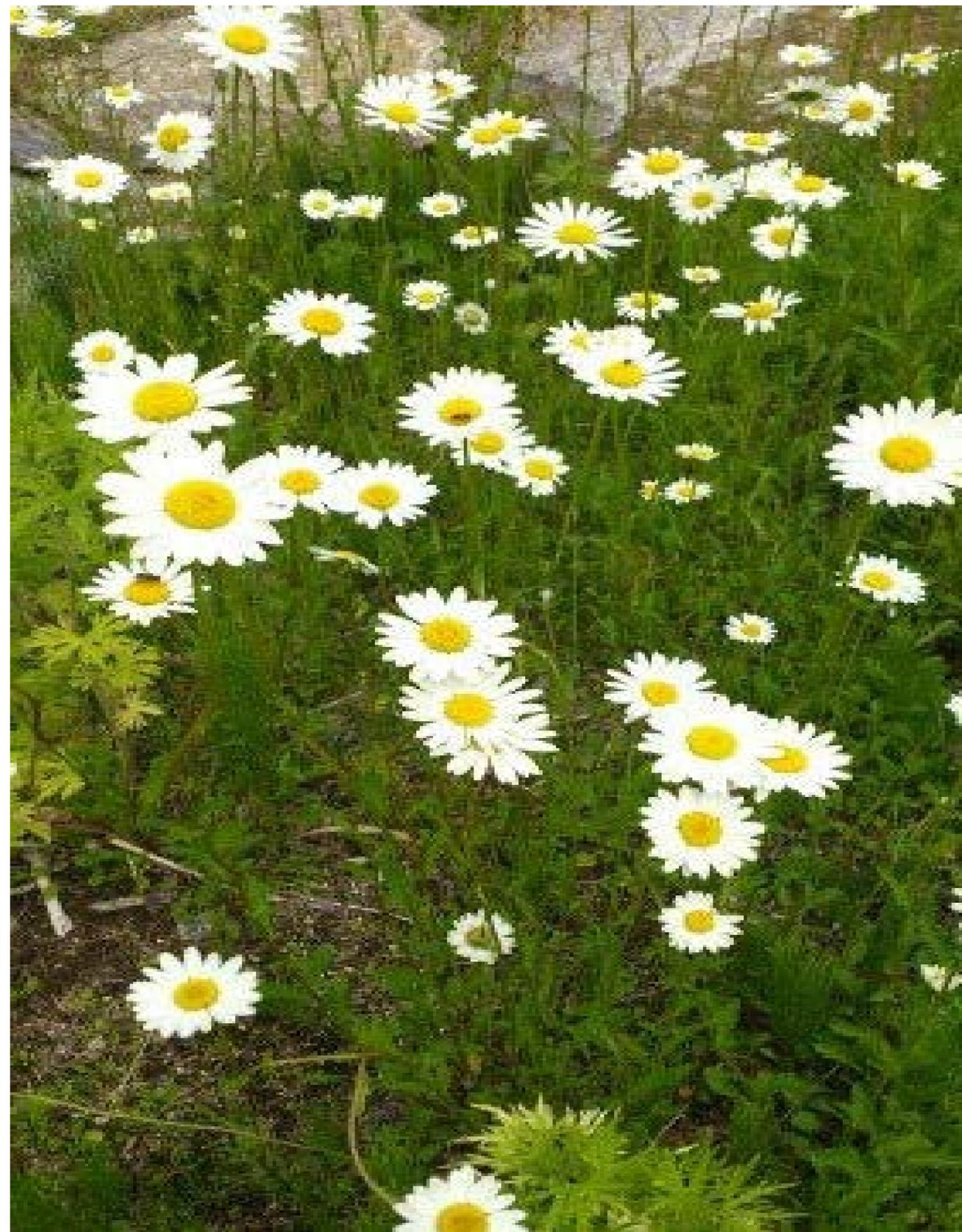
DAISIES   PHOTO: VIRGINIA GOULET

Cry for Life: A Writer Warrior

by Ying Kong, Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, and

University College of the North, The Pas, Manitoba
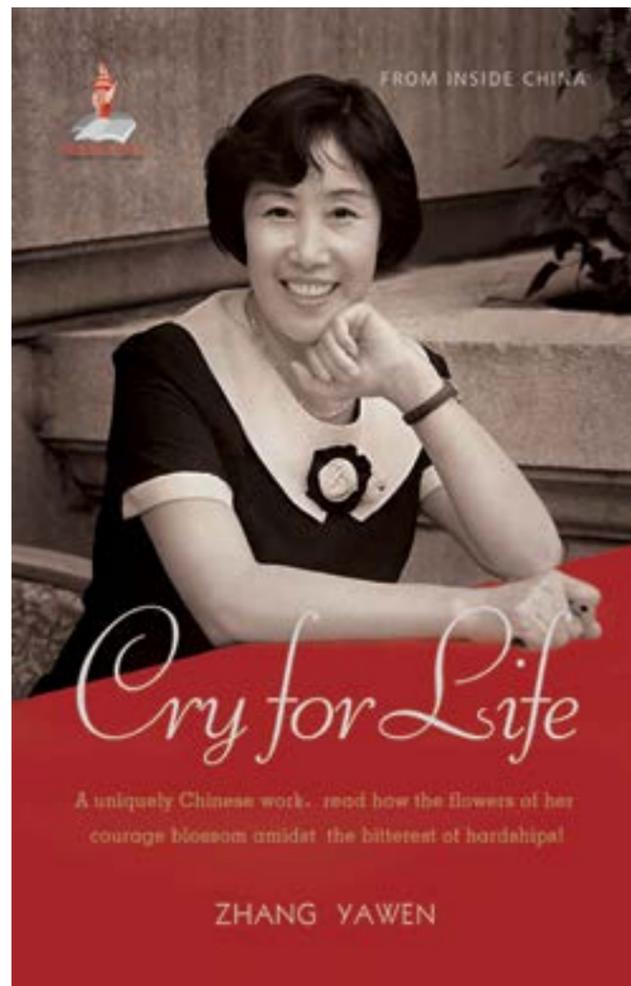
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Cry for Life by Zhang Yawen, translated by Saul Thompson

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Zhang Yawen's autobiography, *Cry for Life*, is a narrative in the series, *From Inside China* (thirteen books in total), which was commissioned by the Chinese National Publication Foundation to Aurora Publishing LLC in 2014 to promote Chinese

literature world widely. *Cry for Life* represents the reality of Zhang's life as a girl fighting against poverty and for education; as a writer fighting for social justice and ultimately for her copyright. It is about suffering and joy, disappointment and success, failure and achievement. Zhang's life story is allegorical because "[a] person's story is just like a country" (120). As the saying goes, "the pen is mightier than the sword." If Lu Xun's *Calls for Arms* (1922) was able to wake up "many people fast asleep inside" "an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible" almost a century ago (6), Zhang Yawen's *Cry for Life* has inspired and will inspire some Chinese to realize their dreams. Using her own life experience, she encourages her audience to strive for a better life by fighting all kinds of obstacles in their lives: "Though my path through life has been bumpy and full of hardships, I have chosen it of my own will and I have pursued my dreams … and I have no regrets," she says (561).

Cry for Life has great significance in terms of the Chinese Dream. As early as 2008 at a seminar on Zhang's Cry for Life sponsored by the Chinese Writers Association, Zhang Yiwu, professor from Peking University, regarded Zhang's autobiography as "the presentation of the Chinese dream in the course of its development." He believed that the core of the Chinese dream is to constantly go beyond oneself to reach a new space and new possibilities, which Zhang has illustrated with her life stories. Bai Miao, the executive vice president of Lu Xun Literature Institute, thinks that Zhang's autobiography is one of the major themes in today's China: the relationship between the individual and one's milieu. Even the autobiographer claims, "My life is like a mirror. What it reflects are not just my experiences, but the deep broad background from which I have come"

(561). If Zhang's life is a mirror of the Chinese people, her writing about the dream is part of the China dream discourse.

Born into a poor family in Northeast China in 1940s, Zhang Yawen fully understands what life means to ordinary peasants: "In my father and mother, I saw the tragedy and helplessness which beset so many people of their generation" (119). Education is wishful thinking for a little girl living deep in the mountains. But her desire to go to school was so strong that "Every day, little ten year old me walked the ten kilometre round trip along the shrub-covered, animal-infested mountain path" (171). She fought with wild boars, wolves, and sometimes bad people in order to go to an available school. Twenty years later, with only a Grade Five education, she fought her way through all kinds of difficulties and prejudices to become a writer. As a writer, she reported on social issues for public awareness and social justice. *Crossing the Land of Sadness—It's Not Just for One Village or One Person* (1989) and *Lay Down Your Hunting Guns – It's Not Just for One North East Tiger* (1990) are stories connected with the physical environment. *Gone Through the Painful Place* (2011) is about the struggles of a party branch secretary of the Fool Village in leading his people to change their fate. Most of non-fiction offerings expose human ignorance and indifference toward society. She also visited prisoners who received death sentences for writing about the marginalized people. A novella, *How Beautiful it is to Live* (1998) expresses death row criminals' "fierce longing to continue living" (433). When reportage in China was experiencing "a low ebb, since a lot of potential source materials was deemed 'sensitive'" (453), Zhang decided to set herself free by looking for topics abroad to "break new ground" in her writing. Using her savings, she went

to Russia, South Korea and Europe despite her language and culture barriers and her tight budget. Exploring primary materials, she produced groundbreaking works such as *Russian Roulette* (1994), *The President of South Korea's Chinese "Imperial Physician"* (1998), and *A Chinese Woman at Gestapo Gunpoint* (2002). The latter is in two forms: both a novel and a TV drama. With such achievements, Zhang could have enjoyed her reputation as a successful writer. Instead, she had to stand up and fight for her copyright as a screenwriter of *A Chinese Woman at Gestapo Gunpoint*. The challenge in her writing life was no less severe than those battles with her harsh life in childhood. Nonetheless, in a rhetoric appeal, she considered her fight for the copyright not "just a victory for [herself] as an individual defending [her] rights, it was also a victory for the right protection of all authors and screenwriters in the country" (559). Thus, *Cry for Life* has become a persuasive autobiography for a nation which has fought its way onto the world stage: "China had been on its knees at the feet of the rest of the world for over a hundred years, but it never got what it had hoped to see by not fighting" (119).

Cry for Life has received a good reception in China since the first Chinese edition in 2007; so far it is in its fourth edition. It won Xu Chi the Reportage Prize and Women Literature Prize in 2008 and in 2010 the Lu Xun Literature Prize, one of the top four prizes in China. Now *Cry for Life* is available to English readers through the Chinese National Publication foundation. As an English reader and life writing scholar, I believe that *Cry for Life* not only has more to offer us in our endeavor to understand human nature and to gain insight into the workings of the particular life of contemporary Chinese writers, but it also contributes to the scholarship of autobiography as a genre. At the presentation of

the Lu Xun Literature Prize, a comment was made on the book to the effect that creative nonfiction can go beyond its limitations to reach the same literary effects as fiction.

In "What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography," Paul John Eakin remarks, "the narrative activity in and of autobiography is an identity activity" (Narrative 130). *Cry for Life* directly or indirectly tells stories about Zhng's identity as a writer in contemporary China, how and why she becomes a writer "in constant struggle against [her] fate, in constant outcry" (561). This "fated" narrative throughout the autobiography, as John Pilling suggests, "cannot be considered 'tragic'" (118) even though tragic accidents seem to have dogged her before and after she became a writer. In the first part of her life, the author beat the odds against several threats on her life, and in the second part, she had to fight even on her deathbed for her reputation as a writer. Seven chapters are direct exposition of her 'oeuvres,' being about her writing of *A Chinese Woman at Gestapo Gunpoint (*the TV drama and the novel which, in the end, have brought her both pain and gain). On June 24, 2015, President Hu Jintao presented a copy of this anti-war novel in an English edition as a gift to Philippe of Belgium, the King of the Belgians.

Even though the autobiographer sets up an empathic tone for her life, "My lot is not a happy one, and so my whole life has been a bitter struggle against my wretched fate" (11), *Cry for Life* has turned out to be what Stephen Shapiro calls "a comic genre in that it asserts the ego's transcendence of circumstance" (quoted from Pilling 118). In Zhang's case, writing autobiography first serves as catharsis from her hopeless situation in the copyright legal case: "I had to have an outlet, only through pouring myself into my writing could I ease the dull ache and imbalance in my heart, only through writing

could I dispel the heavy thoughts that had been weighing on me for so long and release the creative passion that I had held pent up inside me for so long! So I began writing, putting my whole life into words" (553). In the process of writing, she learns "to use emotion as a tool to become closer with the world" (446). In the end, the "words" have turned into a celebration of life: "My life is just as it always has been: full of energy and joy" (561). As in most autobiographies, the self in *Cry for Life* is in "a transformational or metaphorical act" (Pilling 118), in which the writing self constantly catches up with her milieu.

Unconventionally, Zhang's autobiography starts with her two deathbed wills: one for her husband and one for herself. Paradoxically, the will for herself expresses a strong desire to survive, "You can't die; you must survive this great trial of life and death!" (11). On the one hand, the will has become an alibi for the author to tell of her unhappy lot in the past and the life-and-death situation at the moment. While awaiting for heart surgery, the autobiographer questions, "When exactly did my heart begin its descent to ruins?" (17). By reflecting upon her life trajectory, she came to the conclusion that it was the "heaven-given task" of writing the screenplay of *A Chinese woman at Gestapo Gunpoint* that led her to this heart surgery and lawsuits for her copyright. On the other hand, "[a]nticipating death, however, is a strategy for overcoming it" (Sayre, 181-2). In her case, the purpose of writing about her life is to bring herself "balance and equanimity" (552) since "the legal system was not capable of delivering justice" to her. As Robert F. Sayre observes, "In transforming life into destiny—in resurrecting the past as necessary—the autobiographers in effect anticipate death, because they deny their continuing historical

Following the chapter about her anticipation of death is "The Inspiration that Brings Fresh Meaning to My Life," which details how she followed up with a story in the paper *Global Times* of a Chinese woman named Qin Xiuling, who used her connection with a Nazi general to rescue many Belgians who had been condemned to death by the Gestapo in WWII. The author demonstrates how she, as a biographer, writes about the life of the Chinese woman in a screen drama, detailing her research through interviews in Belgium, collecting source materials, working on the characters in the play. She takes us to the networking she does to find a film company shooting in Europe. As the autobiographer differentiates her apathetic self from herself as a dead person on the deathbed, she is fully engaged in playing her role as a biographer. She tells stories of her experiences of losing face:

> I'm ashamed to say that I, an author of modest means, who had spent all
> the money I had swanned off to Europe, with stars in my eyes, found myself
> confronting that most fundamental of problems in life; I was embarrassingly
> short of money. All the self-respect and sense of accomplishment that I had
> nurtured in China were laid bare, like a peeled egg sitting alone and shiny
> in the middle of a plane. (23)

On the other hand, she enjoys her conversation with Qian Xiuling, visits the museums and experiences the thrill of obtaining the precious photos, all of which would testify authoritatively to the truth of herself as the screen writer of *A Chinese woman at Gestapo Gunpoint*. The now biographer believes that "content of this true story is so profound,

so rich, so full of wild plot twists and deep, strong-willed characters, it's even more soul-stirring than the original story behind the film Schindler's List" (50). To her, the material she obtains is "no less of a revelation to have stumbled upon this kind of heaven-sent material than it would be for a gold prospector who chances upon a gold mine." The style of this chapter is a mixture of the autobiographical self, the self of her subject, and part of the screen play she has written. If one were to read only this chapter, one could discern the author's strong passion for her subject, admire her tactics in conducting interviews and celebrate her efficiency in completing the screenplay. All of these attest her ability as a screenplay writer.

Chapters 3 and 12 are mainly about the author's copyright legal case, which reveals the rampant fraud in Chinese media and legal fields. The chapter of "'Black Fridays'—I Am Driven to Death's Borders" exposes "the inner workings" of the film world (64), which the author believes, "has always been a place with no law, no nationality and no morals" (96). Although the author realizes that "a screenwriter declaring war against a powerful film company is like hitting a rock with an egg," her unyielding personality empowers her to be a writer warrior to pursue her battle for her copyright. The chapter of "Two Last Testaments, One for Myself, One for My Husband" details the difficult process for the author to appeal against a negative judicial decision which is against her. Her husband, who worked in law for over twenty years, warned her of the difficulties, "I warn you not to pin too much hope on the law! The law is dead, but judges are very much alive…they're also bound by all kinds of personal relationships" (98). True enough, the legal fight lasted seven years!

Those moments in the appeal process are "the bitterest, most bereft of hope period" of the author's life (508). As a writer nurtured in her own society, Zhang "refused to believe that there was nowhere in China where people speak reason" (552). After dealing with "judges who all had different levels of competence, different backgrounds, and different webs of social connections" (516), the author admitted, "I mistakenly thought that a court of law is a place where you can put right the wrongs that have been done to you and seek justice." She discovered that the court of law was "just a platform for all parties to say their lies in public and to quibble over irrelevant technicalities. One side shoots arrows at the other and vice versa simultaneously, each arrow piercing your heart and further widening the already gushing wound it has made" (516). Even though the author tried her best to demonstrate how her copyright was violated and she used legal devices to protect herself, the content of these two long chapters can be overly difficult to keep the reader's interest. Another element that makes the author lose grasp of her writing is the "anger" in Virginia Woolf's word (*A Room of One's Own*, 583). "It was the anger that had gone underground and mixed itself with all kinds of emotions. To judge from its odd effects, it was anger disguised and complex." Although in the case of autobiography, "telling the truth is the cardinal rule" (Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, 21) , "autobiography is so often thought of as an art of retrospect" (148).   While the dates and the people involved in her legal case are important for the autobiographer to provide the significant facts, the story telling is more appealing to the reader, because "Autobiography in our time is increasingly understood as both an art of memory and an art of imagination" (Eakin, *Fiction in Autobiography*, 5-6).   The complexity of her legal cases draws away the reader's interests and curiosity. Reading one hundred pages

in which the writer the writer seems to lose her capacity for imagination and creativity is challenging but the reader is rewarded with her eagerness to provide the facts and truth regarding time, venue, rumors. These two chapters confirm the assumption that the autobiography "should depend on actual and potentially verifiable events" (Eakin 6).

In contrast to the chapters which examine the dates, venues and procedures, *Cry for Life* is true to what Pasternak wrote, saying "The greatest works of art are those of which describe their own birth" (61). The physical birth of her life is described in her own cultural context: "At the same time I was born, my older brother's wife had just given birth to my niece … In those days, it was a matter of embarrassment for a woman to be with child at the same time as her daughter-in-law" (122). Thus, she imagines the fetal self, who understood her mother's embarrassment, "I refused to finish my birth for a long time even though my head was already out. I dragged out my entrance into the war-ruined world." Blaming herself for adding to the burdens of the already impoverished family, she feels sorry for her mother as saying "my forty three year old mother to become shy about seeing other people." For this her parents called her "Little Miss Extra." (The translation does not fit the vocabulary of the autobiographer's parents, who speak a local dialect, Little Extra Girl would be better for the context).

Interestingly, with no Christian background, Zhang associates her spiritual birth in the operating with resurrection of Jesus Christ while she was in surgery, "the operating theatre to observe a surgery" (537). She wrote of this moment of observing, "As I watched the patient, whom I saw as myself, lying on the operating table like Jesus enduring his

torture" (537). "In that moment, I felt as if I had been born again, as if I had returned to my true state" (539). Only from that moment, did the author give up the grouchy and angry self. Thus, a new self was born:

> I gazed out of her journey of a new life. I gazed out of the window at the
> passing scenery; everything felt at once unfamiliar and intimate, and I had
> a strange, vague sense of being in some other world and an insatiable feeling
> that I could not see enough with my eyes…. Everything that I had taken
> for granted in the past suddenly seems so beautiful and dear to me. (538)

With a new self, the author develops "a deeper understanding of love and friendship" (540), which expands to embrace the poor and the helpless: "what about those who cannot do so, who are powerless to resist the injustice they face? What can they rely on to bring equanimity to their hearts" (554). She realizes that writing about her life is not any more about the "venting of emotion" but of a calling to "those poor young people who are still struggling to free themselves from their own hardships" (559). She encourages them to strive for a better life, "It is not our fault that we are poor, and we can't throw away our lives for nothing just because we are poor. We must take the fight to our fates!" To this end, her autobiography is very didactic and inspirational. As a matter of fact, the whole autobiography is about how the author fights through her life to gain her status as a woman writer warrior.

What makes Zhang a writer warrior for herself and for her peers who have also suffered rights infringement for a long time? Zhang owes her fighting spirit to her parents' upbringing and to her society: "My parents were common peasants their whole lives,

remaining at the very bottom of the social hierarchy…But in the dangerous, dark and corrupt society that China was in their day, they moved heaven and earth for the sake of their family, for its dignity and its very survival. They stood tall and fearless against a county official" (115). She associated her parents' fate with that of her country, "China had been on its knees at the feet of the rest of the world for over a hundred years, but it never got what it had hoped to see by not fighting" (119).

With her mother as her role model in her own life, she acknowledged, "I admired my mother for her unwavering courage, even in the face of death, and I admire my father even more for his willingness to sit locked up in a jail rather than submit. I see my shadow cast by their bodies, and in them I can also see from what base materials my own character was formed" (115). When the debt-collectors came to their door, "we lined up next to her (the mother) like a row of little soldiers, ready to protect our jail and our home" (136)! Little Extra Girl also became a warrior to protect her hunchbacked sister. When a group of children taunted her sister, she charged them. One boy even bloodied her nose. But this little girl would never stop fighting for her sister, "I would fight with all my strength against anyone who called her a hunchback" (159). She fought not only with the debt collectors and the taunting boys, but also with wild animals such as wolves, wild boars, black bears, and tigers. The terrifying experience of seeing "a hole in an old elm tree that was full of snakes all coiled up on top of each other" (173), and running into a black bear and a pack of wolves never stopped the little girl from going to school.

Ironically, the unyielding character the author takes from her parents also hurt them badly when she fought later against their traditional ideology. At the age of 15, she

escaped from home to become a skater, which was against her father's wish. In those days, athletes in China were thought to have "feeble brains hidden in muscular bodies" (287). An even worse show of rebellion against her parents was her marriage to an athlete. To them, "only those who had nothing else they could do in life went off to become an athlete." They were "eats-for-free" and her father even believed that "it was a waste of money for the state to cultivate athletes" (287).

In terms of her fighting copyright infringement in her writing career, Zhang associates her own life with the life of her country and nation: "A person is just like a country" (120). "I decided to continue fighting the case, not because I wanted the two hundred and fifty thousand *yuan* of my writer's fee, … but because I demand at least some justice from the law!...I wasn't doing it any more, I was doing it on behalf of the thousands upon thousands of common people who have no backgrounds, no rights, and no influence, and to whom no doors or even windows, are open" (558). After seven years of court cases, Zhang won. In a more reflective tone she comments, "This wasn't just a victory for me as an individual defending my rights, it was also a victory for the rights protection of all authors and screenwriters in the country" (559). In fact, the Chinese people hear these words for encouragement, and they accept the discourse around her fighting spirit. He Xilai, a famous Chinese literary critic, remarks, "Zhang Yawen's reflection upon her 60 years of life and writing provides us with a woman who is aggressive, stubborn, unyielding and unbeatable… Her striving for a better life and her fighting spirit are the precious characteristics of a rising nation and of its intellectuals…She does not only shout for her own life in times of adversity, hardships and setbacks, but calls for arms on behalf of the diligent and strong nation."

The strident calls to fight for a better life are not only the themes highlighted in this autobiography, *Cry for Life* also provides readers with fascinating stories of cultural myths in China. The "magical power" of Master Zhang, a Daoist priest and a senior member of the author's own family clan, is a story of how the author's father fought against the power of the dark world controlled by the Daoist priest. The story of "Old Mrs. Fox" tells how her family is tricked by the fox spirit.   Zhang gives a reasonable explanation why "that basket and chopstick dictated almost every aspect of our lives": "back then people were ignorant about many things. They were not able to be the masters of their own fate, so they put their fates in the hands of imaginary spirits" (161). The story of two men and one woman living together under the same roof harmoniously reveals a human culture in rural China, where "if a man's health was bad and as a result couldn't fulfill the duties expected of him as the man of the house and as a husband, his wife could take another man if she so desired"(185).

Memory talk is another feature in *Cry for Life*. Through memory talk, the author revisits her parents and sisters in the process of writing her autobiography. She identifies herself with her father who fought with Master Zhang, and identifies herself with her mother who fought with the court to rescue her husband. Memory talk not only provides Zhang with the source for her life writing but also for her creative writing: the stories of a snake with magic power, of Cherry Mountain, and of a deep well have been written into her works: "These ancient and mysterious stories represented my earliest cultural awakening and also provided the material for the endless daydreams. I ended up weaving

these stories into my novels" (138). The little girl was obsessed with the harsh life in a deep and isolated mountain, but she was elevated by her imaging herself in a city she has never been. The weird, isolated and poor people she met during her life have become the source materials for her creative writing: one of the characters in her novel *A woman Crossing the River of Men* is based on a real story of an old man in whose house they stayed while they were building their own shed. He lived alone because there was no other woman on the mountain. The little girl happened to see him "sobbing loudly and holding up a set of flower-patterned women's clothes. He cried and cried and began to stuff the clothes down the front of his trousers" (164). The desire to walk out of the mountain and see the outside world helped her in her later writing days to create the main character, a woman "whose heart ached to leave the mountain and find love" (140). As the author tells her readers, "my childhood gave me a deep understanding of the suffering and hardships of the peasantry, which I used to create works like *A Woman Crossing the River of Men*" (220).

Zhang is a good story teller when looking back at her younger self. The story of Big Yellow is full of joys, sorrow and sadness. Big Yellow is a dog that her father got her as a companion while she had to walk more than 15 kilometers for a round trip to school. In a ten year old girl's voice, readers seem to hear the singing, "one dog, one girl, playing their way joyfully down a mountain path" (198). Readers can feel the sorrow when Big Yellow vanished into a clump of grass to protect the girl from wild animals, "I couldn't see what was happening, I could just hear a tearing, biting sound that was enough to make my skin crawl" (211-12). The story of the red silk ribbons describes her hunchback sister's repressed longing for love for a peddler who never had a chance to say goodbye to the hunchbacked girl he fell in love with. The red silk ribbons have become the keepsake for love and faith for her hunchback sister who died at the age of twenty-four: "it was as if she had placed her last hope in them. The silk was her greatest refuge of her heart's sorrows" (150).

As a screenwriter, Zhang is good at adopting cinematic techniques in telling stories. Reading her stories makes one see the image and hear the sound. Describing her mother working in the field, she writes, "The image of her tiny frame propping up a mound of firewood has been forever carved into my memory" (138-9). The image is so strong that the tiny body under the heavy load seems to be in front of the reader. The story of how Little Yawen managed to escape a child-sex offender who offered her a ride in his horse cart in a deep winter evening is very moving. Reader is treated to a dramatic word picture: from her lucky moment of being invited onto the horse-driven cart with the "dog-fur-hatted driver", the chatting between the little happy girl and the face-covered man, one of his freezing-cold hands reaching into her jacket, smooth chest and belly, reflection of her mother's story of a bad man "tapping children's heads with a knockout drop and take them away to some place where no people lived and chopped them up to sell on the street as meat dumplings" (186), to the child's shouting, "Stop! I don't want to ride in your sled anymore! I want to get off! Stop!" The driver's "wolfish glance" (187) and "his eyelashes crusted with frost" and "the image of the meat dumplings kept flashing in and out of focus in front of my eyes", the thin little girl struggling free of the driver's grip and climbing up on the back of the sled and in the end jumping off the sled, but her "school

bag caught on a wooden stake tied on the back of the sled" (188), "like a dead dog being dragged over the ice by the speeding sled," "stretched out my hands to try to free my bag" and "the strap snapped", "the sound of the horse's hooves receded into the distance and I lay like a corpse in the ice," "mother saw my belly covered in blood and heard my tearful account" (189). The little warrior fought with the sex-offender in "a contempt for death and danger, and defiance of violence and force" (192).

One thing that spoils *Cry for Life* are the dozens of quotations and mottos from popular or famous people inside and outside China. Zhang might intend to use those sayings and mottos to erase her "primary school student" identity, which "already became a tag that was firmly stuck to me, much like the 'scarlet letter' on Hester Prynne's dress. Many people viewed me through the colored lenses of these words, in the same kind of way that people view peasants sojourning in the city" (402). As a matter of fact, the redundant quotations add nothing to her new identity as a writer except to prove that she is well read. In an autobiography, the readers expect to explore the self- presentation through development of the self rather than through famous writers who are not directly associated with the self being explored or discovered. Nonetheless, the stories in this challenging autobiography have been grounded in real people, places, and things, and thus are useful in telling us better "what really happened" in today's China from the point of view of a popular Chinese writer.

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2015

Alpha and Omega

Again the planes fly overhead.

The bombs drop and tanks advance

As we walk through fields and divisions

Like ghosts untouched by rapid fire

Or shells exploding, wondering what

The war's about. They pile the dead.

We have arrived as if by chance

And know each other by a charm.

They think the other side's a liar.

Self-interest of the fallen world

Without belief and quick to cut

Enemies who mean them harm.

Amid confusion, each one runs

Not to be struck, a body hurled

As shots will scatter all the birds.

It feels like hunger, but it's thirst

For we seek our final words

And suspect we'll only find our first.

—*Jefferson Holdridge*

PHOTO: STUART MATHESON

WINTER LUNE

Contemporary Anxieties and the Future of Humanity:

Joss Whedon's *Avengers: The Age of Ultron*

by Antonio Sanna, University of Cagliari, Cagliari, Italy

Joss Whedon's *Avengers: The Age of Ultron* hit world theatres in April, quickly earning more than 1.4 billion dollars worldwide and thus reaching the top-10 list among the highest-grossing films of all times. It is the second instalment in the Avengers saga as well as the eleventh film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the extremely-profitable and undoubtedly-entertaining group of films based on the adventures of comic superheroes Captain America, Hulk, Iron Man, Thor, Black Widow and Hawkeye. The saga can be rightly considered as a universe because it is programmed to involve nine more films by 2019, films which will introduce new Marvel characters to the big screen (such as Doctor Strange and Black Panther) and finally unite all of them in the apocalyptic two-film finale *Infinity War*. Similarly to *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, Marvel has therefore created a franchise that delights the spectators with a great narrative arc based on different films and on the TV series *Agents of SHIELD* (ABC, 2014-) and *Daredevil* (Netflix, 2015-). After all, as Paolo Armelli has pointed out, human beings have always enjoyed "the stories of gods and heroes, and Marvel is the updated and 2.0 version of mythology".

On the other hand, for a spectator who has not watched the previous ten films in the saga or is not familiar with the decades-long intertwined plots of the comics, *Age of Ultron* could be a difficult and frustrating film because, as Keith Phipps suggests, it actually "moves as if unburdened by the need to explain everything". This is due to frequency of the battle sequences (one about every fifteen minutes) and the total presence of fourteen characters, many of whom do not appear to be developed completely, especially those secondary characters who are briefly introduced in cameos that do not explain their origin or their place in the Marvel fictional universe. The film has been criticized by Sady Doyle and David Sims for its lack of involvement in the characters' narrative arcs, which are allegedly left with marginal spaces among the action sequences. In this sense, *Age of Ultron* is apparently a film fabricated only for the devout.

Nevertheless, as Antonio Bracco and Richard Roeper argue, although the battle scenes and the big-screen entertainment have the priority, the characters' dialogues are actually well-balanced within the general narrative flux of the film. All of the six main heroes and their three antagonists have at least one moment on the scene to express their inner thoughts, beliefs and emotions, whether through a soliloquy or a dialogue, especially in the "farm interlude" (Sims) - the moment of recovery at the centre of the film in which the Avengers confess their own weaknesses and failings to each other. The subjective feelings of the characters are particularly heightened by the excellent performances of the actors/actresses, who are completely at ease in their respective roles. Particular attention is paid to the moments of intimacy between introvert and reluctant Dr. Bruce Banner/Hulk

(Mark Ruffalo) and sweet but ready-to-bite Natasha Romanova/Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson).[1] Their interaction is accompanied by the slow rhythm of a piano and is set against the prevailingly-fast-paced soundtrack composed jointly by Brian Tyler and Danny Elfman. On the other hand, several moments during the film are dedicated to the portrayal of the rivalry between the two effective leaders of the group, Tony Stark/Iron Man (Robert Downey Jr.) and Steve Rogers/Captain America (Chris Evans). The two characters disagree on many occasions for every question regarding the group's decisions because their moral positions are opposite. Their being continually set against each other is also an anticipation of one of the next instalments in the saga, *Civil War*.

Whedon - creator of the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel* (1999-2004) as well as director of the recent Shakespearean adaptation *Much Ado About Nothing* (2012) - directs this film with acumen and a praiseworthy ability to select only the most pertinent material. However, what emerges clearly from the final product is his will to reproduce faithfully the comic strips of the original stories, especially through the use of many slow-motion sequences that almost freeze the six superheroes in their muscular and combative poses on the battlefield. Whedon has also endowed the script with much irony, especially in the dialogues between the characters, which lightens the tension created by the battle scenes and by the threat of human extinction posed by the new villain introduced in this film. Furthermore, he transports the characters (and the viewer) around the globe, from the fictitious town of Sokovia located in the snowy forests

of Eastern Europe to the hypertechnological headquarters of the Avengers in New York, from Seoul to Johannesburg, where Iron Man and Hulk fight violently against each other in a sequence that demonstrates the devastating effects of the latter's savagery over the inhabitants, streets and buildings of the city.

Extremely appropriate is the choice of the villain Ultron, usually considered as one of the greatest enemies of the group of heroes after the mad titan Thanos (who has hitherto appeared only in small cameos but shall be the main villain of the final instalments in the series). The first mention of Ultron occurs in *Avengers* #54, published in 1968. According to the comics, his Artificial Intelligence was created by Doctor Henry Pym (also known as Ant Man) who downloaded his own brain patterns (and instable personality) into a robot. During the course of the past four decades Ultron has re-built, reincarnated and reactivated himself numerous times, but it has also created other sentient androids as himself (such as Vision, Jocasta and Alkhema) in order to perpetuate his own species.[2] In the film his birth, which is as unexpected and rapid for the viewer as it is for the Avengers, is realized with great creativity by Whedon. The director in fact portrays initially a mere voice in the dark and then depicts the quick interaction between Stark's computer program Jarvis and the expanding and dominating conscience

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1 According to Matt Zoller Seitz, the sequences that focus on Hulk and Black Widow channel "King Kong: she interrupts his Hulk-outs by holding up a slender hand with slightly curved fingers, and after a moment's hesitation, the green giant reaches out in kind, like a curious ape touching his reflection in a fun-house mirror".

2 The storyline has subsequently evolved to include other planets and civilizations as well as other time periods. In Al Ewin's *The New Avengers: Ultron Forever*, for example, a narrative arch set in the distant future portrays Ultron in Asgard as the all-father of the other gods in the place of Odin. The artificial intelligence declares: "I am the one true lord of the machines. I AM GOD!" (19). After exterminating humanity, Ultron has therefore aspired to the status of divinity. In the 2015 *Rage of Ultron* by Ricky Rememder, the villain conquests the moon of Titans, home of the eternals, infecting the local infrastructure and network, and becomes the planet itself, whose shape assumes its very threatening grin (46-47).

of Ultron as a conflict of coloured interfaces. The villain enacts a Darwinian law of the survival of the fittest as soon as he is activated, first by suppressing Jarvis, and then by re-interpreting his Chamberlain-like mission "peace in our time" as involving the annihilation of humanity. Precisely as it occurs in the comics, one of the film's main thematic concerns is therefore the safety of the future for humanity.[3] The very term "Age" in the title of Whedon's production indicates the concern for the end of humankind, but also the fear for a forthcoming age of robots, where human will and flesh shall be eradicated, or, in Ultron's own words, "when the dust settles, the only thing living in this world will be metal", an allusion to the hostile species of the Borg in Jonathan Frakes' *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996). The message "humans are creating the means for their own destruction" is allusive also to the Terminator and The Matrix sagas.

As soon as his first provisional and unstable robotic body is destroyed, Ultron's conscience spreads on the Internet and copies itself inside a laboratory in Sokovia, where he rebuilds himself and an army of robots. We could therefore agree with Lev Grossman, who has brilliantly summarized that "Ultron represents a new trend, the cloud-based villain. [. . .] his essence is software [. . .] Pulverizing his body doesn't do much good: he sheds bodies the way we shed old iPhones". However, it is undeniable that his mechanical bodies fill the screen with a realistic and strong presence: the character is absolutely believable for the spectator and expressive of emotional intensity, particularly when he amuses himself with a series of quotations, from Matthew 16:18 ("upon this rock I will

build my church") to Walt Disney's classic *Pinocchio* ("There are no strings on me"). Actor James Spader - the protagonist of Roland Emmerich's *Stargate* (1994) and Steven Shainberg's *Secretary* (2002) - superbly endows Ultron with a very expressive, masculine, grave and authoritarian voice. He "gives the impression of icy calculation with every line" (Kohn), although that is only an impression because the villain harbours many feelings behind his multiple armours of iron or vibranium (the strongest metal on Earth, according to the Marvel universe).

One of the most interesting aspects of the film is the presentation of Ultron as the personal nemesis of Tony Stark. As several critics have noted (Bradshaw, Fletcher, Nicholson), the devious villain has in fact inherited his creator's genius as much as his narcissism: he is a twisted robotic mirror image and hideously parodic version of his creator, "essentially a bigger, badder Iron Man" (Persall). His oedipal complex is fully developed in those scenes in which he loses his temper merely for being compared to his human father and expresses his rage against Stark and his superhero allies.[4] We can therefore agree with Kurt Busiek's affirmation that

> Ultron was only a cold machine on the outside. At his essence, he was a passionate, emotional, disturbed being, one with strong family ties to the Avengers. Murderous towards his father, betrayed by his son, he was a figure of high drama, of almost operatic fury. Regardless of how much

3 In Brian Michael Bendis' 2013 *Age of Ultron* the last remnant of humanity are hunted down by Ultron's agents. The villain builds an enormous fortress (called Ultron City) over the ruins of a devastated Manhattan, whereas his body finds shelter in the future.

4 The graphic novel *Rage of Ultron* exemplifies perfectly the robot's oedipal complex. Indeed, in the first encounter between the Avengers and the villain, the latter complains of having being betrayed by "the one soul in the world that should have cared for [me]", and then he tells Doctor Pym: "I have grieved you, father. Accepted your contempt for me. ... and moved past it" (14-15). Subsequently, in a more intimate encounter with his creator, Ultron unleashes explicitly his frustration by arguing that "a child is merely an extension of a father's ego" (23).

he denied it. [. . .] for about 15 or 20 years, the core of the Avengers series was about one bizarre extended interfamilial psychodrama, and the core of that struggle was Ultron. (Introduction 4)

Extremely interesting is the entrance into the Marvel Cinematic Universe of the character of Wanda Maximoff/Scarlet Witch (Elisabeth Olsen), who, as Nick Romano has pointed out, possesses something viewers never saw in the previous Marvel films, that is, magic. Originally presented in the comics as the offspring of X-Men's Magneto, Wanda has voluntarily submitted to experimentation that endowed her with telekinetic abilities and the power to alter both reality and the human mind. Her scarlet, stringy, and fluid magic is brilliantly matched by the musical track "Ultron-Twins", whose undulating movement of violins seems to follow the wavy movement of her hands, whereas the dark choirs of the track support perfectly the villains' resentment against Tony Stark. Indeed, together with her twin brother Pietro/Quicksilver (Aaron Taylor-Johnson), Wanda has been traumatized during her childhood by the death of her parents, caused by the explosion of a missile manufactured by the billionaire Stark. The very scene in which she and her brother Pietro recount the experience of their parents' death and the subsequent imprisonment in front of an undetonated shell ("every effort to save us, every shift in the bricks, I think, 'this will set it off'. We wait for two days for Tony Stark to kill us") is certainly the most emotionally-intense and touching of the entire film, especially because the actress performs egregiously her role, with suffering eyes, clamped lips, and evident pain and resentment. [**Image #1**] We could therefore agree easily with David Edelstein when affirming that "Olsen with her lemur peepers makes the Scarlet Witch so charismatically damaged she steals every scene".

Wanda and Pietro Maximoff (Elisabeth Olsen and Aaron Taylor-Johnson) are comforted by Ultron (voice of James Spader) (*courtesy of Marvel Studios, 2015*).

The importance of the character of Wanda is also established on the narrative level. Her ability to manipulate the human mind and produce a nightmarish vision of an individual's worst fears precipitates both the action and the psychological development of the other characters. At first, during the initial assault against the Hydra headquarters in Sokovia, she attacks Stark, who experiences a fearful dream sequence which triggers the resurfacing of the trauma he experienced during the battle against the Chitauri (narrated in Whedon's 2012 *Avengers Assemble*). The gradual smile accompanying Wanda's realization of her

power on the mind of her rival is almost as worth watching as the entire film. It is the nightmarish vision she induces that later leads the billionaire to the fatal idea of creating an artificial intelligence controlling his own Iron Legion in order to defend Earth against future invasions. Subsequently, after allying with Ultron, Wanda attacks and disables three more Avengers. She thus offers us some glimpses of their minds and, specifically, of their fears and dark sides. As Scott Foundas has suggested, "these nifty phantasmagorias allow Whedon to flex his visual imagination in ways that the first 'Avengers' never hinted at (think 'A Nightmare on Marvel Street')". Phantasmagorias is the proper term to define these visions: Captain America hallucinates on his Second World War experiences and the unrealized project of a family life that he desired back during the 1940s. Black Widow instead remembers her juvenile training as a killer and the sterilization procedure she voluntary submitted to, as she herself later explains, in order not to be distracted from her profession as an assassin – a particular that has provoked many outraged responses from the critics who accused Whedon of misogyny for equating womanhood to reproductive choices (Doyle, VanDerWerff). Finally, Thor (Chris Hemsworth) dreams of a *danse macabre* in which the court of Asgard is massacred by his fulminant power, a scene which contains a series of clues essential for the understanding of the future developments of Marvel Cinematic Universe - specifically, Thanos' search for the six gems known as the Infinity Stones.

Another significant addition to the cast is the android Vision (Paul Bettany), who, contrary to the rules of filmmaking that usually dictate to introduce every element that the story needs in the first twenty minutes, appears in the last forty minutes of the film,

but then has a decisive role in the defeat of his own father Ultron (Sargent). His much anticipated creation is portrayed in a Frankenstein-like manner: it is preceded by Stark and Banner admitting that they are both mad scientists, and it is favoured by Thor attacking the cradle in the middle of the laboratory with a lighting that actually animates the android. After raising from his cradle, Vision faces himself in a glass (in what could be perhaps considered as the Lacanian mirror phase of the individual) and asserts his own identity through a statement of difference: "I am not Ultron. I am not Jarvis. I am … I am", almost in a reinterpretation of the foundation of knowledge established by Descartes' principle "I think, therefore I am". Unexpectedly, his face is the most humane and his eyes are the most compassionate of the entire cast, in spite of the fact that he is not literally human: he has been created by uniting human tissue cells with vibranium and the Infinity Stone of mind. Nevertheless, Vision is a very ethical being: although he is contrary to murder, he is forced by necessity to conclude that Ultron's termination is necessary in order to save all of humanity. He also provides a detached perspective on human actions and beliefs, especially near the end of the film when he affirms: "humans are odd. They think order and chaos are somehow opposites, and try to control what won't be. But there is grace in their failings".

Certainly, special effects have not been spared in this grand-scale production: Hulk jumps to vertiginous heights, Iron Man and Thor fly, civilian vehicles are smashed to pieces, weapons of all kinds are fired, buildings collapse, and the city of Sokovia finally rises in the sky after being programmed to act as a meteor that shall erase humankind from the planet. All of these spectacular special effects have been realized in a very realistic

way: even watching part of a truck flying over Seoul is believable, once the spectator has voluntarily suspended his/her disbelief and has got used to such a array of continuous action sequences. Another convincing visual pleasure is offered by the inimical army of Ultron deployed against the eponymous group of superheroes. According to Kristen Whissel, in contemporary films "the digital multitudes always function as radically homogeneous formations, while in contrast, the protagonists function as an aggregate of heterogeneous individuals" (77). The ideological and personal differences that separate the Avengers throughout the story are solved during the final confrontation against Ultron's hordes, precisely in the moment in which Iron Man suggests to the other members of the group (including new recruits Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver and Vision) to stop the adversaries by working "together".

Whissel also argues that the overwhelming force of computer-generated hordes is emblematic of "the protagonists' relationships to sudden, often apocalyptic, historical change" (60). This is certainly true in the case of Whedon's film, which depicts the Avengers as facing possible global extinction as an unannounced event that requires immediate solution. The final battle scene thus reaches epic proportions and is majestically realized through the use of multiple cameras that follow the movements of Ultron's terrestrial and aerial armada through a series of quick cuts that include also the perspective of the civilians caught in the middle of the conflict. The term "epic" is particularly relevant if we use Sheldon Hall' and Steve Neale's interpretation of it. Hall and Neale argue that, independently of their historical setting, epic films are those that portray the struggles of "protagonists caught up in large-scale events[,] those who sway the course of history or the

fate of nations" (qtd. in Elliott 139). The same occurs in this sequence in *Age of Ultron*, in which the superheroes do not merely fight for the assertion of a single country's national identity, but are ready to sacrifice themselves in order to save the human race at large, an intention that is declared explicitly by Black Widow when, after Iron Man proposes to vaporize the flying city, she affirms "I didn't say we should leave. There's worse ways to go".

The theme of heroism and the battle for the safety of all human beings are also vehicles for a very instructive metaphorical treatment of contemporary anxieties. The fantastic events depicted in *Age of Ultron* are indeed made plausible and relevant to the contemporary viewer through the similarities with the current War on Terror. As Matt Zoller Seitz has noted, the film is

> a metaphorical working-through of America's War on Terror, with Cap[tain America] representing a principled, transparent military, answering to civilian authority, and Stark as the more paternalistic military-industrial response to 9/11 type threats, treating the masses as unruly kids who aren't allowed a voice ….There are accusations of hypocrisy from both sides.[5]

The central message of the film lies indeed in the moral legitimization for extreme measures in the face of an alien hostile force. The narrative frequently revolves around the issue whether the creation of a weapon more powerful than those possessed by the

5 Matt Zoller Seitz further argues that "some of Whedon's dialogue has the sting of political satire: Cap warns Tony that 'every time someone tries to win a war before it starts, people die,' a not-too-veiled slap at post-9/11 American foreign policy, while Ultron chides Cap as 'God's righteous man, pretending you can live without a war,' a comment that indicts the United States itself, if you read Cap as a beefed-up Uncle Sam".

enemy could actually constitute a greater danger itself. dangerous itself. The creation of an Artificial Intelligence is portrayed as the typical Frankenstein-like transgression of the limits of human knowledge which, although apparently justified by the fear of a potentially-lethal inimical other, is immediately revealed as a greater menace for the survival of humanity at large.

The thematic concern with contemporary fears is typical of many superhero films. It derives from the involvement with social and political issues that was depicted in Marvel and DC comics during the superhero boom known as the "Silver Age" of comic books in the 1960s and that, according to Arlen Schumer, exposed readers to the darker sides of contemporary America, especially through characters such as Green Arrow (21). Cinematic adaptations of comic books have been equally concerned with global crises, whether past or contemporary. Examples of the former are Matthew Vaughn's *X Men: First Class* (2011), which is set at the very time and place where the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in 1962, and Zach Snyder's *Watchmen* (2009), which hypothesizes an alternative end to the Cold War. A contemporary global crisis is represented in Sidney J. Furie's *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987), which portrays the superhero as the actual solution to the problem of the arms race during the 1980s. Similarly, Whedon's *Avengers Assemble* (2012) and Zack Snyder's *Man of Steele* (2013) allude to the 2001 New York bombings by means of the representation of the devastating attacks on the city's skyscrapers and of the casualties among the people in the streets (caused, respectively, by the alien army of the Chitauri and the Kriptonian forces of General Zod). The post-09/11 threat of terroristic attacks against densely-crowded urban areas is evident also in Steven

Sommers' *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra* (2009) – in which the Eiffel Tower is destroyed by a chemical agent released by the members of the criminal organization Cobra. Similarly, in Christopher Nolan's trilogy on Batman (2005, 2008, 2012) villains such as the Joker and Bane are associated to the figures of the political insurgent and the terrorist, whereas Batman often employs many post-9/11 counterterrorist measures (Sanna). Jon Favreau's *Iron Man* (2008) and *Iron Man 3* (2013) depict instead the fear of the armament of terrorist groups in the Middle East and of their alleged secret collaboration with American enterprisers. Contemporary cinematic supervillains are nevertheless perceived as a threat to the social order in many different ways. For example, portraying the Lizard (Rhys Ifans) in Marc Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) as the result of an accident of experimental bio-chemistry and as attempting to transform the city's inhabitants into reptiles connects with the current paranoia regarding bio-warfare, pandemic, and the panic surrounding the contagion due to the transmission of viruses. Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003) alludes to the fear of experimental research on human beings, whereas a reference to the danger posed by dirty bombs is exemplified by the use of explosives and tracking devices by Doctor Doom in Tim Story's *Fantastic 4* (2005) and by the Green Goblin in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* (2002).

Whedon's harmonious gathering of such a great amount of characters and story arcs cannot be but praised highly: exciting sequences follow smoothly one after the other, whether they comprise battles or are merely dialogic. *Age of Ultron* is indubitably an entertaining and dazzling spectacle, even though knowledge of the previous instalments in the Marvel universe is necessary for the viewer to fully comprehend and metabolize

the story, especially because this is an interstitial film which is intended to prepare the spectators for an even greater spectacle in the future.

Filmography

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PHOTO: REBECCA MATHESON

FROST GARDEN

"Two Tenses of To Be"

I was from Iroquois and Kiowa and Navajo,

roads named after conquered peoples

and colonized by desert dwellers like me.

I was from Joshua trees and Prickly Pears,

from sandstorms and dust devils and grit, grit, grit

that found its way deep into everything I carried

and chaffed what I was in every crease.

I was from Iroquois and Kiowa and Navajo.

I was from blue collars and burnt faces,

baked on an anvil and blasted by afternoon winds

till leather and skin were one.

I was from pre-dawn to post-dusk, the only beautiful times,

from the creeping sun and humpback shadows

that always travelled in herds on the horizon,

from telephone lines whose electricity never stopped

at Four Corners and Adelanto and Barstow,

places that pass through you even as you settle.

I was from Fort Irwin and Death Valley and Mojave Greens and

bodies bent and broken through the devil's forge,

from rattlesnakes and horned toads and abandoned homestead shacks

whose forty acres hid all the barbed wire,

from thirst and dry lakes and salt flats and

mirages that offer hope at a distance.

I was from blue collars and burnt faces.

I am from Ivory towers and still reflection and learning pathways,

a vast interior landscape whose cartography expands with

the murmurs of ancestors and authors and foreign guests.

I am from conferences and talks and seminars,

from colloquia and practicums and thought, thought, thought

that has found its way deep into everything I carry

and grows in what I am in every crease.

I am from Ivory towers and still reflection and learning pathways.

I am from three lands and three faces,

crossing oceans and cultures,

a journeyman and apprentice of languages and tongues.

I am from the crevice between cultures,

a native, an immigrant, a writer of sorts,

a straddler of margins and doorways and entrances to Burkian parlors,

a listener to bards and drunks, sages and students.

I am from older women,

replacement mothers and colleagues

birthed by need and maintained by friendship,

from books and stories and grants and service,

from teaching like my hair's on fire and

frontloading, backloading, sideloading, and overloading

to make good citizens of us all.

I am from three lands and three faces.

I am from narrative makers and story tellers and tale spinners

from printing presses and sorts and galleys from which

spring row after row of invitations to somewhere else

someone else, interior landscapes and guides to humanity,

from the shiver and awe at every foyer to every library.

I am from Shakespeare, Jonson, and Chaucer,

from Kingsolver, Kingston, and Jamaica Kincaid,

from Kuralt, Morrison, and Keillor,

narrative makers, story tellers, and tale spinners whose stories,

whose language and words, words, words

have found their way deep into everything I carry

and nurture from every crease.

I am from desperation and drive, my birthrights of stone,

from sweat to dampen my own private Mojave

from fret that the desert will gnaw on the fringes of my civilization,

    count coup with scalped blue collars outside my ivory tower

and take back what was once its own.

I am from narrative makers and story tellers and tale spinners

who gave me words, words, words.

—Lash Keith Vance

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PHOTO: SUE MATHESON

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