

**THE BIBLE**

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**the quint**

# *the quint*

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## EDITORIAL

It was minus 28 degrees centigrade on the way in to work this morning. We can't wait for Spring to arrive this year. This March issue of *the quint* is designed for anyone with cabin fever, that claustrophobic uneasiness that accumulates over the long, dark winter months. Celebrating far away places, peoples, and diversity, *this quint* is designed for those interested in visiting Hawaii, Africa and the Far East. Our writers from Canada and abroad invite you to consider the challenges of island sovereignty, the Mau Mau Rebellion, northern environmentalism, hyperreality, anti-realism in postmodern film and video, the possibility of a parallax gap existing at your breakfast table, Michael Antonioni's *L'avventura*, and the nature of violence and virtuosity in film. There is something here for everyone. For those interested in imagist exercises, Anne-Marie Moscatelli's exquisite haiku in French and English are a wonderful way to exorcise the winter blues. And always interested in texture and shadow (even in the coldest days of winter) Anne Jevne has submitted a number of anthropomorphic treatments of frozen flora (filmed in February) which she hopes her viewers will find entertaining.

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

Sue Matheson  
Co-Editor



PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

MEETING ON THE STREET

# The Rhetoric of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement: Resistance against Commodification, Consumption, and “Social Death

by Sarah Antinora, California State University, San Bernadino,  
California

## Introduction:

Haunani-Kay Trask opens her *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawaii* (1993), with the following assertion: “Despite American political and territorial control of Hawai’i since 1898, Hawaiians are not Americans. Nor are we Europeans, or Asians. We are not from the Pacific Rim, nor are we immigrants to the Pacific. We are the children of Papa—earth mother, and Wākea—sky father—who created the sacred lands of Hawai’i Nei.” With this short passage, Trask asserts sovereignty for Native Hawaiians by engaging in the rhetorical tropes emblematic of the movement. She references the date of 1898, the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani and the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, as the beginning of colonization. The movement uses the term “colonization,” as it not only denies statehood, but it also highlights the subjugation and marginalization of Native Hawaiians. Hence, Trask denounces her American status and instead identifies herself as *kanaka maoli*, or “real or true people” (Okamura 99). Trask names Papa and Wākea, the earth and sky, as her grandparents,

referencing a Hawaiian mythos and theology which allow Native Hawaiians to claim a spiritual connection and sole entitlement to the land. Trask's words are therefore emblematic of the three grand rhetorical moves of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement: claiming colonized status, utilizing Hawaiian mythos and language, and reaffirming the interconnectedness between the Native Hawaiians and the Hawaiian Islands.

Work defining the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement is largely lacking, stemming from a greater issue—the absence of Hawaiian studies in academia. Hawaiian literature and studies of Hawaiian rhetoric are usually not examined in isolation. Instead, Hawaiian works are included in the genre of “Pacific literature,” as in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* (1999), or of “indigenous rhetoric,” as in *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* (2005). While both of these anthologies prove useful in examining the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and should not be dismissed as homogenizations of cultural productions, they do however demonstrate that scholarly endeavors in this field are deficient. Notable exceptions include Houston Wood's *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of Hawai'i* (1999), which examines the ways in which textual production of Native Hawaiians and Hawaiian culture mirrors their physical displacement, and a paper presented by Carissa Dunlap at the National Communication Association Women's Caucus (2007) linking feminist rhetorical theory with Trask's rhetoric for sovereignty. However, these exceptions merely work to prove the rule that Hawaiian rhetoric, and rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in particular, has been largely ignored by academia.

The aim of this project is not only to establish Native Hawaiian singularity, but

to uncover Native Hawaiian ethnicity as epistemic. While Trask's work provides rich ground for rhetorical analysis, what little work that has been done with the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement has centered on her. Her poetry and prose is in danger of supplanting the work of the entire movement if analysis does not engage with its other voices. Although her theoretical work will be incorporated here, most of the investigation will center on the poetry of arguably the most recognizable voice and body of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, universally known as just “Iz.” While an analysis of Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's lyrics and sound will allow for a richer discussion of the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty, this artist's work has also been selected as it is so exemplary of the consumption of Hawaiiana. Employing a similar methodology to Arlene Dávila's *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of People* (2001), the appropriation and commodification of Kamakawiwo'ole's image and music as symbolic of the romanticized Hawaiian will first be examined. This will in turn lead to a discussion of “Pacific orientalism” and its use as a tool to enforce what Raúl Homero Villa calls “social death.” An examination will then be conducted to determine how the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty resists “social death” and asserts “rhetorical agency,” approaching Kamakawiwo'ole's musical calls for Hawaiian sovereignty, such as “Hawai'i 78” (1993) and “Living in a Sovereign Land” (1996), as what Mira Chieko Shimabukuro calls “resistant rhetoric” (128). Additional theories informing this project include Scott Lyons' “rhetorical sovereignty” and the rhetorical concept of “space” as seen in Villa and Roxanne Mountford. Lastly, not only Kamakawiwo'ole's image but his medley “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” (1993)

in particular will be reclaimed as an exemplar of the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty.

The hope is that this work will help those outside the movement for Hawaiian independence to engage in what Jon Cruz calls “pathos-oriented hearing.” Specifically, it attempts to further resist the “social death” of the Native Hawaiian—the byproduct of attempts to freeze them in a romanticized past.

### **“Somewhere over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World”: An Orientalized Icon**

Although recorded in 1993, Kamakawiwo‘ole’s medley of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” and “What a Wonderful World” did not become popular around the world until almost a decade later. In fact, it reached its peak position of #12 on the Billboard’s Hot Digital Track in 2004, almost seven years after Kamakawiwo‘ole’s death. An acoustic ‘ukulele cover of the popular *Wizard of Oz* song, Kamakawiwo‘ole’s version intermingles verses from Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World” with those from the original track. This song would inspire native Hawaiian filmmaker Chris Lee to claim that Kamakawiwo‘ole “gave voice to the Hawaiian people” (“IZ”). For, even if the average listeners “can’t pronounce his name, they know they’re hearing the voice of Hawai‘i....They know the sound and the emotion” (“IZ”).

However, the status of the song is problematic. While it has popularized the Hawaiian sound around the world, many now consider it to be *the* Hawaiian song, much as Don Ho’s “Tiny Bubbles” and Andy Williams’ “The Hawaiian Wedding Song” were in past decades. While it is troubling when any song or artist becomes synonymous with a culture or ethnicity, this particular case is even more so as the song is viewed separately

from Kamakawiwo‘ole’s body of work—work that consistently called for Hawaiian sovereignty. Further, the largest circulating Hawaiian newspaper, the *Honolulu Advertiser*, has erected a memorial to Kamakawiwo‘ole on its website stating, “He has, arguably, achieved iconic status; that his fame was built in large part on a medley of two songs with no connection to Hawai‘i seems almost irrelevant” (“IZ”). Here, the newspaper claims Kamakawiwo‘ole as an icon for Hawai‘i while simultaneously asserting his (or at least the song’s) disconnect from the culture. While this claim is problematic, the perception still remains. The song is “Hawaiian” rather than Hawaiian; it is viewed as a romanticized version of the Hawaiian Islands as opposed to an authentic voicing of Native Hawaiian rhetoric.

Giving credence to this perception is the song’s multiple appearances in television and movies, as commodification is indelibly linked with the essentializing of ethnicity. Internet Movie Database (IMDb) lists nearly twenty movies and television episodes which have featured the medley, all after his death in 1997. These range from the Kauai-filmed *50 First Dates* (2004) to a “bikini challenge” on Rachael Ray (2008). Additionally, the song has been used in many television commercials, many promoting Hawaiian tourism. Strikingly, IMDb makes no mention of Kamakawiwo‘ole’s support for the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in its biography of the performer, although it does mention his highest weight. Similarly, Answers.com states that Kamakawiwo‘ole is “best known as [the] Super-sized Hawaiian singer of ‘Over the Rainbow.’” While neither of these websites would be considered academic or scholarly sources, they do carry credibility in that they reflect the mainstream public’s perceptions and values. What can be derived from both sites is that his excessive size is more recognizable in American culture than his message. As can be seen here, the iconic status of both the medley and his body has become

synonymous with perceptions of Native Hawaiians, defining the “decorum,” or what is appropriate, for Hawaiian ethnicity (*Silva Rhetoricae: The Forest of Rhetoric*). Leading one to wonder, which elements of “Hawaiian” culture have been deemed decorous?

One answer can be seen in a visit to Maui Wowi, a coffee and smoothie establishment. In these shops, surfboards hang on “koa” walls alongside posters proclaiming “Eddie Would Go.” Grass rooftops are perched over each table to create an “authentic” environment. Shapely Hawaiian dolls wear coconut bras and grass skirts, and, Kamakawio’ole’s medley “Somewhere over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World” plays often through the sound system. While two of these icons represent the Hawaiian sovereignty movement—Eddie and Iz—nothing sanitizes them more than being surrounded by coconut bras and smoothies. Here it can be deduced that part of how the hegemony has defined the decorum of Hawaiian ethnicity is that it must be nonthreatening. While the implications of this threat will be included in a discussion of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement below, it is clear that just for the purposes of commodification, placing Kamakawio’ole and Aikau alongside romanticized icons of Hawaiiana allows for these figures of Hawaiian sovereignty to be subsumed into what Rob Wilson calls “Pacific orientalism” (2).

This repackaging of Hawaiiana for consumption could easily be entitled Hawaii, Inc. Dávila’s *Latinos, Inc.* examines how marketing not only commodifies Latino ethnicity, but also defines what it means to be “Hispanic.” Her work uncovers the way in which Latino-based television helps to construct a vision of the “right way,” or a decorum, of being Hispanic. While Dávila’s work sheds light on how commodification of ethnicity shapes decorum, it also highlights a major difference between the “incorporation” of Latino/a ethnicity and Hawaiian ethnicity. Dávila traces the “reconstitution of individuals into consumers and

populations into markets” as the “central fields of cultural production,” a neoliberal project that sees Latino/as as consumers (2). Further, she uncovers the “involvement of ‘natives’—that is, of ‘Hispanics’—in their very production” (3). Dávila’s research highlights the ambivalent nature of such a type of commodification, for while it promotes stereotypes and homogenization, it also validates Latino/as as viable consumers and business leaders. However, the commodification of Hawaiian ethnicity lacks this ambiguity. Here, predominantly white American tourists are targeted as consumers while Native Hawaiians are largely consumed. Further, Native Hawaiians, while not entirely removed from some aspects of the tourism industry, are largely absent from any positions of power in the neoliberal production of Hawaiian culture. Instead, the orientalizing of Hawaiiana silences or marginalizes contemporary Native Hawaiians, and the Hawaiian sovereignty movement in particular, while simultaneously freezing them in a romanticized past.

### **“Pacific Orientalism” and “Social Death”:**

In an orientalizing version of “Hawaii,” the lei is no longer a gesture of love and compassion, but a pun for the “clever” innuendo of “I got lei’d in Hawaii.” “The Spirit of Aloha” is about tourism rather than a spiritual belief grounded in centuries of theology. And, as Trask notes in her description of a magazine advert, the luau is a space where the Hawaiian language, dance, people, and even customs of eating are “used to ensnare tourists” (*From a Native Daughter* 193). Instead of a celebration of Native Hawaiian culture, Trask declares that “a tinsel version of Hawaiian culture adorns the tourist industry, prostituting not only our lands

and waters, but also our customs and our people” (“Writing in Captivity” 17).

“Hawai’i as paradise” has allowed for the marginalization of Native Hawaiians. In fact, Native Hawaiians have been almost entirely removed from these visions of Hawai’i. Case in point, Trask relates a story in the introduction to her poetry collection *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (1994) in which an American tourist approaches her in the airport and exclaims, “Oh, you look just like the postcard.” Trask responds, “No, the postcard looks like me” (xvii). When David Barsamian asks her about this incident in an interview for *The Progressive Magazine*, she notes that “it reveals how distant we Hawaiians are as human beings from the image that tourists have of us...as an object of desire” (92 ellipses in original). This desire is one which silences the corporeal Native Hawaiians in favor of a romanticized, picture postcard image.

Vilsoni Hereniko highlights the removal of the Native Hawaiian from “paradise” in his “Representations of Cultural Identities.” Hereniko describes a typical day in Waikiki: white sandy beaches, “semi-naked tourists lounging on the beach,” and rows of coconut palms. However, the fruit of the coconut palms, the coconuts themselves, are removed on a daily basis. It is thought that actual coconuts ruin the created image of paradise. While this anecdote emphasizes the absurdity of the romanticized version of Hawai’i, it also mirrors the removal of Native Hawaiians from the area. Hereniko points out that Waikiki, although

being the most populated area of Hawai’i, has the lowest percentage of Native Hawaiian residents in the entire islands. This claim is supported through Census 2000 data, which indicates that there are fewer than 500 Native Hawaiians residing in each of the divisioned areas that comprise Waikiki and Honolulu (*Native Hawaiian Population by Census Tracts: 2000*). Geographically, the Native Hawaiians have been segregated. While this stems from a desire to meet tourist expectations, it also reveals an underlying prejudice. Hereniko notes, pakeha, or the white population of Hawai’i, often uses the term “coconut” to refer to islanders, “a metaphor with connotations akin to ‘nigger’” (137). And, as can be seen in Waikiki, both types of “coconuts” have been excised.

The above discussion has shown that Native Hawaiian ethnicity has been commodified, allowing for a sanitized and romanticized representation to supplant any authentic voices in mainstream American culture. It is also clear that the Native Hawaiians themselves have been subject to orientalization and geographically segregated away from the state’s most populated areas. In other words, Native Hawaiians are in danger of becoming “socially dead.” Although “Social death” is a term that was used by Zygmunt Bauman and Orlando Patterson to describe the lack of any socially recognized existence outside of Nazi Germany for Jews and white masters for the black slave respectively, Villa’s discussion of “social death” in his *Barrio-Logos* (2008) is more fitting for this project. Villa

spends much of his work detailing how Chicano/as have used space, rhetoric, and art to ward off “social death;” however, he first establishes how white Southern Californians worked to enact a social death on the Chicano/a community.

One method was to establish residential segregation. Mexican-Americans were portrayed as alternately dirty, uneducated, violent, primitive, and lazy. Areas heavily populated by Latino/as were viewed as “blighted areas” (72), with the solution being to strategically build freeways and ramps in order to prevent motorists from even having to view them. Beautification projects were adopted in order to tear down Chicano/a-owned buildings and rebuild in a style (and price) that targeted white consumers and drove the Chicano/a community into the barrios. Although this residential segregation, coupled with economic marginalization, takes great strides toward inflicting “social death” upon this community, it is further accomplished when in conjunction with a romanticization of Southern California’s Spanish roots. Villa relates the celebrations of the “Old Spanish Fiesta,” a glorification of the original rancheros, as an orientalizing of the Spanish-influenced culture. “Spanish romance,” complete with castanets and tiered skirts, is embraced while simultaneously “attacking the “Mexican problem” (156). It is this exaltation of the imagined past which serves to eradicate the present, as freezing people in time denies any current cultural experience.

Much of Villa’s Barrio-Logos reads as a discussion of the plight facing Native

Hawaiians, for while each ethnic group’s experience is unique, the methodology for marginalization is often the same. Wood’s work traces how Hollywood films promote Native Hawaiians as sexually primitive and promiscuous. Other stereotypes that have endured include Native Hawaiians being “dumb, lazy, violent, and criminally inclined” (Okamura 100). Michael Kioni Dudley and Keoni Kealoha Agard in *A Call for Sovereignty* (1993) note that Native Hawaiians “hold the lowest paying jobs in the state, they have the greatest number on welfare, [and] they have the worst housing, if they have housing at all” (77). Dudley and Agard provide further data supporting the assertion that Native Hawaiians have been marginalized, including that they outnumber any other nationalities in the prison population and have the shortest life expectancy of any of the ethnicities in the state (77). These social and economic realities are coupled with a geographic segregation, aimed at denying the Native Hawaiians their very means of life. Dudley and Agard write, “By executive and legislative fiat they have again and again been driven from areas where they have tried to live a traditional subsistence lifestyle” (78). Hence, not only have Native Hawaiians been excised from the well-populated areas in order to guarantee that the tourists’ image of paradise is met, but they have also been removed from outlying areas when they have attempted to live according to tradition. While social, economic, and geographic segregation supports the myth of the

“vanishing Hawaiian”—much like the myth of the “vanishing Indian”—Trask claims this as “the great American lie” (“Writing in Captivity” 20). She writes, “Hawaiians are still here, we are still creating, still resisting” (29). As will be seen below, resistance takes many forms, many of which serve to define the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, ultimately, warding off “social death.”

### **Native Hawaiian Resistant Rhetoric:**

In “Relocating Authority: Coauthor(iz)ing a Japanese American Ethos of Resistance under Mass Incarceration,” Shimabukuro explores the writings of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee as “resistant rhetoric.” Shimabukuro defines “resistant rhetoric” as claiming “rhetorical agency” with words and “explicitly resist[ing] oppression through writing” (129). Much of Kamakawiwo‘ole’s music works to resist oppression, explicitly calling for the sovereignty of the Native Hawaiian nation. Before examining his “Living in a Sovereign Land” directly as rhetoric of resistance, it must be made clear that the movement itself is the primary act of resistance against “social death” and oppression.

Just as there are many voices in the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, multiple strands of the movement argue for varying degrees of independence. However, the largest call for sovereignty supports some version of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act, known as the Akaka Bill, which would allow for Native Hawaiians to gain federal recognition as a nation. This would allow for a nation-within-a-nation, where Native Hawaiians work cooperatively with the United States but are respected and recognized as a sovereign nation. Dudley and Agard define the goals for the movement as having their “own territory, their own governmental structures, their own laws; they collect their own taxes;

and they are protected by American federal law in the practice of their culture and religion” (xi). Notice that the goal is two-fold: one establishing self-governance and independence and one preserving and protecting Native Hawaiian culture. As their national culture, or their ethnicity, becomes more orientalized in the name of consumerism, the Native Hawaiians have become a “very endangered species living in their one and only homeland” (79).

Yet, defining the call for Hawaiian independence as merely legal sovereignty would be incomplete. Kilipaka Kawaihonu Nahili Pae Ontai instead reminds her readers that *ea*, the Hawaiian word for “sovereignty” actually has a dual meaning. In the 1957 edition of the *Hawaiian Dictionary*, Mary Kawena Pukui combines the traditional definition of the term with the Euro-American translation. Thus, while the Euro-American connotation is “sovereignty, rule, independence,” the traditional definition allows for a spiritual denotation of the term: “life, breath...Spirit” (154). *Ea* then comes to mean “life of the land” (156). Therefore, a reaffirmation of the Native Hawaiian culture and ethnicity via an emphasis of its interconnectedness to the land resists against “social death.”

One form that this rhetoric of resistant takes is in merely proclaiming sovereignty in writing. Maile Kēhaulani Sing writes the following in her poem “Thinking about Hawaiian Identity”:

Hawaii is paradise  
Up for grabs  
Full of aloha  
And hula dance  
An image of smiling natives  
That everyone would love to be

The only obstacle that complicates  
Is the call to discriminate  
For the sake of sovereignty  
Self determination fueled  
By genealogical identity (in Kauanui 32-42)

Sing begins by referencing the “paradise” envisioned by tourists to Hawaii, with its orientalized versions of “aloha,” “hula,” and “smiling natives.” She then asserts that the call for Hawaiian sovereignty resists, or “complicates,” this created image. Finally, Sing writes that the right to be sovereign in this land is genealogically determined. Here she is asserting the singularity of Native Hawaiian ethnicity as not merely what the hegemony has orientalized and commodified for consumption, but that it rests in something intrinsic.

Kamakawiwo‘ole’s “Living in a Sovereign Land” mirrors Sing’s rhetoric of resistance.

In the first verse he sings the following:

There’s a celebration on the palace grounds  
People need to know...just what’s going down  
There’s a proclamation from the powers that lead  
Says our island nation has got to be free!

Living in a sovereign land (1-5)

Kamakawiwo‘ole references ‘Iolani Palace, the space where annexation occurred when Queen Liliuokalani was abdicated from her throne and the location of celebration of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement one hundred later. The proclamation came in the form of an Apology Resolution signed by President Clinton in 1993. By referencing these two events, this song acts as rhetoric that resists “social death.” Instead of a silenced, invisible ethnic group, the Native Hawaiians are asserting

their right to sovereignty and their right to be heard, both in song and in political venues. Further, by playing with verb tense, Kamakawiwo‘ole presents the envisioned future of a sovereign land as a current state of independence, demonstrating that a critical component of self-governance, and resistance, is the assertion to this right.

### **Assertions of "Rhetorical Sovereignty":**

In his “Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want from Writing?” Lyons outlines the ways in which writing and the agency it provides have been denied to the Native American nations and how contemporary Native American writers now assert “rhetorical sovereignty” through their work. Lyons defines “rhetorical sovereignty” as “the inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit [of sovereignty], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (449-450 emphasis in original). While Lyons is inspired by the traditional connotation of sovereignty, which he defines as “the right of a people to conduct its own affairs, in its own place, in its own way” (450), he claims the term as a rhetorical device, granting words the power to effect change and establish agency. Upon examining the poetry of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, what Dunlap calls its “primary rhetorical document,” it becomes clear that this is the rhetorical space in which the movement defines its goals, modes, styles, and languages, or where it asserts “rhetorical sovereignty” (3).

Hawaiian poetry has always included a combination of mele, song, music, hula, and poetry. Although writings calling for Hawaiian sovereignty periodically take the form of prose or legal document, the predominant mode of expression occurs in poetry.

Clearly, this is not the mode of rhetoric most often used by those who oppose Hawaiian sovereignty. Solely by choosing to speak through poetry, as both Trask, Kamakawiwo‘ole, and many other writers do, Native Hawaiians have asserted “rhetorical sovereignty.”

Poetry calling for Hawaiian independence also asserts “rhetorical sovereignty” through its use of the Native Hawaiian language, recurring tropes, and incorporation of traditional Hawaiian cultural elements. One such poem is Keith Haugen’s “I Ka La ‘Apopo (Tomorrow).” Here a portion of the song is translated:

*Hu mai ke aloha no keia ‘aina nei* (Love for this land swells forth)

*Mai ke kahuli ‘ana a ke ea hou* (From the overthrow until the new independence)

*E ku hou ana na keiki o ka ‘aina* (The children of the land will rise up again)

*A kahea no ke ku ‘oko ‘a* (And call out for freedom)

*Pono kakou e malama i ka ‘aina* (We should care for the land)

*Pono kakou e kako’o in a pua* (We should care for the children) (13-18)

As Lyons notes, choice of language is an essential element to asserting “rhetorical sovereignty.” Poetry uses the element of language in a dual move, as it not only works to define the terms of the conversation (as seen in Native Hawaiian references to “colonization” rather than “statehood”), but also preserves Hawaiian culture. Trask calls using the native language an act of resistance, explaining this rationale in her interview with Barsamian. She claims, “One way to decolonize is to recover your own metaphors, your own pronunciations, the language that is the language of the place from whence you come” (98). When Native Hawaiian poets write in their native language, they carry the history of those words and their culture in its entirety into their poems, not the re-vised history portrayed in mainstream American culture.

While Haugen’s choice to write in the native Hawaiian language in and of itself

claims “rhetorical sovereignty,” centering his poem on the Native Hawaiian children and tying their futures to that of the land also furthers that aim. Children have traditionally been the focus of Hawaiian poetry, as they are not only viewed as the inheritors of the land but they are also the targeted audience for many of these poems. Chants traditionally use repetition, small words, and clear ideas in order for children to not only understand them but so that they could sing them. One such traditional chant entitled “Ke Ao Nani (The Beautiful World),” presented here only in translation, serves as an example:

Up above, above

Birds of the heavens

Below, below

Flowers of the earth

In the mountains, mountains

The forests

In the sea, the sea

Fishes of the ocean

Tell the refrain

Of the beautiful world

In the name of the children (1-11)

In this poem, the birds, flowers, forests, and fish are all called upon to celebrate nature. The directional phrases “up above,” “below,” and “in” allows for a synchronous relationship between the lyrics and the movements performed by the singers. Although these lines are in translation, the vocabulary used here is accessible to all. “Ke Ao Nani (The Beautiful World)” demonstrates Hawaiian poetry’s use of repetition, invocation of its children, and its epistemic view of an interconnectedness between the Native Hawaiians the land of Hawaii. Hence, when Haugen references these same elements in his “I Ka La

‘Apopo (Tomorrow),’ he is using the traditional elements of Hawaiian poetry as a way to (re)define the terms of Hawaiian sovereignty—in essence, he is asserting “rhetorical sovereignty.”

Many of these same elements can be seen in Kamakawiwo‘ole’s music and “Living in a Sovereign Land” in particular. Although “Living in a Sovereign Land” is predominantly sung in English, which cannot be said of most of Kamakawiwo‘ole’s songs, he does include “*e ola*”—which has connotations of long life, survival, and healing—in the refrain. Kamakawiwo‘ole also incorporates repetition, as “living in a sovereign land” is repeated five times while “e ola, living in a sovereign land” is repeated four. Like Haugen, Kamakawiwo‘ole centers this song on the Native Hawaiian children. He writes, “Our children deserve to know/ What went down a hundred years ago.” While the repetition in the song allows for it to be reminiscent of a traditional *keiki* chant, this line indicates that the future of Hawai‘i lies in the children’s hands, that they are the future of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

Lastly, Kamakawiwo‘ole incorporates the terminology of “theft” that prevails through the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty. Invoking the children again, he writes, “What’s been taken must be returned/ Give our children what they deserve.” Here, Kamakawiwo‘ole chooses the word “taken” rather than “annexed.” “Annexation” implies not only a legal incorporation of one territory into the domain of a state, but it also has the connotation of “adding to.” Conversely, “taken” implies an illegal theft, or a loss. While the United States may use “annex,” Native Hawaiians use the terms of theft. By defining the terms of the discussion, the historicity of the action can be reinterpreted with the goals of the Hawaiian sovereignty in mind. As Lyons indicated, “rhetorical

sovereignty” involves the pursuit to define the “goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse,” and clearly Kamakawiwo‘ole works towards this pursuit.

### **Native Hawaiian "Rhetorical Space":**

In “On Gender and Rhetorical Space,” Mountford notes that the concept of “rhetorical space” is not a new one. She cites Gaston Bachelard and Lorraine Code as theorists who work in “the geography of argument,” or the concepts of “here” and “there,” and “outside” and “inside” (41). This type of “rhetorical space,” or “rhetorical situation,” is the theoretical foundation for Hereniko and Wilson’s *Inside Out*. The authors use this titular term to highlight its two connotations. First, they note that it works against the notion of “blood-based ‘cultural insiderism,’” as an inextricable hybridity already exists in the Pacific where the “‘outside’ is already very much ‘inside’” (2). However, the term also implies a certain type of knowledge. To know something “inside out” is “to know [it] intimately and in struggle,” to tell one’s own story rather than having someone from the outside tell it (3). While Hereniko and Wilson’s work encompasses literature from various islands in the Pacific, their theory is especially fitting for the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, as one of its aims is to promote Native Hawaiian authors. As O.A. Bushnell, a Hawaiian novelist, states in a purposeful use of pidgin English, “And when there aren’t any more novels being produced by novelists in Hawai‘i, we goin’ be sad and sorry. Because all those outsiders coming...to tell us about ourselves. Instead of ourselves, from inside, telling us about ourselves” (qtd in Hereniko and Wilson 11).

However, Mountford argues for a new application of “rhetorical space” to “the effect of physical spaces on a communicative event” (41-42). Although words have histories, Michel Foucault’s statement that “space itself has a history” is equally valid (qtd

in Mountford 41). Villa works within this definition of space in *Barrio-Logos*, linking the geographical segregation of the Chicano/a community to its resistant rhetoric. He notes how Chicano/a artists incorporate aspects of their space, especially those that represent their marginalization such as the freeway and bridge pillars, into their art, as either canvas or motif. These artists resist “social death” by utilizing the very elements of their physical space which were intended for marginalization. As an ethnicity that has been geographically segregated in its own homeland, in a territory that has been military occupied and now Americanized, Native Hawaiian artists have also embraced the rhetoric of space in their work.

One element of Hawaiian independence rhetoric which has already been discussed supports Mountford’s definition of “rhetorical space,” that of nature and the islands themselves. It is rare to encounter rhetoric from this movement that does not use the motif of land, both in its current occupied state and in its connection to Native Hawaiian theology. Returning to Trask’s introduction to *From a Native Daughter*, it is clear that theological beliefs connect Native Hawaiians to the Hawaiian Islands. In Hawaiian mythos, Papa and Wākea, the earth and sky, had two children, the ancestor to all Native Hawaiians and Haloa, the son who was stillborn and reborn as kalo, the taro plant (Ontai 156-7). The land is mother, the sky father, the flora brother. Hence, mention of the islands, or the gods who inhabit them, allows for reassertion of the Native Hawaiians as spiritually and genealogically connected to them. When Haugen writes that “We should care for the land/ We should support the children,” he is portraying these notions as one and the same. Caring for the land is synonymous to caring for the children.

However, the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movements is just as likely

to mention freeways and traffic as the natural elements of the land. Because freeways were constructed in the 1950’s to connect the military bases on Oahu, the freeways represent military occupation to the Native Hawaiians. Although the freeways are now used by military personnel, Hawaiian residents, and tourists alike, they are most heavily congested in the areas of Honolulu and Waikiki, thereby allowing the freeway to have a double connotation of military occupation and tourism as prostitution. Therefore, the freeway is often seen in the rhetoric of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement as indicator of the effect of space.

Kamakawiwo‘ole’s cover of “Hawai‘i ‘78” serves as an exemplar of Native Hawaiian use of “rhetorical space.” Although originally recorded in 1978, Kamakawiwo‘ole’s interpretation is by far the most well-known and most associated with the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. The song wonders how the king and queen would feel if they returned to Hawaii in its current state, with its “modern city life” and “condominiums” (18, 24). In its lament, both Native Hawaiian motifs of “rhetorical space” are seen.

First, the song is written and performed from an insider perspective, a Native Hawaiian perspective, but one that has also lived with the influence of “outsiders.” Kamakawiwo‘ole, as a Native Hawaiian born in Honolulu after Hawaii became a state, has lived the “inside out,” hybrid experience, as opposed to a Native Hawaiian that might live on the islands of Molokai or Ni‘ihau. Kamakawiwo‘ole also references the interconnectedness between the land and the Native Hawaiians. He sings, “Cry for the gods, cry for the people/ cry for the lands” (13-14), indicating that the survival of the gods, people, and land are inextricably linked. He makes a similar move when he changes the line, “Our people are in great, great danger now” in the first verse to “Our land is in great,

great danger now” in the second (9, 21). However, it is the song’s reference to the modern freeways that overwhelms the song. In addition to naming the “traffic lights” as a source of the king and queen’s sadness, he sings, “Could you just imagine if they were around/ and saw highways on their sacred grounds” (17, 4-5). It is this traffic, these freeways, that highlight the rhetorical space of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement—traffic that is a symptom of the orientalized culture of the Native Hawaiians marketed to tourists as authentic ethnicity, and freeways that symbolize not only the military overthrow of their nation but their current geographic segregation.

### **“Pathos Oriented Hearing”: Reclaiming Iz for the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement:**

Iliia Beniamina, Kamakawiwo‘ole’s cousin, remembers the performer as an activist for the movement of Hawaiian independence. She recalls that he sought out the song, “E Ala E,” or “wake up,” as a way to bring its message to the Native Hawaiian people. “He was telling the Hawaiians, ‘Wake up, we’re sleeping and as we’re sleeping, our land is slowly being eroded to foreigners” (“IZ”). Similarly, the author Margaret Jolly recalls how she first discovered the ideas of nationalism and sovereignty in the Pacific: “I heard many expressions of nationalist passions in English and Hawaiian through listening to compact discs by artists like the late Israel Kamakawiwo‘ole” (145). Inside the movement, inside Hawaii, Kamakawiwo‘ole is known as a voice calling for sovereignty.

However, outside, mainstream American culture is guilty of what Jon Cruz calls “instrumental hearing.” In *Culture on the Margins* (1999), Cruz defines three types of hearing: “incidental hearing” engaged by those who merely stumble upon a sound;

“instrumental hearing” involving “attempts by overseers to use music for nonmusical purposes;” and “pathos-oriented hearing” or the “humanistic turn” to make meaning (43). As Cruz’s work centers on uncovering how slave owners heard black music before the abolitionist movement, his examples of “instrumental hearing” reflect the prominent inclination to view music as a means to increase the value of the slave as a commodity and source of production. While the music itself was considered insignificant, and the words meaningless, slave holders believed that when slaves sang up-tempo songs, they worked faster, increasing productivity. It was also understood that a slave who could sing and dance would garner a higher price than one who did not have the skills to entertain his/her new masters. Hence, “instrumental hearing” means hearing black music as a source of revenue that can only be understood as it is being repurposed away from the song’s intent.

In examining how Kamakawiwo‘ole’s medley of “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” has been sanitized and commodified, it is clear that it has fallen victim to “instrumental hearing.” The lyrics and performance of the song are not heard in and of themselves. Instead, the song has been repurposed to sell the constructed image of Hawaiian paradise to American consumers. Any singularity or message of sovereignty, by both Kamakawiwo‘ole and the song, are denied, as only non-threatening music garners the greatest sales.

However, a re-examination of “Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” will allow for those outside the Hawaiian sovereignty movement to get a few steps closer to “pathos-oriented hearing.” A closer look indicates that the song uses many of the rhetorical acts of resistance that are emblematic of the movement for independence. First

he engages in “rhetorical sovereignty” by performing the song with an acoustic ‘ukelele, the quintessential Hawaiian instrument. No other instrument creates as authentic of a Hawaiian sound as the ‘ukelele, and by choosing to perform this song with only that instrument, Kamakawiwo‘ole defines the mode of the conversation.

Similarly, his playfulness with the lyrics also asserts “rhetorical sovereignty.” Since Hawaiian poetry was traditionally orature, or not in written form, precise language is not valued. Instead, wording and phrasing often change in performance. Here, Kamakawiwo‘ole combines three separate stanzas to create the following: “Somewhere over the rainbow/ Bluebirds fly/ And the dreams that you dream of/ Dreams really do come true” (4-7). He also changes the phrase “Away above the chimney top/ That’s where you’ll find me” to “High above the chiminey top/ That’s where you’ll find me” (11-12). Notice here that he not only changes a word, but also uses pidgin English to pronounce “chimney” as “chiminey.” Finally, he engages in vast repetition, mixing up phrases from his own constructed verses, in a method harkening back to the *keiki* chants employed by Native Hawaiians for centuries. As “rhetorical sovereignty” involves choices made in language, mode, and genre, it is clear that Kamakawiwo‘ole’s medley works towards that aim.

However, the song also demonstrates an understanding of “rhetorical space.” Kamakawiwo‘ole chooses to merge verses from two songs, allowing the lyrics of both to speak to each other. While Judy Garland’s version of “Somewhere over the Rainbow” allows her to dream of a place elsewhere, over the rainbow, where her dreams could come true, Kamakawiwo‘ole’s interpretation shows that this place is Hawai’i. Louis Armstrong’s “What a Wonderful World” depicts a space of natural beauty and its connectedness with

humans. This space of “trees of green” and “skies of blue” represent Kamakawiwo‘ole’s Hawai’i, with the “colors of the rainbow” connecting both the sky and the “faces of the people passing by.” His rhetoric, the choice to merge these two songs together, is shaped by the space of Hawai’i and the Native Hawaiian belief in a familial relationship between the Islands and its inhabitants. Kamakawiwo‘ole’s version is a song for sovereignty. What he envisions “over the rainbow” is a sovereign Hawai’i, where a natural balance can be restored without outside influence and control.

### **Conclusion:**

“Somewhere over the Rainbow/ What a Wonderful World” is not merely a medley that connotes Hawaiiana. Although it has been sanitized through its association with tourism and a romanticized cultural past, the song itself resists that type of classification. When placed within Kamakawiwo‘ole’s larger body of work and alongside that of other voices calling for sovereignty, it is clear that the song is an anthem for the Native Hawaiian independence movement--using a form of resistance rhetoric that claims both “rhetorical sovereignty” and sovereignty for his people. While the refusal to hear much of the poetry of this movement, including Kamakawiwo‘ole’s other songs, is indicative of the attempts to deny this movement its voice, the repurposing of this medley is perhaps the greatest example of mainstream American culture’s role in enacting “social death” against the Native Hawaiian.

Although admittedly this project has been limited in scope, when Kamakawiwo‘ole’s work is examined alongside the other voices of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, the singularity of the Native Hawaiian ethnicity becomes clear. Although their culture

has been orientalized and “othered” in relation to mainstream American culture, this singularity remains. The rhetoric of the movement indicates a unique epistemic world view, while also demonstrating a resistance to their social, economic, and geographic segregation. Incorporating the theories of “rhetoric as resistance,” “rhetorical sovereignty,” and “rhetorical space” allows those of us outside the movement to more clearly hear the voices from inside. While there is much work left to be done in defining the rhetoric of Hawaiian sovereignty, examinations like this one help to allow those voices of resistance against the “social death” of the Native Hawaiian people to be heard.

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## Hiver

Larmes de givre  
Fleurs de glace aux fenêtres,  
Les premiers frimas

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

**Representations and Issues in Mau Mau's Freedom  
Struggle: Re-appraising Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Githae**

**Micere Mugo's** *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*

**by Stephen O. Solanke, Ajayi Crowther University, Nigeria**

**Winter**

Tears of frost

Ice flowers on my window

First snow crystals

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

**Introduction**

The literary-historical dramatic text, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976), according to its Preface (unpaged), is an

imaginative recreation and interpretation of the collective will of the Kenyan peasants and workers in their refusal to break under sixty years of colonial torture and ruthless oppression by the British ruling classes and their continued determination to resist exploitation, oppression and new forms of enslavement.

It is not an exact reproduction of the 1957 farcical court trial at Nyeri, which sentenced the historical Kenyan revolutionary, Dedan Kimathi wa Wachiuri (born 31 October 1920), to death for struggling for those things which were his: country, people and land. According to the journal, *New African* (2007: 23), "He was finally captured, and sentenced to hang in 1957 by Chief Justice Sir Kenneth O'Connor for the treasonable

offence of “leading a terrorist organization” ”. The text, set in the Kenya of around 1956, is symbolic of Kenyans’ struggle through the Mau Mau Movement’s (Kenya Land and Freedom Army) uprising against British imposed colonialism. These deeds of resistance, as exemplified in political personalities like Jomo Kenyatta, Paul Ngei, Fred Kubai, Achieng Oneko, Bildad Kaggia and Kungu Karumba, were based on retrieving the Kenyan land ‘stolen’ and appropriated by the British colonial power through its settlers, soldiers of fortune, the clergy and finally its forces of occupation which settled in Kenya.

The Mau Mau Uprising led by military Generals like Dedan Kimathi, Njama, Matenjagwo, Mbaria Kahiu, Kimemia, Ole Kiso and others sought, through armed resistance, to reject colonially imposed slavery on Kenya. It was a collective struggle that derived its strength from a national resolve to right situations. To counter this state of affairs and fortify its base, the British government sent in its own military forces headed by Generals like Lathbury, Hinde, Erskine and others. The Homeguard and K.A.R soldiers, mainly of black descents but headed by whites were also mobilized to oppress, fight and arrest the Kenyans.

*The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Githae Micere Mugo is an extension of the beliefs of the two playwrights. Simatei (1999: 155), while writing on the social phenomenon, signification and thematizations of the Mau Mau Movement, posits that some writers “end up painting a larger than life picture of the movement and its leaders”. This is akin to what these two playwrights emphasize as one of their aims in writing the text as they question in the text’s Preface (unpaged):

. . . was the theme of Mau Mau struggles exhausted in our literature?  
Had this heroic peasant armed struggle against the British Forces

of occupation been adequately treated in our literature? Why was Kenyan Literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Take the heroes and heroines of our history: Kimathi, Koitalel, Me Kitilili, Mary Nyanjiru, Waiyaki. Why were our imaginative artists not singing songs of praise to these and their epic deeds of resistance?

Ngugi wa Thiong’o was born as James Ngugi in 1938 at Kamiriithu near Limuru, Kiambu District in Kenya. A Gikuyu by birth, he schooled at Makerere University College, Uganda and Leeds University, England. A novelist, journalist, editor, essayist, lecturer and playwright, his works are concerned with his country’s transitional problems from colonization to independence with the attendant problems of neo-colonialism. He had brushes with different Kenyan governments because of his political beliefs. This political leaning, in support of the people, is portrayed in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Githae Micere Mugo, a female on the other hand, was also a student of Makerere University in the early 60s and an editor of “Penpoint”. A Lecturer in her own right, she is a literary critic, playwright and poetess. According to the text’s Preface (unpaged) both writers believe that “Imperialism was the enemy of all working peoples . . . the wealth produced by the labour power of many people, went to the hands of a few”.

The text is an exemplification and realization of the above assertions, portraying the fact that people can be free from different oppressive obstacles and manacles, when they are resolved in unshackling themselves either as individuals, groups or as a nation. This paper, premised on the foregoing, is also in consonance with Brown’s (1999:56) assertion that the text is “. . . the attempt to narrate, and in narrating to rethink the meaning of, the Mau Mau uprising of 1952-56”.

In this struggle, the colonized must be ready to codify the essentials of their struggle so that the colonizers are kept out of the “secrets of the passage-/way into the castle of our skins . . .” (i.e of the colonizers) as posited by Funso Aiyejina in his poem “And so it came to pass” (Solanke, 2005: 10). Their fighting secrets, stratagems and strategies will be known only to them. The colonizers, who are strangers to the cultures and traditions of the colonized, are kept at bay. It becomes easy to fight as a unified body against the onslaught of a usually developed army of the colonizers. Most of these issues, which become encoded and can only be decoded by the colonized, are tied to the culture and traditions of the colonized.

## **Representations in Freedom Issues**

### **i. Oath Taking**

The revolutionary fighters, who were forced into the forest to continue the struggle through guerrilla warfare, instituted modes of acquiring loyalty from the people. Oath taking was one of them. To an African (especially a traditional one), the myth of oath and oath taking, rooted in blood and traditional symbolic icons, is bounding to a very large extent. Duerden (1975:152) avers that “One way of defining oneself is to take an oath. An oath means that a man stands by a declaration or a decision. He intends to carry it out come what may”. According to Settler (*Trial*, 29), his black workers were:

. . . loyal, meek, submissive.

Then that devil, Field Marshal, came

Milk clerk, oath clerk, murderer!

Poisoned simple minds

led astray their God-fearing souls

with his black mumbo jumbo.

Even with this, there are still betrayers among the people, and disappointedly enough among the revolutionaries as the issue of trust comes to the fore. Kenyans, in the struggle, are divisible into three groups: the fighters (revolutionaries), the collaborators (the betrayers) and the unconcerned (the neutrals). The fighters, in the mould of Kimathi, are ready to and do lay down their lives towards the realization of a free Kenya. The collaborators are the betrayers like Wambararia, Hungu, Gaceru, Gati and Gatotia (the hooded Gakunia). The elite, in the likes of African Business Executive, Politician and Educated African, who ought to be supportive of the struggle, also become betrayers of the revolution. They are tools utilized to break the ranks, weaken and betray the fighters for killing by the British. The last group, the unconcerned, consists of those who are neither here nor there (not guerrillas, not collaborators). These are the common people, with similarities to Boy and Girl (before they met Woman), who are arrested every day for no reason. They suffer at the hands of both sides as they are hardly trusted. Betrayal is so strong among the Mau Mau fighters and the common people that Kimathi and Woman fall preys: Kimathi is sentenced to death and Woman is arrested.

### **ii. Land and Colonialism**

Another issue Ngugi and Mugo examine is land deprivation and acquisition. The original landowners, the Kenyans, already deprived of their land try repossessing it through militancy. On the other hand, the British who appropriated it through false means and by force want to hold on forever. In this fight, it is apparent that he who owns

the land owns the people and their lives. According to Kimathi, the British have neither ever been truthful nor trustworthy: “Deals! Pacts! Treaties! How many nations have you wiped out, and later said: well, according to this treaty and that treaty, they had ceded their land and their lives” (*Trial*, 33). As a confirmation of Kimathi’s accusation, Henderson, a white, expresses his feelings about the land and the people: “I love your country and your people ... I am a Kenyan. By might and right. Right is might ... I’m only fighting for my own, spoils of war if you like” (*Trial*, 35). This extends to the text’s thematic preoccupation with colonization and its nefarious effects on the people imposed on. Most of Ngugi’s works are concerned with his country’s problematic transition from colonialism to the post-colonial (independence) period and the resultant neo-colonial effects. Colonization, as was operated by the British, suppressed the socio-cultural and political psyche of the people. The people were divorced from their traditional beliefs. The deceit of imperialism is succinctly exhibited in the text. This runs through exploitative tendencies, prejudiced judiciary, land deprivation and false magnanimity of ‘giving’ separate regional governments independence (within the same country) through the policy of ‘Majimboism’ (Anderson 2005). This was also done in Nigeria - another British-colonized country (Keay and Thomas 1965, Abiola 1974). These are done in self-interest towards the development and entrenchment of British colonialism and imperialism. In summing this situation, Nyamndi (2013: 13) writes:

. . . the settlers do not stop at seizing the land of the natives; they do a lot worse than that, for they eat up the native as well, body and all. The ethical boomerang at work here shatters the moralistic pretensions of colonialism to pieces and in the process exposes its substantial ugliness.

In the struggle against this, the people rise up through various avenues: politics,

military, religion, culture (oath taking) and even in the arts (through a drama group). This uprising is opposed vehemently and violently by the British colonial power through the oppression of the people. Military violence is unleashed upon them through the Homeguards, the K.A.R soldiers and the imported British forces of occupation. The people are arrested, imprisoned, raped, maimed and killed. Dehumanization and depersonalization become the order of the day all in the name of colonial imposition. Kimathi (*Trial*, 64) points out that in this type of struggle the common man is used to fight the common man (from different cultures and countries):

It’s always the same story. Poor men sent to die so that parasites might live in paradise with ill-gotten wealth. Know that we are not fighting against the British people. We are fighting against British colonialism and imperialist robbers of our land, our factories, our wealth ...

This kind of imperialism’s vermin

Makes my blood boil with hate

Did you come all this way

Many thousands of miles

Across the sea, over the air,

A long way from your home,

To kill our people

So that Lord So-and-So

Might drink other people’s blood in peace?

### iii. **Recanting**

Another relevant freedom issue examined in the text relates to that of recanting.

The arrest of Kimathi is carried out to ameliorate the power and force of the struggle. It is also to use him as a bait to puncture all the beliefs the people have in the struggle. If Kimathi could rescind his actions, his participation in the struggle and, therefore, betray his fighter-colleagues, then a major aspect of the Mau Mau defeat would have been achieved. Kimathi's reward would be the preservation of his life by the British. Talking to Kimathi, Henderson (*Trial*, 35) subtly states:

But now you are in custody. Hanging between life and death. Plead, plead, plead guilty. It's a game, yes. You can name your prize. You'll have your life. Only, we must end this strife. Plead guilty for Life!

Knowing the implications of recanting not only on himself as a person but as a personification of the struggle, he refuses. This increases the fighting zeal of the guerrillas as Woman sacrifices herself and gets replaced by Girl and Boy.

#### iv. **Symbolic Allusions**

Though *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* is set within the time-frame of the 1950s, (with the time-limited Mau Mau Uprising and British imposition of imperialism), the textual events cover a period of four centuries. Kimathi asks Business Executive to “unchain four centuries of chains” (*Trial*, 45). Kimathi's “four centuries” of slavery corresponds to the biblical four hundred years or so of Israelites' slavery in Egypt. This biblical allusion reflects itself in Africa's “four centuries” of slavery and its incumbent freedom (based on the independence of African countries from different Western colonial masters/countries). Therefore, the re-enactment of Black Man's History (*Trial*, 4-5) which spans the period from the beginning of slavery to the time of struggling for freedom is a depiction of the timelessness of the issues involved. These past events, which are sub-divided into phases,

spill over into the present. They reflect on the Kenyan people and nation culminating into the court trial and the sentencing of Kimathi. The struggle for freedom becomes epitomized in the fighters led by Kimathi, Woman, Boy and Girl. The textual events, spanning two days, revolve round the court and its proceedings. Interspersed within and acting as the background reasons for the court events are the flashbacks which are spread through the text.

The ‘assumed’ killing of Kimathi mythically symbolizes a transition from the present to the future. Through it, the future becomes assured. The inner and psychological wrangling of Kimathi are stilled and answered. According to him (*Trial*, 83):

In the forest, I was sometimes plagued / by doubts,  
If I died today / Would our people continue/  
the struggle? / I would look at the braves/  
killed / I would say:/  
If I died today / Will this blood ever be/  
betrayed? / That was my Trial./  
But now I know that / for every traitor/  
there are a thousand patriots.

Stipulated in the exclamation of Boy and Girl is that Kimathi is “Not dead!” (*Trial*, 84). The struggle and commotion that ensue in the immediate Stage Direction that follows epitomize the eternal but now specific futuristic fight between “opposing forces” (*Trial*, 84). This struggle and darkness are for “a little time” as light and the winners (of the struggle) in the persons of the peasants emerge, “*singing a thunderous freedom song*” (*Trial*, 84). To Brown (1999: 71), “The logic of Kimathi's martyrdom - [is] victory-in-

defeat-”.

## v. Characterology

Each of the characters, especially the revolutionaries, sojourns individually into the mythic world. Kimathi, the main character, as the leader is not seen as a normal human. According to Henderson, Kimathi had prophesied that no white could ever catch him. He had fought in different wars, suffered in the forest and bore several spiritual and psycho-social traumas. His arrest, when it happens, is believed impossible by Boy and Girl (*Trial*, 62):

Boy: How then could they arrest him?

Girl: They have caught his shadow.

Boy reinforces this when he questions, “And suppose it’s not Kimathi, and it is his double, his shadow whom they have arrested?” (*Trial*, 30-31). Mazrui (Year Unstated) considers most writings on the Mau Mau Movement as tending to eulogise and mystify its leaders and their actions. This cannot be otherwise as these fighters were thickly involved in the militancy that first drew the attention of the world to Kenya and Kenyans wanting freedom and independence. For fighters like Kimathi, their fames soared and they were regarded as freedom fighters who were more than the ordinary humans they were. According to Simatei (1999: 159):

Kimathi’s fame among the ordinary people outside the forest owes nothing to his military skill, but to some kind of mysticism that surrounds his personality. Rumours and myths about his indomitability and invincibility are propagated and accepted by the ordinary Kikuyu who have never seen him, but who nevertheless hope that his reported outmaneuvering of the colonial army is true.

Kimathi alludes to Woman, who equally runs the textual actions along with him, as representing “our women” deserving of “monuments” (*Trial*, 73) for all she undergoes. She serves as a messenger, link, teacher, comforter, protector and even as a missionary of the struggle converting people to its cause. She had undergone the rebirth process from an unconcerned individual to a revolutionary. She states (*Trial*, 19):

Yes. I too have lived in the city. I know the life you have described. Fighting ... Drinking ... Fighting ... Drinking ... Kangari, Karubu, busaa, chang’aa ... . Mathare Valley... Pumwani ... all that and more. I was a bad woman ... a lost stinking life ... until I heard the call.

... The call of our people ...

It is this ‘call’ that stabilizes and concretizes her life to develop and struggle for her people. Though she is arrested at the end, she acts and serves as a Classical *deus ex machina* to Kimathi and the struggle.

Boy and Girl also come from among the ‘unconcerned’ and ‘neutral’ citizenry. They move through the streets aimlessly as loafers, eating crumbs that fall off the whites’ tables until Woman takes them under her wings. She tutors, lectures, encourages, challenges and indoctrinates them until they become convinced about the struggle. Walking their own path, their plan of helping Kimathi escape is performed at the end of the text. Their test of loyalty and initiations come through the transportation and delivery of the gun-in-the-bread message purportedly meant to help free Kimathi. They become, for Kimathi and Woman, the next generation of guerrilla fighters and revolutionaries who will carry on the struggle. The future, which for them is certain, is one of unity in the

face of despair, fear and oppression. Girl questions and admonishes Boy: “Is that how to become a man? Only a few hours ago after you told me about the woman, and we talked about it, you still had spirit; you had hope. Have you forgotten the resolution we made together? Hardly an hour gone?” (*Trial*, 52).

It is clear that the characters are not ordinary but mythically symbolic of the forces of evil and good in the eternal struggle for the control of man and his sociological balance. Woman, as already pointed out, is representative of all women who are mothers: the cocoons from which emerge new generations of humans and in this situation, revolutionaries. The diverseness of her experience and character is captured in the textual Direction (*Trial*, 8):

*She is between thirty and forty years of age, with a mature but youthful face, strongly built. Good looking ... Though apparently a simple peasant, the woman is obviously world-wise, and perceptive of behaviour and society. Throughout, her actions are under control: her body and mind are fully alert. Fearless determination and a spirit of daring ... She is versatile ... A mother, a fighter...*

Boy and Girl become the future hope of the fast disappearing present revolutionaries through the colonial government's hounding. They are indoctrinated and enmeshed in the revolutionary ideology preached by Kimathi (the political and military leader of the movement). Nyamndi (2013: 1) avers that this work, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, in this type of portrayal, has satisfied a basic dramatic function, especially, in an African world bedevilled by colonial limitations and problems: “One of drama's basic missions, especially within its African matrix, is to convey in dialogue, and action the urgency of the playwright's deeper intention but also of the characters' driving motivations”.

The military personnel marshalled for the suppression of the people are blacks and whites. It seems that the black soldiers are more dangerous than the whites in trying to satisfy their masters. After escaping from the black soldiers, Woman comments: “Wui, that was another narrow one. Escaping from the leopard's claw to fall into the lion's mouth” (*Trial*, 14). This type of soldiers, represented by Second Soldier and the K.A.R soldiers, are regarded as “lost sons of the soil” (*Trial*, 14) by Woman. They are unconcerned by the plights of their people. They are individualistic and selfish, fending for themselves and getting paid with “One hundred shillings” and “posho” (*Trial*, 65). On the other hand, there are sympathetic individuals among the soldiers as represented in First Soldier who, in deeds and actions, restricts himself. His understanding lies with the fighters though he works for the imperialists. In the end, unfettered, he joins the push for the struggle along with the revolutionaries. His consciousness had been aroused and, therefore, his rebirth is unproblematic. The white soldiers are symbolic of the use to which the common man, garbed in the cloak of a fighter, is misused and misled. The ordinary Englishman is used against his African counterpart through indoctrination by the elite. This is exemplified in the stereotypical answers given by the white soldiers (*Trial*, 64) during their interrogation after they were captured:

Soldiers: We are the Queen's soldiers!

1<sup>st</sup> Soldier: We are only obeying orders.

Shaw Henderson, the prejudicial judge who regards himself a friend but in reality is an enemy of the Kenyans, represents the whites. In prison, he typifies a tyrant oppressing Kimathi, an old friend (*Trial*, 54-58). He is the face of imperialism and colonialism that would brook no objections and is undeterred from their aims. According to Fanon

(1967: 48), “colonialism is not a thinking machine, not a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state”. Kimathi (*Trial*, 54), therefore, becomes violently condemned even before stating his case:

Henderson: It will have to be from the hangman’s rope, Mr. Field Marshal.

Kimathi: Already sentenced, am I? How is that for even handed British justice!

The white Settler is not different. He sees the blacks as tools to be used and domesticated as he, a soldier of fortune, had won his booty: the Kenyan land. He represents the whites who see the Kenyan land as a prized plunder to be shared not with the original owners but amongst the settlers alone. The blacks, on their own land, should become second-class citizens oppressed and “loyal, meek, submissive” (*Trial*, 29).

## vi. Racial Issues

Some of the textual events are emblematically relevant to on-going situations on Africa’s socio-political arena. At the beginning of the play, Kimathi in chains (*Trial*, 13) stands for Africa undergoing four centuries of slavery while the text’s denouement portrays a continent seeking and achieving (political and economic) freedom. During his court trial scenes, there are various delineations separating the blacks from the whites. The blacks sit on rough seats while the whites are comfortable. The blacks are shabbily dressed in comparison to the whites. The whites have permission to speak anyhow and any time while the blacks can only murmur or be quiet. This is symptomatic of the relationship between the two races for the last four centuries since contact. At the end of the text, a change occurs: the blacks fight for freedom.

This struggle between the two cultures is symbolized in the mime of Black Man’s

History (*Trial*, 4-5) which comes in phases: of entry into slavery, of oppression and of struggle for freedom. This concern is also represented in the Stage Direction with the machine gunfire opposing the drums: “*Staccato burst of machine gunfire. The drums respond with a deafening, rhythmic intensity*” (*Trial*, 6).

According to Woman, the blacks are ‘ants’ and the whites ‘elephants’ (*Trial*, 14). To counteract the situation, Kimathi emerges as a leader: military and political. The whites and the blacks refer to him as Prime Minister and Field Marshal (*Trial*, 3, 24). He is a person loved and respected in both peace and strife periods. He epitomizes the full respect and trust the beleaguered people of Kenya have in him: an all-in-all leader. When, therefore, he is caught, a fusion of bread and gun is concocted to bail him out: the gun to kill and the bread to give life. Woman states: “Bread is life” (*Trial*, 22). In celebration of this life and also in remembrance of the fiftieth anniversary of his execution a “classically monumental Dedan Kimathi statue in the centre of the capital is” (Coombes, 2011: 219) erected on 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2007.

In one of the most powerful symbolic imagery of the text, the whites are shown as wanting to perpetuate themselves as permanent “riders” and the blacks as permanent “horses” (*Trial*, 34). This protracted situation is utterly rejected in the person and ideology of Kimathi. Rejecting Henderson’s “there has to be a horse and a rider” (*Trial*, 34) apologia, Kimathi posits: “Well, let me be Balaam’s ass then. Yes, the one who rejected his rider. When the hunted has truly learnt to hunt his hunter, then the hunting game will be no more” (*Trial*, 34).

## vii. Initiatory Passage

To achieve heroic positions, the major textual Kenyan characters, especially, undergo socio-economic, religious, psychological and physical initiatory rites. All his battles and traumatic personal ordeals in becoming a leader help Kimathi metamorphose into a stronger being. His tribulations, after his arrest during the special emergency period, culminating into his torture and sentencing become his initiatory rites. These transmute him from the ordinary Kenyan into a seasoned, ritualized and carrier-sacrificial hero. Boy and Girl start their initiatory classes and tests from the streets and end them when they meet Woman. Their main test is transporting the gun-in-the-bread package to Fruitseller. Commenting on their passage from childhood and innocence to adulthood and revolutionaries, Woman opines: “I thought you told me you were ready for initiation. Son, I told you, you are a man and no longer a child. I shall not accept less of you” (*Trial*, 60). Like Boy and Girl, Woman moves from a rough and directionless life to one of dedication and single-mindedness with a focus on the people’s struggle. Her own change comes when she hears “The call of our people. The humiliated, the injured, the insulted, the exploited, the submerged millions of labouring men and women of Kenya” (*Trial*, 19). Her sufferings toughen her as she undergoes all as part of her initiatory process. This culminates in her arrest while trying to help Kimathi escape.

These characters become convinced and solidified in their belief in the struggle because of the oath they took. The oath taking serves as the first/initial initiatory rite for all: fighters and non-fighters. It aligns them to the struggle’s ideology. According to Kimathi, he could not betray the movement because, “This is what I, Kimathi wa

Wachiuri, swore at initiation” (*Trial*, 54). Oath taking also changes the awareness of the common people as Settler’s once docile black farmers become something else. Oath taking, according to Settler, “Poisoned simple minds / led astray their God-fearing souls” (*Trial*, 29). On the other hand, the blacks become united as a focused fighting force that derides and exposes betrayers: their consciousness become opened, exposed and developed.

## CONCLUSION

It is apparent that nations that are colonized and ruled by other nations must look for ways of achieving freedom and independence for their people. In this struggle, they must look inwards and forge a unity in the face of the military, political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and negative onslaughts that the colonial master(s) would launch. Because this sort of struggle might not always be an open, free and equal fight, the colonized must devise ways and means of coding all their means and avenues of their struggle like the Kenyans did. This should encompass, amongst others, their manifestos, campaigns, military and political warfare, religion, diplomacy, culture, tradition, their fighters (living or dead) and tribal divisions. The main issue is that the colonized nations and peoples must become one single fighting block against their colonizers. This is aptly put by Brown (2007: 57):

The lesson is clear enough: that “tribalism” and other divisions, really induced by competition for scraps of colonial power, are only overcome by an armed struggle against a common enemy, forging a new national consciousness.

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## L'abeille

Insecte doré  
Pattes fines ciselées  
Ailes éphémères

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

## John Haines's Unarticulated Environmentalism

by Daniel Spoth, Eckerd College, Petersburg, Florida

### The Bee

Golden insect  
Legs daintily chiseled  
Ephemeral wings

—  
Anne-Marie Moscatelli

As mental calisthenics, I occasionally ask my students to recall a place that is important to them, a place that they see as significant to their moral, aesthetic, or intellectual maturation. The topic is wide open, I tell them—it can be as exotic as the summit of an Antarctic mountain or as mundane as your living room. Though, as one might imagine, I get a range of responses, there is one overwhelming trend: the places my students choose are always outside, and, in their memories, they are always alone. When pressed to elaborate on their choices, they cite many of the values commonly associated with the wilderness idyll—beauty, spiritual regeneration, contemplation, bare life, and solitude, a switching off of junctions between themselves and the social world surrounding them. It is this last criterion that always intrigues me the most, given the perpetual incumbency of connectivities in the digital age: their experience of the wilderness is unmediated by structures, technologies, or others.

Whether my students realize it or not, their response to my prompt is being factored by countless comparable narratives of aloneness in the wilderness. A syllabus on nature

writers might include Thoreau, Emerson, Muir, Bartram, Leopold, Carson, Abbey, Dillard, and Lopez, all of whom, for the vast majority of their best-known writings, are alone, or at least (like Thoreau) cultivate the image of solitude, and themselves as the arbiter of that solitude. Bernard Quetchenbach, in *Back From the Far Field* (2000), locates nature writing in “an individual encounter with the nonhuman” that derives its authority from “attentive experience of and in the natural world” (5-6). John Elder, in *Imagining the Earth* (1985), takes the issue of authority still further, making nature poetry a quasi-mystical performance:

Poetry comes to resemble Hebrew prophecy in its quality of alienated authority. A solitary voice from the mountains calls upon the community to renew itself; a socially eccentric impulse makes possible a more balanced culture, concentric with the planet. In their imaginative passage from estrangement to transformation and reintegration, poets enact a circuit of healing (1).

I would contend that aligning nature poetry with an “eccentric impulse,” as Elder does, and placing the onus for an “imaginative passage” between wilderness and civilization upon the figure of the nature poet, constitutes a spectrum more than a binary. That is, the degree to which the impulse is eccentric, and the remove to which the poet retreats over the course of Elder’s cycle, determines the viability of the “prophecy” to some extent.

From this admittedly rudimentary set of standards, the career of John Haines, the famous Alaskan poet, occupies the extreme end of the above scale. Few poets of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have matched his iconoclasm, hermeticism, and attention to place. Frequently grouped with nature poets due to his chronicles of the Alaskan wilderness and

eloquent defenses of the same in his later essays and memoirs, his poetry nonetheless represents a distinctly unusual articulation of preservationism. In Elder’s terms, if Haines lays claim to alienation, he forsakes authority. In his writings, particularly early in his career, Haines tacitly resists the urge to prophesy; his environmentalist aesthetic and ideology is implied, but never explicit. Haines resists speaking for nature and, in his early poetry (for which he is still best known), nature never speaks for itself. I would like to contend, however, that the inarticulate quality of Haines’s environmental ethos, rather than signifying a lacuna in his ideology, is a deliberate aesthetic choice calculated to provide an alternative to traditional preservationist jeremiads. In other words, I will argue that Haines’s poetry constitutes a unique approach to nature writing, insisting upon the necessity of the reader, rather than the author, to articulate an environmental consciousness.

Implicit in these questions are much larger issues: what is nature poetry? What is it good for? Is it incumbent upon the genre to make activist claims, or is it always already political? Thomas J. Lyon provides perhaps the most concise definition of the form in “A Taxonomy of Nature Writing,” to wit, nature writing is “natural history information, personal responses to nature, and philosophical interpretation of nature” (20). This casts the net fairly broadly, given the still-vigorous debate over what is meant by “nature” itself, which Terry Gifford designated, in *Green Voices* (1995) the necessary context for any “wider social concern with the future of our planetary environment” (5). If “nature,” as many (including Haines himself) claim, must be expanded to include any anthropogenic enterprise, “nature writing” becomes a fairly empty signifier. It may

be worthwhile to triangulate Lyon's definition with several other delineations of nature writing. John Elder, in his 1995 address to the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), defined nature writing as "a form of the personal, reflective essay grounded in attentiveness to the natural world and an appreciation of science but also open to the spiritual meaning and intrinsic value of nature."<sup>1</sup> In the same volume, Elder revises this earlier definition—rather than "just one variety of the personal essay," he believes that the term should refer to "the whole range of imaginative writing about the earth" (312-313). What is immediately clear, however, is that nature writing, in its most traditional form, involves some sort of deeply, subjectively imaginative engagement with (whatever is meant by) the natural world. Both Lyon and Elder emphasize the "personal" nature of reflective nature writing. I take this to indicate less a preclusion of any claims for communal or societal attitudes toward nature than a directive that, in nature writing, such claims are assumed to emanate from an individual. Elder's comments about the "prophetic" character of nature writing are relevant in this regard.

However, I would like to emphasize that, if nature writing relies strongly on a notion of subjective, personal authority and interpretation, it similarly relies on individual exceptionalism and alienation—at least since Thoreau, who sought an escape from "the mass of men," the nature writer has typically been the figure capable of criticizing dominant cultural trends from a removed perspective: a cabin in the woods, a desert pilgrimage, a tent, a fire lookout. Elder places this removal in the context of the barrenness of built environments: "revulsion from man and his works turns into rejection of all the mortal world of process and ambiguity" (*Imagining the Earth* 12). Only a "purgation" so

<sup>1</sup> qtd. in Armbruster & Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing* (2001), 2.

radical that it "removes all of life along with its diseased human manifestations" makes improvement of the human wasteland possible.<sup>2</sup> Few individuals in poetic history have effected a removal of this type more completely than John Haines. A former naval officer who had studied painting and sculpture at a handful of Eastern schools on the G.I. Bill, in 1947 Haines bought 160 acres of land at Mile 68 of the Richardson Highway outside of Fairbanks, a spot that critic Jody Bolz would later call "the loneliest address in American letters" (*A Gradual Twilight* 192). Haines imagined that he would use the land as a retreat for painting; when his paints froze, the retreat became a homestead and Haines became a poet. In "Poem of the Forgotten" from *Winter News* (1966), his first volume of poetry, he describes himself as "Well quit of the world," having "framed a house of moss and timber, / called it a home, / and sat in the warm evenings / singing to myself as a man sings / when he knows there is / no one to hear" (5). Glossing the "song" for the "poem," as is frequently the case in modern and postmodern poetry, seems to imply (as does the title) that Haines's composition stems directly from a sense of isolation—the poem is phrased as a consequence, if not a result, of Haines's alienation from the surrounding world. The line of reasoning is easy to follow: the more complete the removal from civilization, the stronger the bond with wilderness, and the purer the philosophical inquiry that is produced.

Due at least partially to its novelty (the self-taught poet crafting his lines, alone, in the Arctic wilderness), *Winter News* was an immense critical success. No less than

<sup>2</sup> *Imagining the Earth*, pp. 12. Elder marks this as a "cycle" inasmuch as the journey into nature is necessarily temporary—the writer must ultimately return to civilization with a message, a revelation, or an injunction. Elder draws on Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) in making this claim, as Marx insists that creators of pastoral landscapes must "ultimately renounce their own renunciations... they must return to society" (*Imagining the Earth* 24).

Wendell Berry said, upon hearing Haines read from that volume, that his poems “told that they were the work of a mind that had taught itself to be quiet for a long time... The poems seemed to have been made with a patience like that with which rivers freeze or lichens cover stones” (*The Wilderness of Vision* 25). Similar accolades from another distinguished poet had already come in a letter from William Carlos Williams in 1953, in which the venerable author called Haines “the most authentic talent for verse that I have encountered in your generation” (*A Gradual Twilight* 147). For a relatively untrained poet to achieve such success with a first volume of poetry is rare; for that volume to gain the readership and praise that *Winter News* did while its author continued to live an ascetic life in the Alaskan wilderness, wholly apart from anything resembling a literary community, is almost unheard of. Though Haines still had a steadily productive career of nearly fifty years ahead of him when *Winter News* was published, the vast majority of critical interpretations and anthologies draw from this initial text. Greg Simon summarized much of the critical consensus surrounding Haines’s career when he wrote: “The poetic reputation of John Haines will continue to ride on the strength of his first and most unified book, *Winter News*” (*The Wilderness of Vision* 155).

The poems in *Winter News* are spare and impressionistic, bearing the hallmarks of Haines’s influences (Yeats, Williams, Jeffers, modern Spanish poetry, and a handful of Chinese translations handed down through Pound and the Imagists), and exclusively deal with settings in the Alaskan Arctic.<sup>3</sup> For twenty-five years, Haines homesteaded near Fairbanks, supporting himself by hunting and selling furs from his trap lines, and

<sup>3</sup> There are poems in *Winter News* that directly mirror some of Yeats’s earlier work (“To the Green Man,” for instance), and “Saying Goodbye on the Yukon” is an echo of Pound’s version of Li Po’s “Taking Leave of a Friend” from *Cathay*, 1915. Haines acknowledged this overtly, saying that “Yukon” was “quite plainly an imitation” (*Living Off the Country* 122).

his poetry reflects this. Much of the appreciation of the volume capitalized on this fact, suggesting that Haines gave his readers an unvarnished picture of a seldom-traveled landscape. Marc Hudson wrote, in a latter-day valediction of Haines’s work, that the poet’s life was inextricable from the poetry itself:

Haines had lived an authentic life. Through most of the fifties and sixties, he had lived on his homestead in Richardson, Alaska, hunting and trapping and hiring himself out as a laborer or as a carpenter. It was an elemental exhilarating life [sic]. During the long winter nights he read and wrote by kerosene light. His fuel was wood that he gathered or cut himself. By day he hunted with dogs and a sled, or trapped, traveling long distances in the cold to check his lines and to gather his prey. It was a life he had chosen. *Winter News* derived its quiet power from that chosen ground (582).

Hudson’s reverent language is perhaps more enthusiastic than Haines’s own; in *The Stars, the Snow, the Fire* (2000), his memoir, he recalls his time at Richardson as a hard life, rife with uncertainty, anxiety, and guilt (the last stemming from the ceaseless necessity of killing animals for their fur).<sup>4</sup> Yet the Thoreauvian comparison is tempting, and studies of Haines’s work do not want for juxtapositions of the imagined paradise of the Alaskan bush and the dissociative, nightmarish urban existence endured by most of his readers.<sup>5</sup> David Mason postulated that “the average New Yorker” would quickly be driven mad by the isolation and silence of Haines’s existence, proclaiming that “it is an experience available only to those who already know it, the immense silence of a world

<sup>4</sup> See, fJohn Knott’s “The Dreamtime of John Haines,” in which Knott agrees that Haines “opposes a simplified life governed by the wheel of the seasons to the life regulated by clock time that he left behind,” but also “recognizes the difficulty of practicing this kind of life, at least in what he thinks of as a wilderness condition.” John Knott, “The Dreamtime of John Haines.” *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 13.1 (Winter 2006). <http://isle.oxfordjournals.org>, access date Jan. 20, 2013. pp. 162.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Jody Bolz’s statement that Haines “claimed his territory in Alaska with his books as surely as Thoreau claimed Walden Pond” (*A Gradual Twilight* 192).

in which no machines grate and no human voice other than your own fills the void” (42). The exceptionalism, the privileged imaginative lifestyle, that Mason attributes to Haines dovetails significantly with accounts of nature writing from Lyon, Elder, and Quetchenbach.

When John Haines moved to Alaska in 1947, the population of the territory was around 100,000 and statehood still more than a decade away; it was a region with which only a very few people were familiar, exoticized both by its remoteness and the Londonesque stories that emerged from the Gold Rush.<sup>6</sup> It was a region that, then (and, to a large extent, today), was wholly defamiliarized, ripe for the centralizing influence of nature writing. As Carolyn J. Allen notes, Haines capitalized upon the romantic image of the Arctic, the untouched “mythic North,” replete with charismatic megafauna and natural beauty, a region “perpetuated in both oral and written traditions with certain unchanged characteristics of climate, landscape, and wildlife” (*A Gradual Twilight* 145). By providing a poetic image of a trackless landscape, Haines supplied his readers with a vicarious, familiarized experience of wilderness exceptionalism. Steven B. Rogers wrote, after reading Haines’s poetry: “I have never been to Alaska; perhaps I will never go. But now, at least, I believe I know something of the true Alaska” (*A Gradual Twilight* 9). Along with this pioneering work came the burden of speaking for the state writ large; for better or worse, Haines became *the* Alaskan poet.<sup>7</sup> When we consider how romantic, poetic images of the Arctic become sublimated into the popular unconscious, Haines is at the forefront of the (small) group of chroniclers of the region. The exceptionalism of the poet

<sup>6</sup> For population trends, see <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/research/pop/popest.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Mike Dunham writes: “In the short history of our small state, only one Alaskan [Haines] has achieved a national reputation as a genuine literary lion” (*A Gradual Twilight* 213). David Mason, speaking somewhat more cynically in the same volume, calls Haines “poetry’s token Alaskan” (44).

combined with the unfamiliarity of the landscape, even before any aesthetic standards are taken into account, gave Haines the recognition he needed to continue his career and begin working as a full-time poet—ironically, his reputation, at least at first, was staked upon his self-conscious distance from the vanguard of poetry and its academic trappings.<sup>8</sup>

The alienation of the nature poet from the perceived corruption and spiritually deadening elements of civilization is analogous to nature poetry’s disciplinary separation from vanguard academia. That is to say, both author and critic of nature poetry are frequently elemental in their interpretation of man’s relationship with nature and the reader’s relationship with the text-as-nature; the intermediary forces of civilization, academia, exegesis, and theory serve to sunder humans from what should be an instinctual, even mystical connection. Lawrence Buell, in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), noted that first-wave ecocriticism arose in large part due to the possibility of developing a more grounded theoretical school “chiefly as a way of ‘rescuing’ literature from the distantiations of reader from text and text from world that had been ushered in by the structuralist revolution in critical theory.”<sup>9</sup> Gifford, too, looks askance at “the exhilaration of freedom created by literary theory in the last decade” in that it impedes “the ability to value freedom itself, or justice, or continuities in anything, including nature” (140). In opposition, Gifford advances the notion that, since “values are being used daily

<sup>8</sup> Arguments for the formal skill and quality of Haines’s verse exist in significant numbers, so I do not wish to overemphasize the circumstances of geographical and societal separation here—aesthetic factors did, indeed, contribute to Haines’s reputation. For multiple endorsements of the technical skill of Haines’s poetry, see Steven B. Rogers’s somewhat unambiguously titled *A Gradual Twilight: An Appreciation of John Haines* (2003). Significantly, the most common comparisons link Haines to both the Romantic poets and Yeats, with whom he shared strikingly similar difficulties in distinguishing between his chosen literary landscape and his adopted readership.

<sup>9</sup> pp. 6. See also Cecelia Tichi’s *What Democracy Looks Like: A New Critical Realism For a Post-Seattle World*, 2006.

in relation to the environment,” critics require “some criteria for making distinctions between them, however provisional” (140). We repeatedly find, in ecocritical jeremiads against “traditional” literary theory (and academia itself), the notion that nature writing, and, implicitly, ecocriticism, are more grounded, more relevant, more (in a word) “real” than linguistic, formal, or sociopolitical analysis. In this view, nature writing surpasses all other forms in terms of verisimilitude owing to its appeal to universal, incontrovertible processes of the physical world, its desire to replicate natural cycles, in a move that Greg Garrard has termed “ecomimeticism.”

At first glance, the ecomimetic impulse would seem to be at odds with the previously stated aims of nature writing; the “prophetic” mode’s prioritization of individual accounts from exceptional individuals willing to and capable of transcending the trappings of civilization would seem to preclude the unmediated, essentialist directives of ecomimeticism. As I have stated in regards to Haines, the appreciation that the reader derives from nature writing is frequently vicarious—we value a poet who has spent twenty-five years in the Alaskan wilderness because his experience serves as a substitute for an experience that very few people can (or wish to) have. Moreover, the combination of claims to verisimilitude and prioritization of individual exceptionalism can give rise to cloistered identitarian politics that equate the veracity of argumentative claims with the experiential makeup of the author. Buell notes: “Up to a point early ecocriticism’s appeal to the authority of experiential immersion and the efficacy of practice over against [sic] the authority of ‘theory’ reprised first-wave race, feminism, and sexuality studies” (7). In other words, when immediacy of experience trumps theoretical potency, argumentation

becomes a function of essentialist elements. However, Buell believes that ecocriticism is exempt from the most absolutist truth-claims that accompany “emergent discourses on behalf of silenced or disempowered social groups” insofar as “no human can speak *as* the environment, *as* nature, *as* a nonhuman animal” (7). Since it is problematic for a nature writer to claim genetic, hereditary, or other incontrovertible links to the nonhuman world, nature writing would seem to level the theoretical playing field to some extent.

However, I want to emphasize that, despite the ostensible evasion of these identitarian claims, nature writing implicitly relies upon a fetishistic conception of individual agency. Though Buell is correct in saying that it is unreasonable to expect an author to speak *as* nature, the quasi-prophetic character of nature writing and its claims to communion with the physical world virtually require the nature writer to speak *for* nature. Quetchenbach makes this point vis-à-vis Robert Bly, Gary Snyder, and Wendell Berry:

In their own ways and depending on their own lights, each has sought to ‘speak for’ nature... in doing so, they have had to discover ways to communicate what is essentially a privately held faith in the ‘meaning’ of the natural world, and they have sought to do this through contemporary poetry, a vehicle designed more for introspection and individual experience than for public issues and shared values (xi).

Quetchenbach highlights the necessarily individualistic characteristics of nature poetry as well as one of its primary challenges: making personal, subjective experience applicable to broad communal value-systems. From this perspective, nature poetry confronts an issue faced by contemporary poetry as a whole: the navigation of the personal and the political, the transmutation of individual sensation into more expansive meaning.

Quetchenbach suggests that most contemporary poetry centers on a “radical presence,” a “poetics of immediacy” in which “the world of the poem revolves around the perspective and quotidian experience of the poet herself or himself” (ix). Honesty, veracity, and relatability, at least since the advent of free-verse confessional poetry, are assumed to reside in a poetics of subjective sensations (whether narrative or not), enabling a bridge between the singularity of personal experience and the prophetic drive toward truth enacted by nature poetry.

However, contrary to the bulk of contemporary poetry, and contrary, too, to the dominant trend in nature writing, it is precisely this privileging of the experience of the individual, particularly Quetchenbach’s “quotidian experience[s]” that Haines resists. In what has become perhaps his most famous essay, “The Hole in the Bucket” (1975), Haines laments the fact that “we have somehow fallen into the notion that one’s individual experience in the world is sufficient material to make poetry out of,” the poems themselves being “a sporadic and shallow response to things... [lacking] the context of a unified outlook on life” (*Living Off the Country* 70, 64). Similarly, in a review of *The Young American Poets* (1969), Haines castigates the anthologized poets for being “too much centered on themselves... as people who are inwardly bored” (*Living Off the Country* 79). And, somewhat later, in a review of David Budbill’s *The Chain Saw Dance* (1977), he states his beliefs succinctly: “during the past two decades subjective exclamation has largely replaced insight” (*Living Off the Country* 101). In his essays as in his poems, Haines forsakes his reviled self-reflexive confessional mode in favor of implicating the reader within his landscapes. John Knott marks Haines’s early subjects as “the value of

imagination and the ‘personal mythologies’ that a writer can offer” (Knott 162). Yet it is important to note that Haines rarely, if ever, makes his own such “mythologies” overt. In keeping his personal revelations hidden, Haines forces his readers to interpolate—and occasionally project—their narratives of truth, beauty, romance, and all of the other agglomerated concepts of nature that dominate our narratives onto his landscapes. Miles David Moore sees in Haines “the lone figure in a wintry landscape” who “does not ask us to share his solitude so much as he tries to make us realize our own, and to help us find sustenance based on that knowledge” (*A Gradual Twilight* 78). In practical terms, Haines’s reluctance to extend his own experience to the reader frequently results in a deep-seated ambivalence toward the notion of master narratives as a whole.

Consider one of the poems from *Winter News*: “Poem for a Cold Journey” in many ways bears all the hallmarks of Haines’s early work—short, impressionistic, unmetered free verse, with an oblique speaker and obscure symbology. Yet this poem, perhaps more than any other in the volume, speaks to Haines’s ambiguities:

On the road of the self- contained  
traveler I stood like one to whom  
the great announcements are made.

In one hand I held  
a hard, dry branch with  
bitter, purple fruit;  
in the other hand a small,  
blue-and-yellow bird  
whose closed eyes stared inward

upon a growing darkness.

Listening, I could hear within  
myself the snow  
that was coming, the sound of a loud,  
cold trumpet (49).

Everything in the text of the poem leads us to believe that some deeper meaning is at hand; the speaker stands “like one to whom the great / announcements are made,” in a state of readiness for a mythic lesson. Like the Greek gods, he bears his symbolic flora and fauna. The poem ends with the trumpet, the sign of impending heavenly revelations. But what is revealed? What knowledge does the speaker gain beyond the vision of “the snow / that was coming?” Or is the coming snow all that there is? Haines’s speaker poses these questions, yet does not hint at any resolutions; he is a “self-contained traveler,” unwilling or unable to share what realizations he receives. Even the branch and bird, though their usage is iconic, do not bear the symbolic relevance that we feel they should—they are given form and hue, but not named. The bird’s eyes turn inward, and see only darkness. The fruit is bitter, the branch is dead. The entire poem seems calculated not to communicate the grand message that it promises, but frustrate the search for that message—a significance that we, as readers of poetry, expect to find.

The form of “Poem for a Cold Journey” is similarly inconclusive. Each of the three stanzas consists of one sentence, with a full stop ending each one; like the speaker himself, each stanza is “self-contained.” If the notion of self-containment is so important to this poem, however, why does Haines enjamb this word in the first line? On a very basic

level, it surely arrests the reader, forcing redoubled concentration and emphasis. Yet the bisection of “self” from “contained” is mirrored by many other doublings in the poem—the dualization of adjectives, for instance. When modifiers appear in “Poem for a Cold Journey,” they always occur in pairs: the “hard, dry” branch, the “bitter, purple” fruit, the “blue-and-yellow” bird, the “loud, cold” trumpet. The bondage in these pairings is strengthened by sonic similarities, with consonance between “hard” and “dry,” assonance between “loud” and “cold,” and two consecutive troches in “bitter” and “purple.” Just as the figure of the poet stands in the center of the poem, extending in either hand the bird and branch, the poem is structurally amphibrachic; two stanzas of equal length bracket the larger central verse, a physical description of the self and its possessions. In both “Poem for a Cold Journey” and “Poem of the Forgotten,” which I have already mentioned, the longed-for significances are absent; the last four lines of the latter poem read “I made my bed under the shadow / of leaves, and awoke / in the first snow of autumn, / filled with silence” (*Winter News* 5). The revelatory insight promised by the “songs” in the first part of the poem are balanced by “silence”—solitude gives rise less to a unified “mythology” than a calculated set of ambiguities.

The theme of opaque ambivalence, of approaching but not narrating a truth or of being in a liminal state between two distinct identities, is typical of Haines’s early poetry. Poems from *Winter News* such as “On the Divide” or “Divided, the Man is Dreaming” capitalize on this space of uncertainty between life and death, human and animal, temporality and stasis. Haines’s poetry can most commonly be found in this Frostian in-between space, as Robert DeMott has noted: “as though, not quite, on the edge of:

in Haines' best work such liminal and boundary moments tend less toward the elevated rhetoric and privileged epiphany of the typical romantic nature lyric, but rather are often muted, intimated, and understated" (*A Gradual Twilight* 99). One of the best examples of this "muted" methodology in *Winter News* manifests itself in the poem "Foreboding":

Something immense and lonely divides  
the earth at evening.

For nine years I have watched from an  
inner doorway:  
as in a confused vision,  
manlike figures approach, cover their  
faces, and pass on,  
heavy with iron and distance.

There is no sound but the wind crossing  
the road, filling  
the ruts with a dust as fine as chalk.

Like the closing of an inner door, the day  
begins its dark  
journey, across nine bridges wrecked  
one by one. (9)

The dominant symbols here—the doorway, the road, the wind, the bridges—are all transitional, symbolizing change or passage from one state of being to another. The images themselves are popular ones in poetry and prove to be dominant in Haines's own work; his volumes are replete with doors, windows, sunset and evening scenes, locations existing on the margins between stable realms. Elder marks windows, doors, and other liminal spaces in nature poetry as symbolic of "the mind's passage between a world of

natural process and the specific enclosures of human order" (68-69). Evening, in turn, becomes the setting of "many of our most valuable poems of integration... with the grey light, things that seemed distinct in the strong outlines of noon begin to merge" (133).

Like Ammons, in his early career Haines was wary of attaching overtly human narratives to landscape, and resistant to the injunction to speak for (or with the voice of) nature common to much nature poetry. In place of any declamatory, prophetic aesthetic and, frequently, in place of the personal, subjective identity inherent to the genre, *Winter News* offers the image of the poet-as-prevaricator, a persona he shares with Berryman and, to some extent, Lowell. The dissonance between Haines and his contemporaries, however, lies in the former's obstinate opacity; while the previously mentioned poets adopt a similar standpoint of alienation and indecision, they invariably provide clues as to the psychic character of their own dissociations. For Haines, however, the dominant mode is silence. In "Poem of the Forgotten," "Poem for a Cold Journey," "Foreboding," "On the Divide," and many others from *Winter News*, there is no synthesis, no catharsis, no summative moves on the part of the poet. Like the speaker of "Poem of the Forgotten," after moments that should be revelatory, Haines concludes with lacunae rather than exegesis. As in "Poem for a Cold Journey," several symbolic routes are explored, though Haines makes no move toward closure, steadfastly refusing to take a position.

This aesthetic mode, for Haines, is very nearly unique to *Winter News*. While his later poetry occasionally readopts the perspective of Berry's "mind that had taught itself to be quiet for a long time," there is a distinct shift, the nature of which I will come to presently, in his work following this volume. I suspect that the poetics of silence embodied in *Winter*

*News* are strongly tied to its status as the first volume of poetry from an author describing a seldom-chronicled corner of the American landscape. In essence, *Winter News* provides what seekers of “true” Arctic narratives expect: a hint of singular transcendence, peerless landscapes, lessons learned that are too personal or ephemeral to express, Wordsworth’s “thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.” Maria Theresa Maggi notes the presence of deep imagism in *Winter News* that seems to do exactly this: “in the earlier poems, the idea is the image, the picture of a landscape or a snapshot of life in Alaska that strips us of preconceived notions about ‘nature’” (*The Wilderness of Vision* 47). Maggi takes note of a similar aesthetic technique to those I have noted in this essay—insofar as “the idea is the image,” the work of the poem is contained not in the author’s exposition or interpretation of those images, but the images themselves. This is a methodology familiar to the Imagist school of poets, from whom Haines learned much, but not necessarily to nature poetry, which, as we have established, relies strongly upon personal reflection. In this sense, *Winter News* paradoxically fulfills its readers’ expectations by contradicting them insofar as those readers anticipated a volume emerging from solitary decades in the Alaskan wilderness to revise or counteract their established conceptions of nature poetry.

After *Winter News*, however, Haines’s poetry superficially begins to resemble the work of other contemporary nature poets. He followed *Winter News* with *The Stone Harp* (1971) and *Cicada* (1977), two volumes outspoken in their critiques of Cold War politics, as well as several collections, most notably *News from the Glacier* (1982) and *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer* (1993), containing reflections on environmental degradation and many ekphrastic “museum” poems. Critical reaction to these volumes

was very mixed. Robert Richman, reviewing *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer*, found Haines an “enormously gifted” poet with a “powerful imagination,” yet seems to attempt an apology for some of the more topical poems contained therein:

Sometimes Haines sounds the anti-city, anti-civilization note we associate with the politically correct regionalists... but this is rare, and confined mainly to the work of one period. Also confined to one period—the late 1960s and early 1970s, when *The Stone Harp* was published—are poems that deal with national and international political events. These, one is thankful, are also relatively few in number (66).

Though Richman’s criticism is perhaps more blunt than others that were offered of Haines’s work post-*Winter News*, the prevailing critical attitude was disappointment. Haines himself stated (somewhat obliquely) in a 1998 interview that he “had come to the end of something” after *Winter News*, and realized that the theme of his poetry had to shift to take account of the rapidly changing political landscape of the country (Bourne & Kooistra). Yet he also acknowledged that readers’ response to *The Stone Harp* and later poems had been lukewarm:

So *The Stone Harp* came out. But an individual who was then chair of the English Department at Fairbanks was disappointed with *The Stone Harp*, because he wanted more *Winter News*. And he was not the only one. Somebody else, I can’t remember who it was, reviewed the book and expressed a certain disappointment in it, that I was not writing more about those days.

It is worth noting that Haines had a long and frequently troubled relationship with the university system in Alaska—though he was hired sporadically as a creative writing teacher at the flagship campus in Fairbanks, his attempts to secure employment there and at the regional campus in Anchorage were abortive.<sup>10</sup>

In some sense, Haines—or Haines’s early work—became his own worst enemy: having established himself as an Alaskan nature poet who defied conventions, he encountered some resistance when composing poems both set outside of both Alaska and more within the expected purview of the nature poem. Valerie Trueblood argues that labeling Haines as a “nature poet” became an excuse to “let a good portion of the critical establishment off the hook for serious examination of his work” (50). Trueblood is writing of Haines’s 2001 volume *For the Century’s End: Poems 1990-1999*, a collection defined by deep-seated anxiety and even horror at the social, political, and environmental direction that Haines saw the world taking. Trueblood sees this concern with “judgment, repudiation and prediction” as distinctly opposite to the trajectory desired by many of Haines’s readers: “for a long time critics liked to situate this poet in a remote cabin with a hide to scrape, and put up some resistance to the political, now clearly millennial, nature of his oeuvre” (50). If nothing else, the poetry itself undergoes a sea-change from the minimalist, solitary verse of *Winter News*; the concern with landscape, survival, and existentialism of Haines’s earlier work gives way to poems such as “Notes on the Capitalist Persuasion,” “Kent State, May 1970,” and “In the House of Wax,” a long tour of a wax museum painfully evocative of the injustices of human history. It is a poem of great

<sup>10</sup> See the article in the *Anchorage Daily News* following Haines’s death: <http://www.adn.com/2011/03/03/1734045/celebrated-alaska-poet-haines.html>, accessed 28 June 2013.

hostility and disappointment:

And all our wigged colonials, our  
Franklins, conspiring

with their strongbox keys and  
profitable lightning —

that so much ink and dust and  
shuffled paper conceals their tidy  
pilferings,

their purity and blunted wrath (27).

There is no longer any ambiguity in Haines’s tone—his hatred for bureaucracy, corruption, and hypocrisy is on full display, and, like much of Haines’s later writing, this opposition extends to figures of the past as much as those of the present and future. The “paper” in these lines becomes not only the tool of diplomacy, but history, a marker for remembrance and, implicitly, literature itself. Yet the paper is here not revelatory, but a tool for obfuscation that enfolds and conceals the undesirable aspects of these contested events. Remarkably, Haines has effected what seems like an almost total *reversal* of the cryptic solitude that he pursued in *Winter News*: “In the House of Wax” fulminates against political opacity and circumlocutive, indirect language. Haines uses his own “paper,” the poetry volume, to enact this protest—for him, the poem becomes a means of exposing and denouncing ambiguities of language. Significantly, the excerpted stanzas actively attack the very methodology that Haines himself employed earlier in his career: the tendency to conceal what is meant behind what is said, the substitution of images (or rhetoric) for

straightforward ideas.

A major question—perhaps *the* major question—of Haines’s career is why he abandons the imagistic (yet popular and, by the account of many critics, revolutionary) poetics of *Winter News* in favor of a more typified variety of nature poetry. It may be that the primitivist image that he cultivated (Trueblood’s hide-scraping rustic) ultimately represented a vestigial aesthetics. Elder, claiming that “art, human community, and the all-embracing physical cycles of the earth must be understood as mutually expressive and sustaining,” suggests that Thoreauvian removal from the civilized world and its associated values can be as potentially damaging as uncritical imbrication within that same accultured environment:

To live in an urban world, cut off from tradition and nature alike, is to experience a life-threatening wasteland. But the inward withdrawal of a distanced tradition, without regard for current necessities of the tribe, becomes absurd; flight into the wilderness, accompanied by a denunciation of all human civilization, arrives finally at the utterance of self-cancellation (33).

While I am unconvinced that *Winter News* represents a wholesale “withdrawal” into a “distanced tradition” for Haines (certain poems in the volume indicate a distinct awareness of concurrent political and economic events, even if Haines’s characteristic neutrality and ambiguity remains in place), certainly the volume could be described as remote from the concerns of the outside world, and certainly iconoclastic in terms of trends in mid-century American nature poetry. Nonetheless, the concept of returning from a revelatory experience in the wilderness is central to Elder’s argument—Haines’s foray into the Alaskan wilderness in some sense may represent an unsustainable aesthetic.

More to the point, Haines, like any nature poet, is forced to take account of the

fact that poetry needs to enact a synthesis between the poet’s individual reflection upon nature and inherited societal images of the same. Gifford writes that “a personal notion of nature will always be in dialectical relation to socially constructed notions of nature. The poem is a site where writer and reader negotiate that dialectic of personal and social meanings” (16). Similarly, Quetchenbach finds that the fundamental individualism inherent in contemporary poetics has limited the success with which any poet practicing this poetics of immediacy can reach beyond the individual level of meaning into the relationship between public readership and subject matter (155-156).

In other words, even as Haines composes poetry that self-consciously contradicts the expectations of his readers toward nature poetry, he is forced to confront the dissonance between his own experience and that of his readers. To continue to insist upon the singularity, the irreproducibility, of his own journey into the wilderness (to which there can be, as in so many poems in *Winter News*, no response but silence) deadens that poetry to the society surrounding it, just as the lack of closure, of synthesis, in the poems from *Winter News* does not necessarily anticipate a reader-response. Haines’s movement toward ekphrasis and politics in his later volumes of poetry would seem to be, in Quetchenbach’s terms, an attempt to “achieve a public voice while retaining the experiential quality of contemporary poetics” (23).<sup>11</sup>

However, even in the development of this public persona, the techniques of liminality, opacity, and ambiguity inherent in *Winter News* manifest themselves. Frequently

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<sup>11</sup> See especially *The Owl in the Mask of the Dreamer* (1996), which strongly emphasizes Haines’s interest in the museum.

Haines will present two or more potential ecological fates or prophecies without necessarily endorsing either—in such instances, the burden is placed upon the reader to decide which outcome they prefer. A passage from his memoirs, titled *The Stars, The Snow, The Fire* (1977) provides one of the best examples of this technique:

Sometime there may come to us in a depleted world the old hunter's dream of plenty. The rich country, full of game, fish, and fur, bountiful as it once was. The bear, the moose, and the caribou. The woods are thick with rabbits... beaver in the ponds, a goshawk beating the late-winter thickets like a harrying ghost; and now and then the vague menace of a wolf passing through. This, or its sometime shadow: the country dead, and nothing to see in the snow. Famine, and the great dream passing (29).

Here, the environment is in distinct decline (the “depleted world” that is dreamed to be “bountiful as it once was”), with the threat of catastrophe looming. Yet Haines's mode here is still imagistic rather than didactic—rather than instruct, inform, and electrify his readers, he presents two alternatives: the green world, or famine. It is up to the reader to choose between these paths and to determine which specific political and environmental actions will produce the desired effect. This is a significant moment in Haines's writing—though he retains the ambiguity and ambivalence of his earlier poetry, he orients his individual interpretation of a particular landscape toward human use of the wilderness at large, addressing himself to the future rather than the imagist present.

This aesthetic technique is present even in some of Haines's most politically strident poems. In January 2001, Frank Murkowski, the Republican Alaskan senator, stood on

the floor of the senate and held out a sheet of blank white paper. This, he claimed, was what the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge looked like, a *tabula rasa*, ripe for exploitation by oil companies. In one of his final poems, “Requiem for the Arctic Refuge” (2006), Haines turned this rhetoric on its head: the threat was not of letting a blank, empty wasteland remain free of industry, but of transforming a diverse, living wilderness—one of the country's last—into Murkowski's stereotype:

No sign of life, no bird calls,  
no mating cries from the tundra...

Only the strewn wreckage of a passing  
Illness -- the discards of metal  
and trash left behind by those who  
write sorrow on the earth,  
and leave to renew their plunder [...]

I hear a voice from another age that  
would speak to us now: “Forests precede  
civilization, and deserts follow...” [...]

And of our lost earth-bound refuge, only a  
broad sheet of white paper  
once held by an official hand -- now  
certified and fingerprinted, smudged and  
stained with oil.

Haines begins with the image, fairly common in the conservative media, of the Arctic as  
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a wasteland, remote and lifeless, but the turn between the first and second stanzas marks this scene as post- rather than pre-drilling. Drilling does, in essence, *add* something to this “blank” landscape, but only in the sense that it “write[s] sorrow on the earth,” implicitly, the blank paper that Murkowski holds out in the final stanza, now besmirched with inky oil. Haines titles his poem a “requiem,” and addresses himself to a vanished, rather than vanishing, landscape (he states: “I remember, and so must you, / the lost sweetness of this land”), implying a certain fatalism vis-à-vis Arctic development.

“Requiem” situates itself at a key moment in environmental development and depletion, yet Haines here speaks to a specific bioregion and a specific political conflict. Rather than beginning with a paradisaical vision of natural abundance, the earth is already damaged, and the reader made complicit in its destruction:

Tell me, citizens in your lighted houses:

Is this what you wish  
for our loaned and borrowed future? When  
your houses are darkened  
and your stations shut down,  
your thousand-year dreampipe emptied...

Haines’s use of the rhetorical question (“is this what you wish”) accomplishes something of the same aim as the passage from his memoirs, but crucially addresses itself directly to the contemporary reader. Haines attacks the “citizens,” implicitly, Alaskan residents, who have mortgaged the future of ANWR against the possibility of a modicum of spending money and a bit more domestic comfort. Haines excoriates these readers for taking a

short view of the situation, as many environmentalists have before: the oil will eventually peter out, the Alaska pipeline will run dry, the lights will extinguish themselves in the houses, but the refuge will stay ruined forever. Gone is the emphasis of the earlier poetry on the self—here, “I” is outnumbered in quantity and force by “you” and “us.” When Haines himself appears as speaker, he always pairs himself with the second-person plural: “I remember, and so must you,” and “I hear a voice from another age / that would speak to us now.” The poet’s identity enters the poem only very indirectly; by imagining and publishing his nightmare scenario, he is in essence writing sorrow on the earth, though much more figuratively than ConocoPhillips, BP, and Exxon, in a manner more informed by history and aesthetics, as the allusion to Chateaubriand’s famous aphorism reminds the reader.

It should be evident that Haines does not anticipate any reader encountering the “dream of plenty” passage in *The Stars*, *The Snow*, *The Fire* or the “strewn wreckage” of “Requiem for the Arctic Refuge” to choose the alternative of ecological depletion and destruction; the possibilities that he offers can be read as rhetorical in this sense. Yet I think that there is a crucial difference between Haines’s presentation of two significantly unbalanced alternatives and a simple, unequivocal advocacy of preservationism, and it is in the space between these two techniques that Haines’s *poetic* environmental consciousness is located. Like narratives of future ecological devastation, the alternatives, both positive and negative, that Haines offers are imaginative creations, made rather than given. “Through imaginative investment in the beginning and the end of things,” Elder writes, “encountering the emptiness from which form arises and to which it perpetually returns,

the poet can affirm himself as well as the world” (20). Much of Haines’s activist writing orients itself toward this “emptiness.” The nightmare scenarios that Haines predicts effectively function as his reworking of the Romantic trope of contemplation, though the burden of such reflection falls upon the reader; selecting (as the reader must) Haines’s preservationist alternative forces the reader to delineate the code of values that decision entails. In this manner, without ever articulating a land ethic entirely his own within his poetic works, Haines dialectically creates such a value system.

Admittedly, this seems a torturous means of giving voice to an ethical system that could be, if not stated outright (as other nature poets such as Wendell Berry frequently did in their own poetry), at least referred to subtly. Yet I believe that Haines’s ambiguities are not simply an oversight on the part of the poet, but a means of attempting a new type of environmental advocacy through poetry, the methodology of which is itself fraught with ambiguity. As John Felsteiner admits in *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* (2009), “realistically, what can poetry say, much less do, about global warming, seas rising, species endangered... well, next to nothing. ‘Poetry’ and ‘policy’ make an awkward half-rhyme at best” (7). Even the most strident poetic manifestoes, Felsteiner states, encounter difficulty in effecting social change. The potential of nature poetry is instead contained in its unique rhythmic and affective structure:

Science, policy, and activism point the way toward solutions, but something deeper must draw us there. It can be found in poetry’s musical lift, attentive imagery, and shaping force, which stem from prehistory and live on in today’s magazines, slim volumes, readings, slams, songs, Web sites, blogs. In country or city, poems make a difference by priming consciousness (13-14).

Felsteiner offers the more intangible elements of nature poetry—its lyricism, imagery, and “shaping force,” as well as its capacity to “prime consciousness,” entirely independent of the *message* of that poetry, as the keys to its social relevance. Similarly, Elizabeth Ammons, in *Brave New Words: How Literature Will Save the Planet* (2010) similarly relies on ephemeral aspects of literature to make a case for its enduring social power:

[sustainability] will only happen if there is spiritual revolution... a fundamental spiritual reorientation to an inclusively relational ethic that recognizes the place and value of all people, their communities, and the natural environment. This is the urgent work of the humanities in the twenty-first century (109).

Though these endorsements of the spiritual, affective aspects of literary creation vis-à-vis environmental activism are, I believe, not incorrect, they do assume a one-to-one correlation between the ostensibly consciousness-raising intent of the author and the poem’s interpretation by a literate, activist audience. In essence, they center around the clear transmission of a message through the medium of literary craftsmanship, encompassing both dominant themes and compositional strategies, tropology, and musicality. Though this is not an unreasonable expectation, it does seem to elide somewhat one of the most prominent aspects of poetic creation—the ambiguities of the poems, the sense that there is more there than what is being said, and a gap between what is said and what is meant.

In 2007, George Monbiot called Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* “the most important environmental book ever written,” despite (or perhaps in part due to) the fact that it contained “no graphs, no tables, no facts, figures, warnings, predictions or even arguments.” Rather, the ecological impact of this text, Monbiot postulated, lay in McCarthy’s

speculation about the potential consequences of environmental degradation. Much the same could be said of John Haines's poetry; his is an unarticulated environmentalism, lacking a definite call to action or programmatic view of ecological destruction. Rather, Haines's methodology is to place the reader amidst, between, or among a set of possible outcomes, insisting that selection from among these alternatives is that reader's prerogative. In doing so, Haines both breaks with the bulk of nature writing, which relies upon a unified, individualistic approach to environmental issues, and capitalizes on the ambiguity and opacity inherent in poetic forms. Whether or not nature poetry has the capacity to change the world is a subject of some debate. However, Haines suggests that, regardless of our answer to this question, that capacity is most fully located with the reader, rather than the author, of poetry.

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**La faucille**

Siffle faucille  
Ta lame fauche l'herbe  
Le foin embaume

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

# The Hyperreal Perception in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*: The Either/Or Logic: The Aura<sup>1</sup> and/or the Real?

by Karima Arif, La Manouba University, Tunisia

## The Sickle

Whistle Sickle  
Your blade scythes the grass  
Fragrant scent of hay

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

I intend in this paper to take up the challenge to question postmodern perception envisioned by Don DeLillo in *White Noise* (1985) in which hyperreality brings up the issue of representation which is substituted for a retreat into ahistoricity, 'spatial disorientation', consumption with a "reckless abandon", natural defilement, and primitivism. I will demonstrate DeLillo's utter negation of the real and its banal and nihilistic interchangeability with the "aura" that is concurrent with an utter focus on an either/or game. With this in mind, I will explore the novelist's exposure of an unreal late twentieth-century America where perception is reduced to a myth and a 'collective fantasy'.

The novel's characters including the protagonist Jack Gladney dramatize the postmodern individual's trauma which leads him/her to escape and distort the real via finding solace in the illusive tokens of safety, comfort and 'replenishment' out of 'exhaustion'<sup>2</sup> and pathological fear of mortality. The main instances I will make use of

1. The field of the halo surrounding people or objects.

2. Replenishment and exhaustion: I make use of these two words to demonstrate the dichotomy of negation and possibility surrounding the hyperreal perception. Both terms echo John Barth's oft-cited essays, 'The Literature of Exhaustion' and 'The Literature of Replenishment'.

include the scene of “the most photographed barn in America”, the evacuation incident, Babette Gladney’s enigmatic appearance on television and the German nuns’ pretentious piety. Drawing on these illustrations, it is paramount to note that the hyperreal perception, despite its larger fallacies, paradoxically seems to conceal a bitter reality in which the only alternative left is to enter the system, an Althusserian assertion that the novelist makes near the end of the novel.

DeLillo introduces the main aspects of a permeating "aura" in this novel via a proliferation of reproductions and images that predominate for the individual and act as a collective response to and a projection of the real in a postmodern American context. Seemingly, the "aura" touches on faith, history, culture and space, which are tinged with a "halo," something that superficially resembles the real, but is unable to capture it in its wholeness. This retreat into simulation is triggered by the drive of averting feelings of danger, insecurity and imminent collapse already implied by reality. Hence, this second version of the real is oriented towards mitigating its traumas. This process becomes abusive and is mythical, for it encourages fragmented projections which lack unity, depth and consciousness, due to the dysfunction of perception. *So, it goes*<sup>3</sup>.

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The process of producing a second reality swerves from the utopian creed of historicizing as it negates any sense of duty towards the real. To fall into the groove of reproducing reality is to diverge from the moral/ethical motives already associated with an authentic real. In the light of this, it is noteworthy that undermining the category of

3. ‘So it goes’: a recurrent phrase in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

the real results into the emergence of a distorted version of a wished for reality. Under the umbrella concept of the "aura," most of the foundational premises upon which reality is based turn into their opposites. The resultant emptying of the ethos of truth, depth and unity intensifies the sense of ethical nihilism in a history shaped by Jean Baudrillard’s ideas. In short, the current era is one in which signs are thoroughly distanced from reality.

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The real meaning of hyperreality is to be found therefore in a conflation of reality and its referents. This state of confusion is best illustrated in the passage of the most photographed barn in America which raises in my view vital questions proper to an image of a prevailing hyperreality and moral ‘liquidity’. The barn which Murray and Jack visit has notably strong affinities with Louis Marin’s Disneyland that stands as a temple of myth, spatial vacuum and collective fantasy in the absence of the real. While Jack seems only to receive Murray’s philosophizing and trivia questions regarding the nature of the barn and its implications, Murray overtly upholds every single note he writes down as he is highly enthusiastic about the “reality” of the Barn in that it is an unavoidable chronotope of post-modernity.

The Barn is a manifesto of urbanization in America. It is also assigned attributes. The Barn lures, is an attraction and to a certain extent exudes durability. These characteristics are entertained and passively contemplated by its visitors. Going beyond space and time, the Barn seems to be submerged in the realm of myth simply because it is engulfed by signs created by photographing and false copying. As Jack and Murray go further into it, “the signs started appearing” (13). Hence, their looming is not arbitrary. Their

appearance alludes right from the beginning to obstacles that prevent one from accessing the real, which is now hidden by signs. Presumably, the kind of “reality” being recreated is equated with a palimpsest, a distorted copy of the origin.

The label, “the most photographed Barn in America” already imposes on its visitors a narrow and ideologically oriented view that sums it up in its being only a site of photographing, the only truth and reality ever ascribed to it. This labelling empties the barn of its hidden and perhaps repressed authenticity, for the reason that the photographs are posted for the viewer as a substitute for the place they refer to, which is the ultimate degree of cultural deceit being conducted against the visitors.

The space the barn inhabits contains people who “had cameras;..tripels, telephoto lenses, filter kits” (13). All along, Murray is busy in taking notes claiming emphatically, though in an assertive tone that “no one sees the barn.” In his view, this fact is due to the signs, which have suddenly replaced the origin. This being the case, he intends to believe that one’s goal in the barn is to maintain an image, not capturing it or embracing its depths. The sense of capturing is a passé because it is overpowered by the impact of the “aura.” This means to say the “halo” is what renders something that seems true and gives that thing the illusion of credibility. Seemingly, the act of photographing and selling of the photograph afterwards gradually impoverishes the barn, making it at several removes from its real spatial, temporal and historical backgrounds as it becomes a narrow harem-like place of traded and negotiated beauty. This meaning is further illustrated as Murray makes the point that “Being there is a kind of spiritual surrender,” (13). This is paradoxical in that it registers an instance of spiritual elevation, which is, nevertheless,

enslaving.

Expanding on this idea, Murray asserts that in the barn, the perception of reality is bound to a collective consent, which is unavoidably shaped by the “aura” in which all forms of experience blur as in the case of the juxtaposition of religion and tourism in which perceived reality is part of a collective vision that no longer distinguishes between the origin and its false copy. Reality becomes a matter of “either/ or”, to use DeLillo’s words already inspired by Soren Kierkegaard’s reflection (1813-1855). The Either/ or formula alludes to the ethical problem in assuming the responsibility for maintaining ties with the real and aesthetics by projecting the real in a way that pleases the self, helps it replenish its cracking ego, and produces an introverted, visionary reception of the real that leaves no room for the passage of political consciousness.

The either/ or game already excludes the possibility of resistance, on the account that one is not granted full freedom. It goes without saying that this view conceals at heart a nihilistic and an absurdist vein. Though it seems to be a workable rationale, the either/or logic is undoubtedly endorsed in a strategy of hegemony that promises an access to freedom via the illusion of choice. The self is here smoothly interpellated as it mistakenly falls in the groove of the “aura” now being equated with a halo of freedom and free will. The ironic effect becomes at stake for there a discrepancy between one’s expectations and the limited (restricted) cognitive paradigm surrounding them which now looms in the shape of an “aura.” The either/ or becomes an extended metaphor that underlines the postmodern individual’s perception which finds its embodiment in a sense of sameness which leads to arbitrariness and randomness.

The real has become no less an aim than an exchange of names, signs and empty images. The most suggestive instance in the passage is the absence of a referential reality the pictures of which are taken. The barn's reality could only be recognized in the process of 'taking pictures of taking pictures', which is rather strange. The real is, here, subject to a third copying that is likely to be open to more copying. Near the end, Murray raises questions about the reality of the barn before the photographing takes place, for he comes to admit at the end that we cannot escape the relationship between reality and its resultant cultural simulacra. The "aura" is everywhere; it is so banal circulating about everywhere just like evil. As "we're part of the aura. We're here, we're now" (13), concludes Murray. This contention is passive, and it seems final on his part.

A close look at the Barn in the novel reminds us of the Disneyland that Louis Marin considers to be a featuring pillar of a false utopia, a dystopian society in which all sense of reality has completely vanished to be ominously replaced by alienation. The most immediate question that springs to one's mind is the ethical aberration of reproducing reality in a distorted way. Like the Disneyland in America, which grabs a visitor's imagination, the Barn is also an inadequate and false copy of reality in that it begets illusion which is paradoxically traded to its gazers, those who search for a short-lasting pleasure—embodied in daydreaming and fancy--that provides for their impoverished imaginations. People inside the Barn are hypnotized and turned into beings similar to zombies.

This assertion complies with DeLillo's contention in the novel that: "we are a society of kids" (49). This reduction of adults to children sheds light on the dwarfing process

(my own emphasis) that individuals are subject to as they gradually dwindle and their insights about the things around them tend towards playfulness and childishness. The term, childishness does not convey the sense of neutrality and 'innocence' but apathy and intentional corruption. This points to the infantilizing effect of myth and fantasy.

The Barn is, in Louis Marin's view, a dystopian playground that neglects social and historical awareness. This playground produces instead an opposite consciousness shaped mainly by myth and fantasy. The individual's inability to disentangle him or herself from the fascinating power of utopia deepens his or her sense of alienation, disorientation, and non-spatiality. Henceforth, the subject becomes a mere actor in a hyper land. Thus the barn is an abode which negates perception, prompting a questioning of the nature and kind of knowledge one could ever get or receive while contemplating signs.

Introduced to the image of the Barn in *White Noise*, one is left with the impression that it is merely a forged copy of an American space that is supposed to be real, but ceases to be so and falls, therefore, into the trap of cultural primitivism. With this in mind, one can note that the negation of reality by the Barn and Disneyland epitomize is an attempt at re-defining—in fact banalizing and mythologizing (producing thus the opposite effect)—historical referents.

The dramatic event of implementing an evacuation accompanies the abusive airborne toxic event as a way to ward off the impact of the catastrophe and gain the feeling of security while performing an evacuation as it might happen in reality (that is to say at a virtual level). What lies behind a simuvac is enacting an artificial evacuation to reduce the horror of the real disaster later on. Here, the logic is speculative in the sense that it

strives to stabilize the event in time and space, in order to anticipate its impact and seize them at a virtual level. This attempt at fighting against an anticipated disaster is escapist conduct. The men in “Mylex suits”, the inhabitants of Blacksmith, choose to withdraw from reality of the abusive airborne toxic event instead of running its risk. Their full involvement in the simulated evacuation further alienates them and defamiliarizes their outlook of reality.

Throughout the process of evacuation, people believe in safety, because they think they can easily avoid the horror of the catastrophe by performing and over-practising their responses to it. The belief that adjusting to the simuvac might delay the catastrophe is erroneous. There is, in fact, really nothing new about the inimical effect of the airborne toxic event, for example, their eyes “began to water” (271). What is being enacted is possible only within the boundaries of the performance itself.

The simuvac displays two characters who seem to perform during the simulation in the most perfect way: Steffie and the man from the Advanced Disaster Management—“a private consulting firm that conceives and operates simulated evacuations” (35). Steffie aged nine seems to believe in “the idea of sweeping disaster”, and deeply involved in her role of a victim thinks that an excessive practice of the event can chase away the phobic fear of the real.

The man from the Advanced Disaster Management firm is aware of the artificiality of the operation in that he recommends volunteers not to fully immerse themselves in the deeps of the situation. He makes it clear that the simuvac is just, “a blast simulation” (206) which does not require a lot of enthusiasm and “tender loving care”. What he

anticipates is a “low –profile victim” (206). This casual approach to the simuvac exposes DeLillo’s ridiculing of the whole thing. In a sturdy contrast to Steffie’s blind identification with the role of a volunteer victim, Heinrich, her brother, questions the potential benefits of enacting a simulation as he asks the “the street captain” (206) about Steffie’s pretence. The overall event of the simuvac is an illusive recreation of the original disaster. The process of imitating a simulated evacuation is deemed to be an efficient preventive shield against the horror of the real itself.

Surprisingly enough, Jack describes his daughter as he says: “I could hardly bear to look. Is this how she thinks of herself at the age of nine—already a victim, trying to polish her skills? How natural she looked, how deeply imbued with the idea of a sweeping disaster. Is this the future she envisions?” (205) Such questioning belies his anxiety about the prospects of the obscure life Steffie and her peers are ominously going to lead. The man in the simuvac says:

We are interfacing with twenty-two state bodies in carrying out this advanced disaster drill. The first, I trust, of many. The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we’ll be from the real thing. Life seems to work that way, doesn’t it? You take your umbrella to the office seventeen straight days, not a drop of rain (205).

These instructions seem to be emanating from an easy going mind. The simuvac man assures his audience that the doctrine of practice will suffice to weaken the impact of the real event. Expanding on his hypothesis, he bluntly addresses the evacuees saying that:

All you rescue personnel, remember this is not a blast simulation. Your victims are

overcome but not traumatized. Save your tender loving care for the nuclear fireball in June. We're at four minutes and counting, victims, go limp. And remember you're not here to scream or thrash about. We like a low-profile victim. This isn't New York or L. A. Soft moans will suffice (206).

The suffusing metaphor, which predominates one's reception of the real is that of discontinuity, copying, and over-practising. The category of the real is denied by individuals in *White Noise*, on the ground that it reminds them of their ties to duty and responsibility vis-à-vis the world in which they live. For example, Murray Siskind is enthusiastic, like Steffie, about artificiality because he has a keen pleasure of the aesthetic appeal of a car crash and disregards its destructiveness. For him, "the basic difference between a crash and a crash landing seemed to be that you could sensibly prepare for a crash landing, which is exactly what they were trying to do" (91).

When Babette appears on television, there is also a huge discrepancy between image and reality. The family's response to her being televised is replete with wonderment, confusion, anxiety, and disbelief—especially on the part of Steffie. At times, Jack considers her a ghostly creature from the past, an artificial entity whose being is set in the black and white frames of the screen. Obviously, their responses are due to her mediated image. Babette turns into another person once she appears on the screen. Her supernatural and gothic "halo" is due to the discourse generated by media. In short, media and, more specifically, television transforms her into an alienated figure. The space that Babette inhabits in the screen is hyperreal and mediated endlessly over time. Her surrender to the image obfuscates and defamiliarizes reality. The narrator goes on describing her in

the following terms:

The face on the screen was Babette's. Out of our mouths came a silence as wary and deep as an animal growl. Confusion, fear, astonishment spilled from our faces. What did it mean? What was she doing there, in black and white, framed in formal borders? Was she dead, emitting, disembodied? Was this her spirit, her secret self, some two-dimensional facsimile released by the power of technology, set free to glide through wave bands, through energy levels, pausing to say good-bye to us from the fluorescent screen? (104-105)

Here Babette's "aura" does more than normalize the real as it is performed and perceived. The shallow content combined with the surface image is not only deployed to provide the self with a "secure" positioning in reality but also deceives the other and persuades him/her of the efficacy of so-called narratives like religion. Near the end of the novel, Jack carries his enemy Mr. Gray to the hospital where he meets the German nuns who turn out to be mere purveyors of an "aura" of a religious faith. Astonishingly enough, they feel responsible for the irresponsible (my emphasis), and for that reason they play games with religion by keeping up appearances just to impress the others. A prime example of such a game is found in a conversation between Jack and one of the nuns:

"Why not you are a nun anyway? Why do you have that picture on the wall?"

She drew back, her eyes filled with contemptuous pleasure.

“It is for others. Not for us.”

“But that’ ridiculous. What others?”

“All the others. The others who spend their lives believing that we still believe. It is our task in the world to believe things no one else takes seriously. To abandon such beliefs completely, the human race would die. This is why we are here. A tiny minority. To embody old things, old beliefs. The devil, the angels, heaven, hell. If we did not pretend to believe these things, the world would collapse.”

“Pretend?”

“Of course pretend. Do you think we are stupid? Get out from here.”

(318-19)

Drawing on this assertion, the collapse of the real obviously hinges on the need to believe in the "aura." The latter is what enhances the waning faith of man in grand-narratives. One needs some reassurance granted by the intervention of mediators. The nun goes on saying that:

“Our pretence is a dedication. Someone must appear to believe. Our lives are no less serious than if we professed real faith, real belief. ” (319)

Here, the nun makes it clear that essence cannot come into being without the presence of the "aura." The real is no less a truth than it is an attachment to the surface. "Auras" are the games played to foreground the existence of the real.

It goes without saying that *White Noise* does generate insightful reflections about the nature of perception in the age of postmodernity. DeLillo's treatment of the "aura," simulation, hyperreality explodes the image itself. However, despite its nihilistic overtones, *White Noise* does affirm that perceptions of the hyperreal contain prominent albeit relative truths. This standpoint which becomes obvious in the final words of the narrator that “everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead” (326).

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## Vendanges

La grappe lourde

Sur ton visage ridé

Pétile l'espoir

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

## Anti-Realism in Postmodern Literature and Video

by Aaron Duplantier, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge,  
Louisiana

### Harvest

Cluster of grapes  
The time-wrinkled face  
Sparkles with hope

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

The visual image's indexicality<sup>1</sup> manufactures the illusion, for some viewers, of an unmediated relation to the Real, as if consciousness, production concerns, and culture industry stakeholding were figments of a bygone critical era. This pool of duped viewers has lessened in the twenty-first century, but the attendant complexities concerning relations to the Real remain.<sup>2</sup> In postmodern literature, contemporary and twentieth century voices express their distaste for visual indexicality through formal and thematic means; their issue, by in large, is the visual image's (false) promise of truth and authenticity through representation, concepts incongruent with postmodernism's

denial of an ontologically sound, unified worldview. However, while postmodern writing

1. On indexicality, "...recording instruments (camera instruments and sound recorders) register the imprint of things (sights and sounds) with great fidelity. It gives these imprints value as documents in the same way fingerprints have value as documents. This uncanny sense of a document, or image that bears a strict correspondence to the image it refers to, is called its indexical quality" (Nichols 34). Taken from *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols; 2001 and 2010.

2. Outright rejection of technologically-enabled realistic representation has yet to occur: "And despite popular skepticism about the representation of reality evident in debates about fakery in factual programming there has not been wide-scale rejection of realist modes of representation by audiences. Paradoxically, if the proliferation of electronic media has challenged epistemological structures, it has also reinforced the popular investment of ontological realism" (Biressi and Nunn 34). Taken from *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation*; 2005.

can serve to dethrone realistic representation's authority, it can also, by the very process of postmodern transgression and experimentation, uphold the illusions of the duped. And these postmodern literary tropes can be appropriated by the visual to simulate a convincing indexical even the savvy, non-duped viewer can buy into.

In the realm of the postmodern literary, there is some disagreement over the primary themes, styles, and motivations of the movement. But, paradoxically, divergent attitudes over postmodernity's articulation fit into a postmodern schema, and denying one trope's relevancy usually has the opposite effect. No different is anti-realism in postmodern literature. Both theme and formal impulse, anti-realism operates in postmodernist writing as comment on the unreality of post-World War, consumer life.<sup>3</sup> A lofty elaboration on this point is Brian McHale's conclusion that postmodernist fiction is "above all illusion-breaking art; it systematically disturbs the air of reality..." (221). McHale precludes a certain audience expectation/literacy not always axiomatic, but his point does parallel itself nicely with some of the foundational writers of the postmodern movement, like William S. Burroughs, who teases with ideological and institutional terms and values functioning in the popular Western Symbolic and shifts them into the transgressive machinations of his experimental novel *Naked Lunch*, defamiliarizing those terms and consequently highlighting their unreality. Burroughs converts an American university, what he calls "campus of interzone," into a site of endless depravity, populated by "herds of sheep and goats and long-horned cattle" and a strictly male student body who "wearily unbutton their flies" in the presence of their literature professor, who more readily recalls

3. "Unreality," in this case, can be subbed for "lack of authenticity," "lack of ontological value," or "incomprehensible complexity."

stories of his sexual exploits than his knowledge of Coleridge (70-74).<sup>4</sup> Vividly here, Burroughs performs McHale's *systematic disruption of reality* by taking the terms of reality believed to be known and making them, deliciously and explicitly, unknowable.

Ultimately, postmodern anti-realism speaks to the failure of realism as an artistic impulse. Like the visual image, literary realism makes a promise it cannot keep: that of replicating reality without mediation, which might receive congratulatory and misguided descriptors like "authentic" and "truthful" from the duped. The postmodernist sees this relation as grossly simplistic; realism, in its most oblivious conveyance, issues a straight, unruptured line from object/idea to its representation, neither multivalent nor complex. Under the scrutiny of postmodern sensibilities, the activity of realism results in a thematic vacuum insofar as it does not recognize the fallibility of its existence. Postmodernist authorial implication and "layering" of representation (the metadiegesis), is a response to this vacuum, though certainly not a proposed solution.<sup>5</sup> When Paul Auster writes himself into "City of Glass," not just as a supporting character but as a hackneyed persona for his deeply confused writer protagonist Quinn, he is speaking on the failure of keeping the author out of the representational equation. Auster playing a role in the narrative troubles the boundaries of his fiction. There is no purely diegetic universe of Auster's *The New York Trilogy*, no illusion that he can produce a reality both fictional and effectively replicating the Real outside it; Auster's work will always be an authorial creation, tainted by his own preconceptions and a complex exterior world impossible to truly represent.

4. Interzone, equal parts fascist military state and locality of any and all perversion, is Burroughs's drug-addled satire/deconstruction of normativity. Interzone also exemplifies the postmodern tendency toward the construction of "alternative universes" that play with the familiar only to doom them to the unfamiliar (McHale 43-94). The diegesis of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* is the logical conclusion of this concept.

5. There are no solutions deployed by the postmodern, only more complexity.

. John Barth's collection of writing, *Lost in the Funhouse*, acknowledges the failure of realism through the acceptance of literature as perpetually critiqued and genrefied, and how those assignments are themselves more proof of literary failure. Barth begins his collection with an Author's Note that indicates some of his pieces, of varying genre (spoken word/short story, etc.), should be consumed particular ways: some through the "oral tradition" and others by means of "mono/stereophonic" recording, knowing full well that his work will, undoubtedly, be read in the traditional literary mode, in quiet solitude. One of the pieces, "Glossolalia," Barth claims will "make no sense" unless heard read aloud (xi). The reader, then, has already failed from the outset of their reading, which calls attention to Barth's "medium of print" (xi). Accepting literature as produced medium, first and foremost, means the terms of its mediation are highly visible; this unsettles the content, the diegetic space, of Barth's proceeding pieces, and establishes a different (probably aberrant) set of expectations for the reader. In his eponymous story, "Lost in the Funhouse," Barth directly engages the discourse of literary criticism by weaving the narrative around terms and ideas an informed reader might be using to analyze the quality of his work, thus removing his story from an "ontology of text," as McHale designates, and layering it between various worlds of reception and expectation, a *metadiegesis* (117).<sup>6</sup> After explicating a family's drive to Ocean City in the open of his story, Barth writes, "The function of the *beginning* of story is to introduce principle characters, establish their initial relationships, set the scene for the main action [...] Actually, if one imagines a story called 'Funhouse,' or 'Lost in the Funhouse,' the details of the drive to Ocean City

6. Metadiagesis, aggressively inserting multiple universes within a text, results in disorientation of the reader and the "undermining [of] the ontological status of the primary text" (McHale 117). In other words, a direct response to realism. An *ontology of text* supposes that a diegetic world exists unruptured and distinct from an external one.

don't seem particularly relevant," which destabilizes the narrative illusion Barth has been trying to build for five or so pages (77). The final product of such thematic construction is something less believable (less authentic) as fictional world, far less real, and, hopefully, making no suppositions otherwise.

But acknowledging complexity and failure in anti-realism can mirror realism in that a postmodern author lays claim to something "more real" in a multivalent text, closer to the incomprehensibly complex Real, thus making a kind of truth claim.<sup>7</sup> An apt comparison is the modernist move toward literary experimentation, especially in regards to literary modes like stream-of-consciousness employed heavily by the moderns; this style is meant to more effectively replicate the "real" processes of the human mind. Moderns Woolf (*Mrs. Dalloway*) along with Joyce (*Ulysses*) exemplify this trend. Here, the indexical is outwardly taken into consideration in the formal construction of a text; stream-of-consciousness is writing meant to have a closer relation to the Real. Samuel Beckett's postmodernist novel *Molloy* configures itself within a stream-of-consciousness mode, and could, under particular critical circumstances, be argued as having a similar formal impetus to the moderns. And there is no doubt of the stylistic similarities, letting the reader into the inane minutia and illogical patterning of supposedly real thought: Joyce's Molly Bloom provides the endless recitation of food items in the close of *Ulysses*; Molloy's descriptions of his bowel movements and orifices. Yet while Joyce employs stream-of-consciousness to validate his characters and their experience, with unity and cohesion as the textual byproduct, Beckett uses the technique to further problematize the

7. Michael Renov considers the documentary "truth claim," which is distinct from a claim on the Real, as the "baseline for all persuasion" in nonfiction filmmaking (30). Taken from *Theorizing Documentary*, Renov "Toward a Poetics of Documentary"; 1993.

condition of his speaker, and of the narrative itself.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, in the postmodern, stream-of-consciousness experimentation plays as a totalizing move, and functions as parody, communicating that experimentation, rather than achieving a discernible end, is all there is. Though this could imply a more truthful understanding of the unknowable Real, it still signifies loss, incompleteness, and failure, whereas Molly Bloom is quite famously redeemed by her exalted “Yes.”

Literary critiques of realism have an advantage over other representational mediums in that they are profoundly distanced from what might be considered “objective” visible reality; the visual image rarely functions in the postmodern literary text, and contemporary visual mediums are where the most volatile conflict over realistic representation emanate, starting with photography and shifting into social networking and virtual realities. That is not to say the visual image has no place in the postmodern literary; Kathy Acker and, more recently, Art Spiegelman have done their parts to effectively incorporate the image into postmodern writing. These attempts, however, have not upset literature or the place of literature, instead serving to reinforce literature’s position in the spectrum of media. Now there are new terms, not without their faults, like “experimental fiction” and “graphic novel,” to associate with postmodern literature that dares to trouble the boundaries of form and medium. In other words, from a historical perspective, postmodernism, which prides itself on its denial of ontologies of text, and may be the last bastion of hope for the anti-real, has been pigeonholed by institutions and ideologies making sense of media and literature in an age where so much of it has already asked, in so many words, not

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8. Molly Bloom is the site of much heartache and conflict for Leopold Bloom throughout *Ulysses*, and going into her thoughts jettisons the reader, pretty swiftly, into a (potential) position of empathy for her.

to be taxonomized. In the same vein, calling Spiegelman’s work “postmodernism,” or anything for that matter, feels feeble. Postmodern anti-realism, with the *express purpose* of denying ontological realness, stands on the premises of “nostalgia for the unattainable,” as Jean-François Lyotard asserts, and social imperative (81). The more mature the idea of postmodern literature has become in critical thought, or, frankly, the more exhaustingly warped, the more anti-realism has developed, paradoxically, into one of the symptoms of realism.

Referring back to Beckett’s *Molloy*, there is intention behind its thematic relay of failure and loss. Coming out of the end of World War II in 1945, two years before *Molloy*’s publication, the postmodern literary was at its most infantile and purest of intent. The nonsensical literary escapades of a disturbed, murderous man accosted by the police for sitting on his bicycle in a way that violates “public decency” and compulsively thinks about his “sucking-stone” points toward an exterior post-war world, outside the text’s diegesis, just as unreal as the trajectory of *Molloy*’s journey (17,67). Beckett’s novel employs anti-realism under the guise of social imperative, one nostalgic for a Symbolic that can be made sense of; thus, a crucial unifying narrative component is purposely left out of *Molloy* to signal loss, a highly self-reflexive move. No different than Paul Auster implicating himself in *The New York Trilogy* to tear his stories away from an ontology of text, or Kathy Acker providing the uncontextualized pornographic sketches of ten-year-old Janey Smith in *Blood and Guts in High School* to illuminate the condition of women in twentieth-century America. *Molloy* functions as contained social/literary critique, as it deploys both the formal frame, a non-sensical narrative and parodic stream-

of-consciousness, and content, loss and meaninglessness, of his message.

Alternatively, Chuck Palahniuk, considered postmodern in his own right, appropriates postmodern anti-real tropes in *Fight Club*, published in 1996, to further elaborate on and verify his novel's diegesis.<sup>9</sup> Palahniuk provides an unnamed narrator whose mental state is called into question, like Molloy, though Beckett as author does not self-consciously signal his character's state, unlike Palahniuk.<sup>10</sup> Palahniuk communicates the themes of loss and meaningless through their constant, overt invocation: "Everything you ever create will be thrown away. Everything you're proud of will end up as trash," the reader is repeatedly told, matter-of-factly (150). But a lack of subtlety is not damning in its own right. The fundamental problem is that Palahniuk feels no need to call into question the ontology of text; he never once implicates himself, performs a distancing effect, or disrupts the narrative with the unanswerable. The promise of unity is blithely conveyed as Palahniuk's unnamed narrator is revealed—revelation is antithetical to the postmodern—to be suffering from multiple personality disorder and institutionalized; the institution saves us from him, a far cry from the mental institution in Beckett's *Murphy* or Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, where the institution does not save but instead signifies a greater societal loss. As far as the text communicates, the diegesis of *Fight Club* is never disrupted and remains real, propagating the illusion that the Real can be accessed through representation. In light of this, a quality distinction can

9. Though Palahniuk's *Fight Club* can be considered a derivation of stylistic stream-of-consciousness, it is too ordered and sensical to fit into its critical literary conception. Primarily, within postmodernism, Palahniuk employs transgressive violence and sex, nihilism, and fragmentary formal mechanics.

10. After making one or another declaration, the narrator will call himself a "liar." *FC*'s narrator even ends up in a mental institution in the novel's close, laughably similar to Holden Caulfield. What's worse, *FC* does not seem to revel in its pastiche. Also, there is nothing exclusively postmodern about the unreliable narrator, though that does seem to be axiomatic in most postmodern texts.

be made between successful (see: good) and unsuccessful (see: bad) postmodern literature.

Though making quality distinctions between one text and another almost always leads to more critical problems, the danger is really in making these assertions without full acknowledgement of their fallibility and fluidity. Firstly, this is not a hierarchy; though the language of a hierarchy (good/bad) is being deployed, surface-oriented writers like Palahniuk have their place in the movement right alongside Pynchon. That there be divergent articulations of the form is fundamental because postmodernity maintains a status of constant internal contradiction. Linda Hutcheon calls this phenomenon of self-problematization a "process that is at the heart of postmodernism" (xi). Second, criteria for what I call good or bad postmodernism, especially given a particular historical moment, can shift at will. And no great theme persists; why one text endures and another does not is arbitrary. Also, while one text might not be "truly" postmodern, in my idiosyncratic judgment, in that it has neither social function nor communicates nostalgia, it may have a more appropriate taxonomical association elsewhere. A dichotomous critical frame does engender reductionist approaches to textual analysis, undoubtedly, but this problematic persists within the discourse of postmodern literary criticism anyway.

Two polarized critical communities have hovered around postmodernity since its inception. On the one hand, opponents of the movement, like Frederick Jameson, remark on its "superficiality in the most literal sense," that postmodernist experimentation ushers in an "end to style" and denies history through a "series of pure and unrelated presents in time" (*Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 9,15,27). Jameson, in particular, finds postmodern dabbling in history to be indicative of a larger post-war

“historical amnesia,” as he calls it, finding no worthwhile social or political function to its historiography (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society” 125). Jameson, who more often associates postmodernism with a cultural milieu, is juxtaposed to champions of the postmodern, like Lyotard, who embrace postmodern experimentation and play, characterizing it as noble, forthright, and prosperous for art and society as a whole. Those opposed to undermining the “correct rules” of art “pursue successful careers in mass conformism,” so decrees Lyotard (75). Though Jameson criticizes Lyotard as remarking on something Jameson calls high modernism rather than postmodernism, assignments like these fail to accept postmodernism as multivalent, which they ought. Later critical investigations into the postmodern, like Hutcheon’s, have engaged bad postmodernism within the thematic boundaries of the larger movement, but inevitably conclude that “... as modernist forms became debased by dilution and commercialization, so the same has happened to the postmodern” (31). Hutcheon and others, though critical of Jameson’s reduction of postmodernity to a product of the culture industry, still resist the inherent self-contradiction they espouse when designating *what is* and *is not* postmodern, which is fallacy.

The postmodern, like the exterior world it comments on and is symptomatic of, is infinitely complex and can accommodate works of pure surface, as Jameson might argue, and ones with substantial social impact, like Lyotard’s. The distinction between the two, already alluded to, can be ascertained on a case-by-case basis and do, unfortunately, require quality standards; these are primarily thematic, as postmodern formal elements (fragmentation, asymmetry, and experimentation with the medium) are frequently and

cheaply replicated in popular contemporary writing, which, not coincidentally, usually serve as prime example of bad postmodernism.<sup>11</sup> Good postmodern works are charged with the social and political. Thomas Pynchon plays with historical fact concerning World War II in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, not to undermine history, as Jameson contends, but to interrogate the problems with and resulting from the war; it is a tactic of subversion. Bad postmodern works revel in the vacuum of consumer culture, never subverting it, but operating within its bounds to (supposedly) transgress and (supposedly) experiment in a way that offers no commentary beyond perpetual nihilism/fatalism, of which Palahniuk is stylist par excellence. Postmodern transgressive violence, a la *Fight Club*, does not “scandalize anyone” and is received with “the greatest complacency” by its audience; in other words, the reader is not ideologically disrupted, not brought to question, and only need enjoy the exclusively visceral pleasures of intense violence, not unlike a Schwarzenegger film (Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 4). Here, surface becomes the totalizing narrative impulse.

These quality standards can be said to originate from a historical locale. Applicable literature written during the generally agreed upon inception of postmodernism, around the World Wars, on into the ‘50s and ‘60s, tend to be more social and political than those recent works written in the latter half of the twentieth century and into the present. But writers like David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*, published ironically in the same year as *Fight Club*) defy this point. Today’s worse-off postmodern literary atmosphere could be due in part to Jameson’s “Late Capitalist” consumer culture, one which has no qualms replicating stylistic motifs belonging to highbrow literary writing and using them as

<sup>11</sup> Read anything by Jonathan Safran Foer for elaboration.

gimmicks to sell books, but that would not take into account the continued subversion (see: Kazuo Ishiguro) written into works that bear no formal resemblance to pioneering experimentalists like Burroughs. But where these quality standards come from, and their inevitable contradictions, remain less important than the nuance they bring to the postmodern conversation, marred by a rejection of its relevancy in popular usage due mostly to its catch-all nature.

These developments in literary postmodernism have seen duplication in the visual. Documentary film, at its outset, claimed an unruptured association with the Real, impetus closely aligned with literary realism. One of the forbearers of filmic documentary, Robert Flaherty, produced 1922's *Nanook of the North*, a portrait of Inuit everyday life, in a style dubbed "romantic realism," in which the illusion that viewers were "watching real life" informed all choices in editing and otherwise (Aufderheide 28). Audiences bought the tale of tribesman Nanook, whose actual name was Allakariallak, as factual, despite Flaherty's overt attempts to dramatize his subjects by staging hunts for the camera and (falsely) propagating a tale of the "noble savage," making the Inuit seem wholly detached from the technological world. In truth, Inuit helped Flaherty work with and maintain his own camera equipment (Aufderheide 29). One particularly damning shot from the film involves Nanook biting into a phonograph record, as if he does not understand the device's purpose. The problem in Flaherty's illusion here is that it is, quite literally, a false promise of truth and authenticity through representation; Flaherty does not implicate himself or allude that Nanook is performing his ignorance, and consequently jeopardizes his artistic position if seen through an anti-real postmodern lens. Undoubtedly, as the

filmic form was in its infancy, its high degree of indexicality still proved too tempting for those producing representation by its means to break away from this problematic. And the popularity of Flaherty's work, especially in a time where audiences suffered from a certain illiteracy in regards to the documentary mode, owed much to its accepted authenticity.

This indexical problem persisted into the Grierson School of '50s documentary film and the Direct Cinema of America. Each made a truth claim regarding the content of their associated films, despite John Grierson's famous acknowledgement that documentary was the "creative treatment of actuality" (Nichols 4). Techniques for documentary production still relied on the illusion of a close relation to the Real, and the consequent duping of their audience. The Maysles brothers, American architects of Direct Cinema (sometimes called observational or "fly on the wall"), took a dogmatic approach to their supposed objectivity and lack of mediation, working long hours with their documentary subjects to ensure the perfect filmic moments were captured. Marsha McCreadie, channeling Al Maysles, says it succinctly: "The documentarian should simply be there...an attentive observer on hand when something memorable takes place and relying on serendipitous happenings" (43). The Maysles' films affix themselves within an ontology of text that does not take into consideration its own operations. "Serendipitous moments" appear to happen for Direct Cinema filmmakers, but that serendipity is product of the filmmaker's presence, who are part of that moment and undoubtedly inform it. And though Al Maysles does accept that he is not a "fly on the wall," especially when questioned regarding scenes where he and his brother incidentally appear in their films, he still maintains a

level of objectivity, saying he has no “point of view” (McCreadie 46). In light of films like *Grey Gardens* (1976), which often feels patronizing/exploitative in the treatment of its subjects, Maysles’ claim rings loud with falsity.<sup>12</sup>

A response to “romantic realism,” Greirsonian productions, and Direct Cinema was the *cinéma vérité* works coming out of the French New Wave of the ‘60s. Comparable to what happened in the outset of literary postmodernism, *vérité*’s intent was to defy the “correct rules” of documentary by outwardly acknowledging the presence of the camera, its operators, and the mediated interaction of filmed subjects within the production of associated works (see: Ross McElwee); if it did not, then *vérité* films appeared highly produced/mediated through heavy-handed editing that often mirrored the type seen in television and advertising, with oppressive non-diegetic sound and purposely incoherent narratives. These activities effectively ruptured the illusion of documentary ontology. An example of the form at its height is Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983), a produced glimpse into Japanese life that feels alien and surrealistic, despite its contents being taken from the inane, the everyday, at least from a Japanese perspective. As documentarians egoistically (and cheaply) ground themselves in their work through narration, *Sans Soleil* deviates in that it is not narrated by Marker, but an unidentified woman, and the contents of her narration are lyrical poeticism and abstraction, distancing the viewer even further away from the viewing experience. Marker, consequently, offers a piece of anti-real representation rather than indexical documentary, one which makes no claim to truth or authenticity, a portrait of an Eastern culture so entrancing and disparate from a traditional

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12. The fact that *Grey Gardens* was later made into a Broadway production offers some insight into the content of the documentary.

expository documentary that he actually remarks on the usual visual transmission of foreign cultures into the Western world; these tend to emphasize difference, and by that process, “Other” global identities outside the West. Additionally, the content of Marker’s film is metadiegetic in that multiple worlds/realities develop as the forms of production become more complex: On the one hand, the footage that Marker captures in Japan and edits together, then his post-production manipulations, then the voice of God narration from a woman who seems to have no relation to any of what is being conveyed.

But *cinéma vérité* does, after all, literally translate to “cinematic truth,” so the dangers of postmodern anti-real literature laying claim to a more truthful understanding of the unknowable Real also find themselves in *vérité*. Indeed, the *cinéma vérité* movement has fallen under criticism from major players in the field for this very problematic. But *vérité*, under the guise of social imperative and nostalgia, does not propose truth, instead comments on it, and often signals its own fraudulence to do so. Good *vérité*, rather than espousing truth, “emphasizes that this is the *truth of an encounter* not absolute or untampered truth,” as per Bill Nichols’ assessment (emphasis added, 184). Juxtaposed is the deployment of *vérité* tropes to perpetuate the illusion of “romantic realists.” A controversial documentary filmmaker and practitioner of bad *vérité* is Michael Moore, who implicates himself in his documentaries, a self-reflexive move, but only to bolster the propagated illusion. Time and again, Moore has used his involvement in his documentaries to make them seem more authentic; for instance, his quixotic journeys to seek out powerful figures in business (1988’s *Roger and Me*) and politics (2003’s *Bowling for Columbine*). These journeys, however, are marred by Moore’s tendency for exploitation

and leaving key facts out of his final films. In *Roger and Me*, Moore spends much of the film uselessly trying to secure a meeting with the head of General Motors, Roger B. Smith; Moore's quest is meant to be a failure, if nothing else, to prove how small he and all of us are in the face of big business. What Moore left out of the equation was that he was eventually given a meeting with Roger B. Smith. While his film's narrative illusion aids its articulation as liberal polemic, of which Moore is an accomplished master, it is flat out illusion, no different than Flaherty encouraging Nanook to play ignorant. The impulse, here, is founded on an ontology of text, which vérité, like good postmodern literature, wants no part of.

Moore's exploitation of his subjects is distinct from literature insofar as it can only be explicitly conveyed through realistic visual representation, the camera. Moore's most famous infraction in this regard is the portrait of an impoverished woman in Flynt, Michigan from *Roger and Me* who raises rabbits, skins them, and eats them, all of which the viewer gets to witness. The woman comes off as explicitly "less than" as Moore leads her on in interview questions and balks at her killing of the rabbits. This portrait is actually antithetical to Moore's underlying political message; if he had not intervened in the woman's filmed presence, she probably would have been valorized by the means of her sustenance, which clearly spoke to the terrible condition of Flynt, Michigan—this fact was Moore's endgame, after all. Instead, the woman seems pathetic and weird. In *Bowling for Columbine*, Moore barrels into the home of actor Charlton Heston, the then-president of the NRA, to prove how pig-headed and gun crazy Heston is. Instead, we see the feeble and contradictory responses of someone just beginning to show signs

of Alzheimer's, the disease which eventually claimed Heston's life.<sup>13</sup> In the film, Heston laxly recalls "wise old dead guys" who invented America and the "blood on the hands" of German ancestry, as Moore heatedly informs Heston's every reply, often taking their confrontation to bizarre and incongruent ideological places. Moore seems to be arguing with himself.

Moore's films are the most successful documentaries in American history (2004's *Fahrenheit 9/11* especially) due in no small part to their troublesome claims to authenticity and fascinating polemics; what has changed in twenty-first century reception, rather than masses of duped audiences buying into the indexical, is postmodern backlash regarding claims to authenticity. Very often, Moore's films will be watched with a savvy viewer's keen eye for what is being manufactured. Even those ideologically opposed to *Fahrenheit 9/11* watched it just to point out the factual errors, the constructedness; this critical activity, especially practiced by a mass audience, is no doubt a result of postmodern questioning of representation, disseminated by literature, art, and elsewhere, which is incredibly promising. However, audience destabilizations never undermine his films' ontology because Moore as creator never signals the inherent fraudulence of his creations; the illusion is, in so many ways, maintained, and the anti-real, rather than subverting reality, becomes and sometimes supersedes reality. And just because Moore will not call his films "documentaries," only "movies," still is not enough to properly decenter. *Sans Soleil*, as good anti-real vérité, does not claim authenticity, quite the opposite, and distances itself so far and away from the external world it supposedly captures that viewers have no

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13. Nichols elaborates on this in a number of his critical examinations of modern vérité, including *Introduction to Documentary*.

choice but to call it a movie rather than a documentary.

The correlation I am making between the postmodern literary and cinéma vérité is that part of what they embrace *should be* self-contradiction, primarily because, as per Lyotard, correct rules and forms are what these movements deny, and pieces of representation that their most noble practitioners denigrate they must accept as their own—Moore and Marker are part of the same continuum. Often, in critical media discourse, just like postmodern literary criticism, there is dissociation with good vérité from the indigent offspring of its movement, like contemporary Reality TV. And, not coincidentally, in popular conversation, vérité has become a catch-all designation, no different than the term postmodernism, meant to demarcate any visual representation that employs handy-cams, synch sound, and other stylistic tropes of vérité pioneers. Cinéma vérité cannot rightfully disown Reality TV or any other bad vérité as that would imply that the movement itself does not understand its ideological foundations, which I see as an outgrowth of postmodernism.

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## Aube

L'aube sonore  
Languit sur le fleuve  
Qui s'évapore

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

## Other Eggs (Nudgings toward a Parallax Gap)

**Words: W. C. Bamberger**

**Drawings: Aja Bamberger**

### Dawn

The resounding dawn  
Pines on the river  
Then fades away

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

We all believe we know an egg when we see one with our own two eyes. We not only know what it looks like (when we say “egg” nearly everyone thinks chicken egg, a convention that will, for the most part, be followed here), but if asked to characterize an egg, most of us can easily come up with a list of associations—a symbol of perfection and simplicity, nourishment or birth, even life itself. An egg, in the main, is plain, rural, homey, a comfort food—at times even a comfort sight, a talisman not meant to be eaten, but gazed upon: the Easter eggs we hunt once a year are trophies, not breakfast. Eggs are fragile, we believe, and at our mercy; care needs to be taken with them. This is the most common view of the egg, one lacking parallax.

Parallax, at its most basic, is when the difference in the image processed by our two eyes produces a third, a combined image conveying complex information like distance and the experience of depth. The red and the blue lenses in 3-D glasses operate this way, produce depth by parallax, by combining two images of the same sight separated by distance and color. If the images were identical they would appear flat, remain static; it’s the deliberate mismatch that wakes the brain, makes it create depth and texture, construct everything we think of as a “realistic” view. Parallax, and not just that produced

by red and blue lenses, can be an illusion, at times even an illusion of the most attractive sort: where photos of two different but similar faces are shown to a subject by way of a simple stereoscopic viewer, with each eye seeing only one of the faces, the resulting image in the viewer's mind—and the mind always has the final say in any parallax—tends to combine the most attractive feature of the pair. But, as this essay means to illustrate, a view without parallax of some kind, a flat two-dimensional view of anything, is even more of an illusion. Our common views of things, of what we think we know, has no parallax, produces no complex information, no depth. But there are other, more complex, at times more difficult, ways to view things—even the homely egg.

Slavoj Žižek writes about an “insurmountable *parallax gap*, the confrontation of two closely linked perspectives between which no common ground is possible.”<sup>1</sup> We resist the emergence of such gaps with all our will: we already believe we understand what something is (or might be) when we look at it, and that parts of us that “see” or “understand” do their best to lodge that comfortable belief in the things we see. “Sure the picture is in my eye, but I am also in the picture,” Žižek reminds us.<sup>2</sup> This imposed parallax, a combination of what something is and what we already “know” it is, is how we tend to see everything, egg included. It's an interesting paradox that the best way to illustrate the distances between the varied realities and embodiments of things comfortably named by a collective noun is to gather them together, have them jostle and grate against one another—a convention that will be followed here.

We are comfortable when we can believe there is a close correlation between the two images we receive, be those images from our two eyes or between vision and reality

1. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 4.

2. Ibid. 32.

or even idea and reality. It is a physiological truth that when there is too wide a gap between one image and another—be it the red and blue separations in a 3-D movie or the differences in the features of two faces—the brain cannot combine the two; the gap is too wide. The result is double vision and headaches. I believe our comfortable image of the egg (including its images in art) and some aspects of its reality are drastically irreconcilable, create such a gap if we allow them into our view. This essay with pictures, then, is meant to coax the reader/viewer into keeping one eye on the common image of the egg and the other on overlooked, less comfortable images. This essay, let it be understood, hopes to give the reader a headache.



*Drawing 101:* To draw someone's portrait, begin by sketching an egg-shape, the wide, blunt end topmost.

*Biology 101:* The pigment in a chicken's egg is pressed into the shell as it is laid; the wide, blunt end emerges first—as is true of human infants, as well—

and endures the most pressure, is always the darkest.

Sanskrit scholar Paul Deussen published a number of anecdotes from his friendship with Friedrich Nietzsche. Among these is a description of the philosopher's lodgings, which Deussen last visited just before Nietzsche left for Turin.

*Deussen:* The furniture was as simple as could be. To one side, I saw his books, most of which were familiar to me from before, a rustic table with a coffee cup on it, eggshells, manuscripts, toilet articles, all in great disorder. . . .<sup>3</sup>

The eggshells were a constant, witness to Nietzsche's decision to cleave to a very restricted diet: *Lachsschinken* (a kind of smoked pork loin) mailed to him by his mother was a mainstay, as were boiled eggs. Nietzsche was depressed at this time. He scanned precipitation records to make sure he moved to the sunniest possible location. This is how he ended up in Turin, where he hugged the neck of a whipped horse and went irretrievably mad.

*December, 1966:* Blues composer Willie Dixon writes and Koko Taylor sings,

Like the bad destroys the good, you know the good destroys the bad  
Like the glad destroys the mad, you know the mad destroys the glad  
[ . . . ]

I don't know how it all began

3. Quoted in Guy Davenport, *Objects on a Table: Harmonious Disarray in Art and Literature* (Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 83.

Which come first, the egg or the hen?<sup>4</sup>

In 1888, the rainy blue year before his madness descended, surrounded by the broken shells of those boiled eggs, Nietzsche, with the untempered ferocity of an Old Testament Prophet, wrote "The Law Against Christianity," which includes this inspired image:

The accursed places where Christianity has sat upon its basilisk eggs shall be razed to the ground and as despicable spots on the earth become the terror of all the world after. Poisonous snakes shall be raised upon them.<sup>5</sup>

A "basilisk" is a legendary, preternaturally lethal serpent. In classical accounts it is born of the egg of a snake or a toad brooded upon by a cockerel (a young rooster). A more modern take on the basilisk has it the other way around: "This snake, which may reach gigantic size, and live many hundreds of years, is born from a chicken's egg, hatched beneath a toad."<sup>6</sup>

What does Nietzsche mean by these "eggs"? It seems clear that he means the beliefs, the doctrines of the church than could be reproduced down through the generations. I doubt Nietzsche tried to reconcile the split between such eggs and the ones he cracked open on his writing table; that way would lie madness.

Unlike legends of babies raised by wolves or studies of chimps raised in the suburbs, in these stories a mismatch of egg and sitter hatches a horror: egg mythology as sociological cautionary tale. And this points out the irrefutable and unnerving answer to Willie Dixon's

4, "What Came First the Egg or the Hen" (1966).

5. Quoted in Lesley Chamberlain, *Nietzsche in Turin: An Intimate Biography*, 200.

6. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (New York: Scholastic, 1999), 290.

question: it's only within the mineral-encased laboratory of the egg that new traits can arise, new species begin their slow rise to viability. A hen (as any mother) is a static carrier, her DNA all but two-dimensional; but the egg she lays sometimes combines Darwin's tireless mechanisms and Dr. Moreau's free hand with experimentation. "Candling an egg," holding it between our eye and a light to check for fertilization, can only tell us so much; we can never know who or what an egg is constructing, parallax-like, scrambling up from the disparities of yolk and fertilization DNA, until it hatches.

The passage about the basilisk eggs is quoted by Lesley Chamberlin, one of the more purple modern writers on Nietzsche. She uses it as a lead-in to this tangential-seeming observation:

The snakes writhed in his consciousness like the spirochetes curling around his brain tissue. (Students of syphilis in Nietzsche's day more often compared the twisting bacteria to spermatozoa, linking beginning and end in a man's hapless fate in being a man, but he was never a realist.)<sup>7</sup>

Does Chamberlain mean what she says here? That the realist's philosophy links the form (the tiny egg-headed-tadpole shape of the spermatozoa) of man's beginning with that of his end? Probably; it would fit the poetic tone of her argument, and our conventional (who truly knows how accurate this is?) image of Nietzsche, the nihilistic aphorist. But nowhere does Chamberlin ask an obvious question: What do spermatozoa *do*? Answer: they hunt, furiously and tirelessly, for an egg. In the absence of any (metaphorical, barring

the possibility of a second parasite) egg in which to lodge themselves, the (metaphorical) spermatozoa destroy the brain. So, the realist's (Nietzsche-inflected) view might take the aphoristic form, "where the will to life cannot raise, it razes." This purple play on words would not have occurred to Nietzsche, of course. To "raze" and to "raise" are not homonyms in German.<sup>8</sup> Still, they remain entangled opposites, which is to say complements that need one another. Not just the churches, but the eggs of the church themselves, have to be razed before even such vicious creatures as poisonous snakes can be raised on the same ground.



*An Exegesis of Job*: It is intriguing: there are no eggs in our greatest poem of creation, the Book of Genesis, none in the Psalms, none in Joshua, they are absent from the creation and the most triumphant Books. Eggs do appear in the books of bitter prophecy and prohibitions: some of the Prophets—in Isaiah and Jeremiah—once in Deuteronomy. They appear most tellingly in the Book of Job, our great poem of unwarranted suffering. In the first such instance these are ostrich eggs, props to characterize ostrich mothers as stupid and neglectful, ignoring their own eggs. In the other instance the eggs are only conjectural: translations of a mysterious phrase (ancient enough to have been eased

7. Lesley Chamberlin, *Nietzsche in Turin: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Picador, 1996), Chamberlin, *Ibid*.

8. German does, however, have its own contribution to make: "Egg" = "Ei" (pronounced "I"); "Eggs" = "Eier" pronounced "ire."

over from Syriac to Arabic to Hebrew) in C.6 V.6 range from “the white of an egg” to “the saliva of the dreams.” Whatever it signifies, eggs or dreams, Job is holding it up as an example of something so tasteless and unpalatable—“drool-like” would be a literal translation—that even he, who bore every plague God set upon him, could not bear to eat it.

*Shell Exegesis I:* There are no eggshells in the Bible, but “shells” are mentioned in Kabbalistic commentaries. These are shells which are pieces of the broken vessels that Kabbalists believe shattered under the force of the power of holy light. Logically, these shells might be potshards, but the term “shells” would seem a bad fit. We might ask ourselves, what kind of shells would be associated with creation, but allow only partial light to shine from (through) them? Again, candling an egg means holding an egg between our eye and the light.

*Shell Exegesis II:* Gershom Scholem has written about the Kabbalistic notion of *Ein Sof*—God in an infinite, formless state—being mystically present in all forms in the world. Paradoxically, “The truer the form, the more powerful the life of the formless within. [...] [The] mystical nihilism that destroys any shape dwells hand in hand with the prudent moderation struggling to comprehend the shape. One might say that both tendencies are peering out of the same shell.”<sup>9</sup> This shell, possessed of an exceptionally true (pure) shape, in which both nihilism and moderation are lodged, is unidentified.

Whether or not these shells are at too great a distance from where we began for a reader to be able to see a connection depends (as does everything here, for that matter) on what he or she lodges in that pure shell. I see chicken eggs as the model of these mystical forms, but then: During a visit to the home of Guy Davenport in the early 1990s, he told me about an early anthropology experiment. A group of indigenous people who had never seen a movie were seated before a screen and a film was shown. The scenes included people, dwellings, etc. When the film ended the anthropologists asked the viewers what they had seen. They all talked excitedly about the chicken they had seen run across the screen. They had not been able to “see” anything else because of the unfamiliarity of the medium, but the chicken was important and familiar enough to them that they had all seen it. (I would like to imagine that if the chicken had stopped to lay an egg, the viewers would have seen that, as well.)

Eggs in word or image can mirror or absorb context, gather in the surrounding mood, be it glad or mad, comic or foreboding, store it to be released to later readers or viewers.



9. Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 41-42.

The eggs on the sideboard in Claude Monet's *Le Dejeuner* (The Luncheon), for example, do much to convey the material comfort of Monet's family life. They do so by participating in a wonderful symmetry. Guy Davenport detailed it thusly:

If we make two axes, at right angles, one from us to the back wall, and one across the table, we find that we have connected egg with egg, the heel of bread with a glass of wine.<sup>10</sup>

Davenport goes on to describe a radial geometry that connects newspaper with novels, the cruet containing salad oil with the oil lamp, the full loaf of bread with the bottle of wine, and more. But within all these connections, in this display of visual imagination and geometric precision, Monet finds nothing to connect to the eggs other than themselves. In the context of a painting about harmony and interconnection, this is not a compliment; the egg remains isolated in its ceramic egg-cup.

Samuel Butler, author of *The Way of all Flesh*, lived in New Zealand from 1859 to 1864, making his fortune as a sheep farmer before returning to England. Butler's *Notebooks*, published posthumously, include a number of sketches about rural living, some of them revolving around eggs. In "A Sailor Boy and Some Chickens" Butler is riding on a train with a girl who has a box of chirping young chicks that she is feeding "biscuits" (cookies). The box she chose to carry them in is labeled "German egg powders. One packet equal to six eggs." Egg powders, in addition to their use in wartime rations

for soldiers, were used from the time of their invention as ingredients in mass-produced baked goods that didn't need to rise—like cookies. A young sailor boards the train and sits in the compartment with Butler, the girl, and the chicks. The sailor eventually breaks down and asks, "with an expression of infinite wonder: 'And did you hatch them from they powders?'" Butler's wry comment: "If we had said that they had been hatched from the powders he would have certainly believed it."<sup>11</sup> (The sailor's only mistake, of course, was in the temporal sequence: the next generation that hatches will, to some small degree, owe its existence to the powdered eggs in the cookies.)

In a more compact and much more interesting sketch, "The Egg that Hen belonged to," the woman Butler buys eggs from is in a boastful mood and says, "Now would you believe it? The egg that hen belonged to laid 53 hens running and never stopped." The answer to this linguistic riddle: "She called the egg a hen and the hen an egg."<sup>12</sup>

This encounter is undated<sup>13</sup> but, in my view, its particulars suggest it was the inspiration for a crucial turn in Butler's thought, a tendency to look at things as if in a mirror, familiar but reversed, or as if from the far side of a parallax gap. Among the most obvious: he appears to have been the first to write "A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg." Most take Butler's comment as a joke; I believe he was completely serious, in that he was suggesting that his readers follow his example and find ways to look at and think about things they believe they know. "A hen is only an egg's way of making another egg" is his sheep farmer's vernacular take on Hegel: "Thinking is always the negation of what we have immediately before us."

11. Samuel Butler, *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler* (ed. Henry Festing Jones) (London: A. C. Fifield, 1919), 245.

12. *Ibid.*, 249.

13. In his introduction to the original edition of *The Note-Books of Samuel Butler*, Henry Festing Jones describes how, late in his life, Butler edited, rewrote and rearranged all the notes he had made over a lifetime and disposed of the originals. Therefore, dates (a very small number include such information) and the original form of these notes as well as any additions or deletions cannot be known.

10. Guy Davenport, *Objects on a Table: Harmonious Disarray in Art and Literature* (Washington, D. C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 15.

The usual date given for Butler’s hen and egg inversion is 1878, but fourteen years earlier—only four years after *On the Origin of Species* appeared—Butler began (anonymously) publishing the notes that became the basis for his famous 1872 satirical utopian novel *Erewhon*. (The title is “nowhere” reversed and altered by some pedantic elocution teacher’s insistence on the proper pronunciation of “wh.”) There are a great number of aspects of Erewhonian society that are inversions of how we normally see the world, inversions that follow the general outline of the hen and egg swap: people who commit crimes, for example, are considered ill, while those who come down with illnesses are treated as criminals. The most famous parts of the novel—chapters that anticipate more recent debates and fictions about the development of AI—forecast an even more drastic inversion. Erewhonians have banished machines, believing that they, in line with evolutionary principles, will develop intelligence and evolve to the point of becoming the dominant species, with humans being reduced to being their servants. This allows Butler’s characters to debate the distance between the living and the mechanical, argue about where the line might be, even invert the two. In this example, Butler trots out yet another egg to widen the parallax between what we believe we know about living chickens and eggs and their industrial reality:

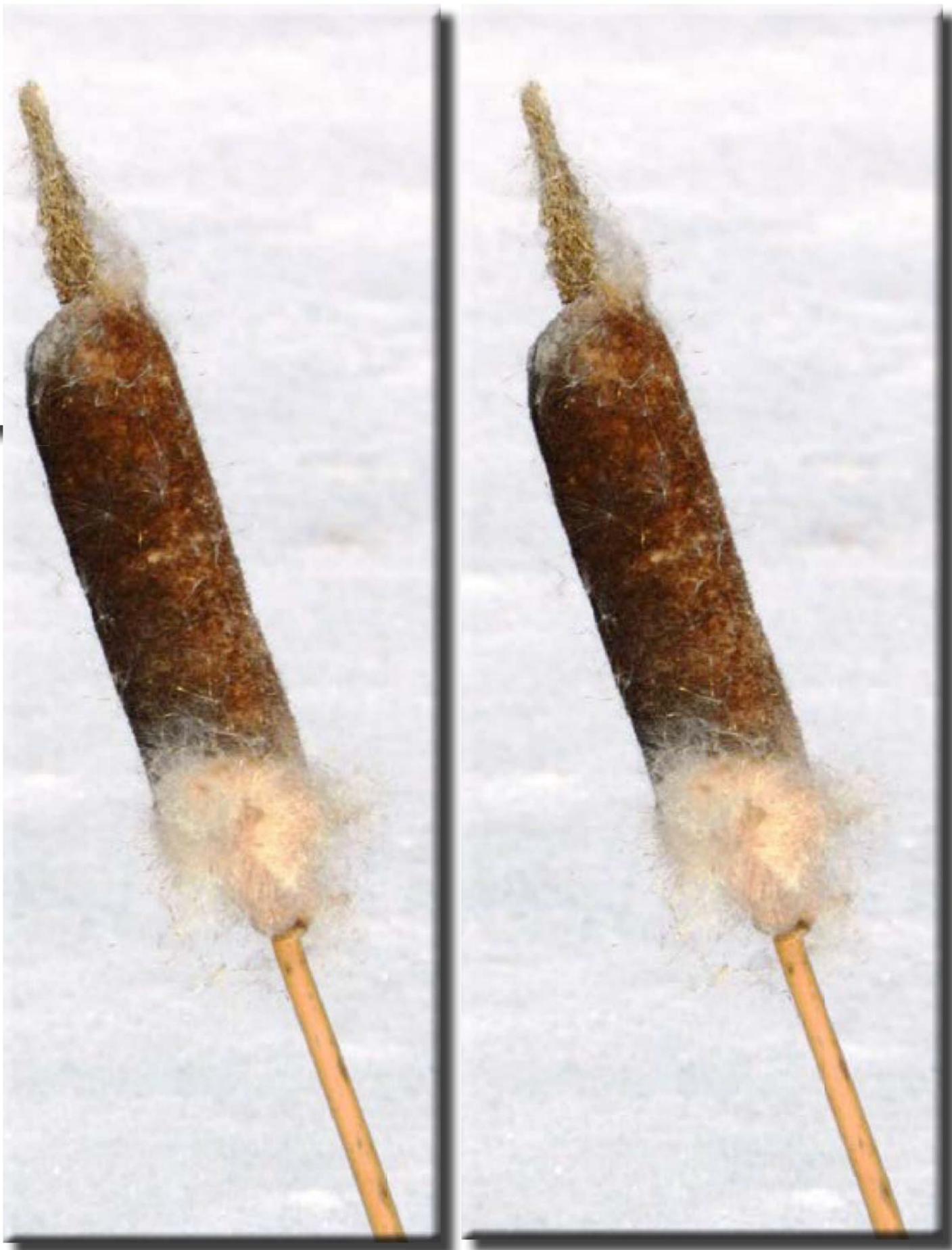
Where does consciousness begin, and where end? Who can draw the line? Who can draw any line? Is not everything interwoven with everything? Is not machinery linked with animal life in an infinite variety of ways? The shell of a hen’s egg is made of a delicate white ware and is a machine as much as an egg-cup is: the shell is a device for holding the egg, as much

as the egg-cup for holding the shell: both are phases of the same function; the hen makes the shell on her inside, but it is pure pottery. She makes her nest outside of herself, for convenience sake, but the nest is not more of a machine than the egg-shell is. A “machine” is only a “device.”<sup>14</sup>

Held up to that light this essay, too, is only a device, a machine for making readers question their view of eggs. An obvious question: Why build such a machine? Answer: To help all of us become akin to Erewhonians in spirit, to try to lodge within all of us the habit of breaking away from our narrow views, to lodge within us the habit of inverting the roles of life and machine, egg and hen, of separating our views of eggs from what we comfortably believe about them—as a first step in applying this to everything we think we know—and to welcome the pains and confusions this will inevitably bring, as we take in the expanding view within the parallax gap.



14 Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* (London and New York: Penguin, 1985), 199.



**La sauterelle**

Gaie sauterelle  
Frêle branche aux fleurs nouvelles  
L'air est peint en vert

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

***Aspetterà: Anna and Claudia, L'avventura and the Neutral***

**by Lisa Tagliaferri, City University of New York, New York**

**The Grasshopper**

Cheery Grasshopper  
Fragile twig of budding flowers  
The air is painted green

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

In his film *L'avventura*, Michelangelo Antonioni creates discord by filling his screen with waiting, uncertainty and *temps morts*, effectively approaching a level of neutrality throughout the film. Much of *L'avventura* occurs in real time, complete with tedious minutes of expecting, delaying, and then ultimately, realizing neither climax nor resolution. When asked what he found to be essential in a film narrative, fellow Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini stated, “A mio modo di vedere, *l'attesa*: ogni soluzione nasce dall'attesa. È l'attesa che fa vivere, l'attesa che scatena la realtà, l'attesa che — dopo la preparazione — dà la liberazione. ... L'attesa è la forza di ogni avvenimento della nostra vita: e così anche per il cinema” (91-92). Adhering to Rossellini's view of cinema, Antonioni uses waiting as a narrative device, and may also see it as the force behind every moment of cinema and our lives. However, rather than situating waiting as a means to bring liberation, Antonioni instead uses cinematic waiting to usher in the Barthesian neutral.

As Roland Barthes meditates on what he perceives to be “the Neutral,” he writes on it in terms of a “will-to-possess,” a “will-to-live” and also, how it is not invisible but



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“unsustainable.” The mystery behind Anna’s disappearance is initially a driving force of the film, but it eases and unwinds, and disappears as well, while Claudia alone grapples with first Anna’s disappearance, and then the disappearance of the mystery: both Anna and the mystery are unsustainable in Antonioni’s panorama. The two female protagonists, in the beginning of the film are presented as complementing opposites — the dark-haired Anna wears white while the fair-haired Claudia wears black — that ultimately cancel each other out and achieve a yin-yang neutrality. However, Anna’s disappearance leaves Claudia missing her complement, and she attempts to recover Anna through finding her, becoming her (“will-to-live” as Anna, “will-to-possess” Anna), possessing her lover, and

ultimately engaging with the waiting and unsustainability of Anna’s being.

The opening shot of *L'avventura* features Anna walking toward the camera wearing a feminine white dress that contrasts sharply with her dark complexion. Judging by the initial sequence that takes place in Rome, the viewer may presume that the protagonist will be Anna, an expectation that would have been heightened for the initial viewers in 1960, as Lea Massari was a well-known film actress whereas Monica Vitti, in the role of Claudia, was relatively unknown (Nowell-Smith 40). When Claudia first enters the film, she is walking behind the main action that is taking place between Anna and her diplomat father, and she walks right off the screen, “clearly set up as a bystander” (Nowell-Smith 40). She smiles and acts jovially, unaware of the ambiguous and dark conversation that had just occurred. Through Anna’s father, the viewer is already introduced to the theme of absence and disappearance, as he is accustomed to spending time alone, though we are unclear as to whose fault it is, and for him Anna is already missing, possibly in more ways than the viewer can understand. As Anna’s father walks off the screen, Claudia excuses herself for being late: “è molto che aspetti?” (“Did you wait long?”) Although it did not seem as though Anna had been waiting, the concept of waiting has been introduced with these words.

When Claudia walks on the screen, she does not at first appear to be in visual opposition to Anna, as she is seen in the background, and is not wearing all dark clothes (a dark top with a gingham black and white pencil skirt). However, her clothes have straighter lines and therefore appear less feminine, and her shock of blonde hair serves as a visual cue indicating the contrast between herself and Anna. Further, the initial expressions of Anna and Claudia are extremely dissimilar: Anna’s knitted eyebrows

and frown cause her to appear worried and discontented while Claudia is smiling, and appears cheerful, as though Anna is wearing the tragic mask of Melpomene and Claudia is wearing the comic mask of Thalia. After our initial meeting with Claudia, Antonioni opts for mostly medium close-ups in the initial scene and in the piazza scene, making the viewer more aware of the contrast between the two young women. In these shots, their clothes and hair colors appear as opposites in the black and white landscape, as though creating a yin and yang. When Anna's father leaves the piazza, he is framed between the two women, which foreshadows what is to occur with Sandro, and also suggestive of a father-filial quality to the two women's respective romantic relationships with Sandro.

Because Antonioni shoots from behind, the viewer is prevented from seeing the final emotions in this scene, as none of the characters' facial expressions are available on-screen. This type of shot is also indicative of a particular point of view within a film; Claudia, as the furthest back in these shots and the only one to remain as a character, provides her perspective as the most influential in the film. As Anna's father walks away, looking into his house, Anna is looking at him, and Claudia is looking at Anna, with just barely the tip of her nose turned toward Anna. In effect, the viewer is simultaneously looking at Claudia as an observer, but also identifying with her as though watching the sequence through her eyes. As Nowell-Smith writes, "[women's] position on the outside, and the role assigned to them of observers of opaque social mechanisms, means that Antonioni's heroines are the focal point of such insight as is offered into the workings of the world" (52). The viewer will realize later on that Claudia is not a part of the elite class that is most ubiquitous in the film, and can therefore identify with her as an outsider in part due to her status. However, because of her relationship with Anna, Claudia can

engage the viewer with the central action of the film. Antonioni situates Claudia as an observer, which is emphasized throughout the film by shots that show the back of her head along with what she is seeing. Thus, we are also subject to her interpretations, and our view of *L'avventura* is glossed by Claudia's thoughts.

After this initial episode, there is another shot from behind during the brief scene in which the two women are driven to Sandro's apartment. Because of Antonioni's preference for continuity, he always shows scenes of traveling from one location to the next, which adds to his *temps morts* and the concept of waiting within *L'avventura*. What is very striking in this shot is once again the contrast between the two women, and also the near indiscernibility of Anna:

While Claudia is partially lit, Anna is engulfed by shadow, which makes her even more difficult to see due to her dark hair. Visually, Anna has already disappeared. The contrast between the two women is even more obvious now, and the lightness and darkness may be suggestive of their personalities, and of consciousness and oblivion. Again, by choosing to use a shot from behind, Antonioni is allowing the viewer to observe the characters, as well as see what they see, as through a secondary narration. Despite the brevity of this scene, it allows for the passage from Anna's father to Sandro, and enforces several of Antonioni's emphases that have already manifested in the film.

In the next scene, in the square outside of Sandro's apartment, there is further development of the theme of waiting within the narrative. As the two women get out of the car, Claudia says, "Io ti aspetto qui, eh?" ("I'll wait here, eh?") to Anna, to which Anna does not respond. Even in this statement, Claudia is waiting for a reply that is never fulfilled. Instead, Claudia must ask Anna where it is she is going, as she is heading in the direction opposite of Sandro's apartment. Anna makes the excuse that she is thirsty and

that she is therefore going to a café, but Claudia tells her that she must not do this while Sandro has been waiting half an hour, and has not seen Anna for a month (suggesting that, in actuality, Sandro has been waiting the full month despite the timing within the film). Even though the viewer has not seen Sandro yet, he is already associated with the act of waiting, as a gender reversed Penelope waiting for the wandering Anna-Odysseus. As the exchange progresses, Anna states that in some ways it is easier to be apart from one's lover, as when one is in front of him, "tutto è li," suggesting that the lack of lover means more to her than the presence of her lover. In *The Neutral*, Barthes quotes Angelus Silesius: "If you love something, you love nothing. / God is neither this nor that. Give leave to the something," showing that the object of affection as well as his nothingness is one in the same; the lover is neither this nor that (60). We must question whether Anna loves Sandro's absence or presence more, or if it is the intersection of the two — that is, the neutral — that Anna most desires. Also, what role does Anna's pleasure of Sandro's absence play in her own absence later in the film?

After this exchange has occurred, there is a brief moment when Anna faces toward the camera and Claudia is behind, adding to their juxtaposition. The closeness of the two characters allows their contrasting garments to be very evident, in addition to their respective light and dark appearances. This also clarifies Anna's position as the observed and distant character, while we are privy instead to Claudia's view of the square, away from Sandro's apartment. In the instance of this still, Anna sighs and decides to leave the square, but Sandro spots the two women and says he will be right down. Anna then joins him in his apartment, slowly moves around with intense expressions that later lead to a

small laugh as she begins to undress. Sandro tells her that her friend is waiting downstairs, to which Anna replies, "aspetterà" ("she will wait"), leaving Claudia in suspension below. Anna is wearing a white slip beneath her white dress, and as the two lovers make their way for the bed, Claudia is seen below in the square through the window. Sandro shuts the curtains, but Claudia is still visible, as both observer and now very literal outsider.

Antonioni's use of the window is very skillful in this scene, although the interior apartment and exterior square, in addition to the vertical difference, serve as a means to divide, the window allows the outsider Claudia to observe the action within. In his monograph on Antonioni, Sam Rohdie explains this scene in relation to the function of windows marking boundaries between spaces:

for example, [this function occurs in] the very complicated spatial play outside Sandro's apartment in Rome in *L'avventura* of the shifting perspectives between Claudia on the outside and Anna on the inside, and then the reversal of those places and — an autonomous outside gaze by the camera — finding an interest in the rush of the Tiber independently of anything taking place in the narrative and from a perspective which simultaneously overlaps a view from the gallery where Claudia is and the bedroom where Anna is, but is neither of their views. (66)

In a sense, once Claudia enters the gallery, there is a sense of the narrator displaced, during which time the camera has more omniscient leeway, which is necessary because otherwise we would not hear the dialogue between Sandro and Anna. In addition, the momentary attention to the Tiber foreshadows the importance that water will have later

in the film. The use of the window, and then the subsequent doorway could imply many metaphors of seeing and observing, but as the scene is about to end, Claudia closes the door to Sandro's apartment:

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In a very beautiful shot, Claudia lingers in the doorway, outside the building, while her shadow is projected inside, she is neutrally hovering the threshold between interior and exterior, a neutral being between two worlds. Ultimately, as seen in the still above, Claudia decides to close the door, keeping her distance from Anna and Sandro for the time being, and reasserting her status as observer.

The shot of Claudia shutting the door dissolves into an uncharacteristically rapid scene of the three driving from Rome to Sicily: this is one of very few moments in the film in which the viewer does not feel the full time that the characters feel. Despite this quickened pace, we are still aware of the sense of wandering and traveling, though we are denied the waiting. This quick shot is in opposition to the gratuitously long and continuous shots that are about to occur in the yacht and on the island. On the yacht we are introduced to the secondary characters, who are never fully developed. Briefly, Claudia wears a white button-down shirt over her black bathing suit, momentarily becoming a figure of complete lightness. Anna, as well, is wearing a white dress or robe with a watercolor butterfly pattern, when she tells Sandro to sunbathe rather than read the newspaper. Anna encourages a lack of activity, suspension from doing, and thus waiting while physically wandering within the boat. Anna is comparable to the water this day, which is first smooth like oil (as Giulia says) then becomes tumultuous. Barthes quotes Chang-tzu: "To the one who stays within himself without things remaining in him, things show themselves such as they are; his movement is apathetic as is that of water, *his immobility is that of the mirror*, his reply is that of the echo" (182). Anna is apathetic as is water, immobile (being moved rather than moving herself), and becomes little more than an echo after her disappearance. Though we never see a direct reflection of Anna (Barthes is referring to Narcissus in this lecture), she is characterized as being self-involved, and seems as though she may be more in love with herself than she is with Sandro. Further, Claudia serves as a reflection of Anna, a looking-glass Anna who is Anna's opposite in some ways, but her manifestation in others, and as the plot develops Claudia resembles Anna more and more.

Sandro suggests going for a swim, but Claudia replies it is too frightening. Giulia tells the group that at one time the Aeolian Islands were volcanoes, and though her lover Corrado responds to her dismissively, her statement gives insight into the landscape as character. Next, the group discusses the names of two of the islands, further emphasizing their status as characters. Antonioni spends as much time shooting the landscape as he does the human characters, suggesting that the terrain is equally, if not more important than the people who occupy it. As volcanic islands, the landscape Antonioni depicts is charged with the same waiting and period of suspension that also engage the human characters. Interestingly, the dream story that Giuliana tells her son in *Red Desert* is very similar to the landscape and happenings in this part of *L'avventura*: “The island is a metaphor for her isolation. The boat is an opportunity, though as it turns out an illusory one, to escape her loneliness. ... There are several boats in the film — a central and recurring image — suggesting travel, change, the possibilities of a new life...” (Baumbach 28). The volcanic islands in *L'avventura* are isolated, but have latent power, and could stand as a foil to any of the characters or as another polarity to the group. The archipelago of isolated individual islands is like the collection of isolated people who may believe that their short voyage will bring change and new possibilities, but they are hopelessly wandering, and the only change that occurs is the disappearance of Anna, of which the viewer is left wondering if this is a change at all.

In a rare early moment of introspection, Parizia states that she does not understand the islands; she says they are “poverini” surrounded by nothing but water. A moment later, she is absorbed with her dog, Cosimo, revealing her lack of attention but also perhaps

indicative of the earthly condition of being surrounded by nothing but the cosmos. This projection on the islands as poor things can also be said of the people who are swimming at the moment, isolated and surrounded only by water. Anna in particular is presented as a small white island surrounded by almost-black water. Her swimmer's cap as a small white beacon consumed by darkness suggests a corruption of the innocent Anna. Again, the bathing fashions of Anna and Claudia mimic and oppose each other: Anna wears a black and white bathing suit with a white bathing cap while Claudia wears a black bathing suit with a black and white cap, as though they are each other's inverse. Though wearing white can indicate that Anna is a sacrificial figure, and though she is later compared to a lamb, in this scene Anna is crying wolf (or shark, to be exact), thus compromising her status as a pure being (perhaps suggested by the black water that is engulfing her). As Anna gets back onto the yacht with some assistance, Claudia immediately doubts Anna's sighting of the shark, asking how she knew it was there, and whether it touched her. In this instance, Claudia serves as a moral conscience to Anna, and also confronts the corporality of the shark while Anna engages with the absence of the shark. When the two are alone, Anna tells Claudia that she lied about the shark, substantiating the closeness between the two.

In this same scene of intimacy, Anna gives Claudia one of her garments. The two are changing out of their bathing suits and Anna asks Claudia which piece of clothing she should wear. Claudia grabs the darker item, feeling the garment with interest, and tells Anna to wear that one, because it is divine (“è delizioso”), to which Anna responds that she should try it on (“e perché non tela provi?”). Claudia excitedly puts on the garment,

the two women smile and Anna tells her that it looks better on Claudia than on herself and that she should keep it, while Anna puts on the light-colored dress. Because Claudia “is an intruder from a lower class,” Ian Cameron posits, “Anna treats her in a slightly patronizing way — having her wait outside while she makes love with Sandro or offering to give her a blouse which she likes” (16). Though Anna leaves her waiting in the square, Claudia does not seem phased, and as we recall, Claudia was late in getting to Anna’s house in the opening scene. Anna’s gift also does not seem patronizing, but merely a component of an intimate female relationship, which they clearly enjoy judging by their closeness as they change. In respect of Anna’s impending disappearance, the gift could also read as the suicidal tendency to give possessions away, but if there is any relationship between the gift and the disappearance it remains as an element of the mystery.

The last time the viewer sees Anna is shortly after her exchange with Claudia, on the rocky shore of Liscia Bianca, following an argument with Sandro. First she says that a month apart is too long, then contradictorily she says that she needs more time alone, maybe years. Sandro is confused, and Anna admits that she is being absurd. Sandro suggests that words only cause confusion, and that they do not need to use so many words any more. In relation to Anna’s approaching disappearance, what Barthes has to say about silence and its etymological relationship to stillness is very relevant: “In short, *silere* would refer to a sort of timeless virginity of things, before they are born or after they have disappeared (*silentes* = the dead)” (22). Thus, in disappearance, Anna returns to a state of nonbeing (as before her birth), and a state of silence in speech and silence in lack of movement. In a certain sense, Anna’s disappearance is exactly what Sandro wishes for.

The concept of talking or not talking is intriguing from a feminist perspective. Is Sandro trying to silence Anna due to a male machismo? Or, is he unable to read Anna separate from her vocal words? In an essay that treats Hanna Arendt and the politics of identity, Honig writes:

... the silence that is opposed to the performative speech acts valorized by Arendt is not the muteness that is provoked by violently urgent bodily need, but rather a kind of silent communication, a constative speaking that is strictly communicative and narrowly referential, so narrowly referential that it need not even be spoken. Here, “speech plays a subordinate role, as a means of communication or as a mere accompaniment to something that could *also be achieved in silence.*” ... The single, univocal body is capable of handling this task without the aid of speech: “signs and sounds,” Ardent says, “would be enough.” (219)

Sandro is associating words with communication and then with confusion because he fails to read the subordinate role that Anna assigns to speech. Claudia, however, is able to sense Anna’s thoughts, as when she told Anna in the yacht that she did not have to explain why she lied; Claudia is able to read Anna, and thus communication is achieved in silence between them. Perhaps due to his identity as a man, or his status as an empowered person, Sandro is unable to differentiate true communication from uttered words.

In Antonioni’s films, with *L’avventura* being no exception, women have their pulse on awareness while the men seem more aloof. As Nowell-Smith writes,

In this world of unexplained power relations, power belongs to men and consciousness to women ... Does this mean that, in Antonioni's films, women are simply wiser than men? Not necessarily. It is rather that their position on the outside, and the role assigned to them of observers of opaque social mechanisms, means that Antonioni's heroines are the focal point of such insight as is offered into the workings of the world. Meanwhile they are themselves the objects of observation. (51-52)

The women of *L'avventura* have a self-awareness that men do not possess in the same manner — Sandro must express his occupational dissatisfaction in words, or in violence against other men, but these are performative acts and not acts of neutrality, as they concern people in power. Anna is never given the same space to verbalize or act out her frustrations, and only someone who can read her silence, such as Claudia, can give her any comfort. In one of her last lines in the film, Anna says to Sandro, “non ti sento più,” with the verb “sentire” suggesting any of the senses — feel, hear, taste, smell, but also a larger intellectual meaning — she cannot sense Sandro, and thus her status as observer is lessened in this exchange with him. Their relationship is chaotic because Sandro is confused by Anna's words, and Anna is unable to “feel” Sandro any more — they cannot make sense of each other, and their status as Antonionian men and women are lowered. Antonioni's women, as outsiders and observers, have a critical lens that his men lack, but are still objectified, by the men and by the film's viewers; their form of resistance to this objectification is best manifested in Anna's disappearance.

Because Anna cannot express her inner thoughts in performative terms, and is

misunderstood by nearly everyone around her, she engages with an extreme solitude that becomes more pronounced in her disappearance. Although reflecting about intellectuals, Barthes's statement here about solitude is also applicable to Anna: “The jolt given to the unity of intellectual discourse (fidelity) can be understood as a series of ‘happenings’ meant to upset the very superegoistic ethic of the intellectual as figurehead of noble causes, at the price, obviously, of an extreme solitude” (132). Anna must pay the price of extreme solitude because she breaks the unity of her relationship with Sandro. As the two of them cannot understand each other, there is no longer a univocal expression between the two, and a “series of ‘happenings’” — that is, Anna's desire for time alone, her unvoiced expressions that Sandro cannot comprehend, her dissatisfaction — tears the two apart, leaving Anna in extreme solitude. Sandro, however, does not seem to be affected by their division and continues in his usual wanderings, but perhaps his weeping in the last scene reveals an internal solitude that viewers cannot fully access.

The very last line uttered by Anna is, “devi sempre sporcare tutto” (“you always have to soil everything” directed at Sandro after he asked if she did not feel him when they were making love in his apartment. Part of why Anna may not feel Sandro is because of this desire to soil everything, rather than allowing Anna to express her feelings in poetic language, Sandro has to move toward the carnal, and throw her words back in her face. There is also the tension between the symbolic meaning behind Anna's words, with “sentire” (“to sense”) suggesting something outside of the body, an intellectual sensing, while Sandro only interprets (or chooses to interpret) the word in its bodily sense. In a related exchange, Giulia mentions to Corrado that the weather is changing, to which

Corrado replies that she need not be so literal all the time, as he can easily see that the weather is changing as well. Although Giulia may not have intended a metaphorical meaning, the “weather” is also changing in terms of the plot, as the viewer is about to discover that Anna has disappeared. The last shot of Anna is the back of her head, as she observes Sandro lying down on the rocks, momentarily maintaining her status as female observer and outsider, as she and the shot fade into landscape.

As the least self-absorbed person, perhaps due to her status as an observer and member of the lower class, Claudia is the first one to ask about Anna, asking Corrado (“E Anna?” “And Anna?”) and then Sandro, who is still lying on the rocks (“Anna dov’è?” “Where is Anna?”). While Sandro asks the others, “l’avete trovata?” (“have you all found her?”) referring back to Anna’s personhood, Claudia has already moved beyond this, later saying, “Sandro? Niente?” (“Sandro? Nothing?”) Anna’s quick descent into nothingness is perceived by Claudia, who seems to be the only one aware of feelings outside of herself, especially those of Anna, implying that Claudia has a desire for fullness — full knowledge and a full, omniscient state of being — she is aware of Giulia’s ambivalence toward the search and her distance from Corrado, and can intuit that Anna and Sandro had been fighting. Neutralizing Claudia’s fullness, Anna seeks nothingness, which may be similar to what Barthes calls abstinence:

Abstinence: can be swept up in an imaginary flagration: the radical, total decision to abstain (from the world) ... : Rousseau (*First Walk*): he decides to “abstain” ... to “cancel himself”: “...I am henceforth nothing among men, and that is all I can be.... No longer able to do any good which does not turn

to evil, no longer able to act without harming another or myself, to abstain has become my sole duty...” → The “to abstain”: minimal response to the trap, to being cornered, to the *double bind*: like the animal that shrinks, that “blends” itself into (operation of the Neutral) to escape predators → imaginary? Yes, because what Rousseau wants, is to escape from images ... that make him suffer so much ... is to cancel himself as a source of images...” (180)

Barthes’s writing here seems especially relevant to Anna as film character — she wishes to no longer be a source of images, to no longer be recorded as an image. In terms of plot, perhaps she does believe that her good actions turn to evil, such as when her expressive words (“non ti sento più” “I do not sense / feel you any more”) turn into soiled sexual jokes by Sandro. She is also the prey escaping the predators — or those searching for her — which could be limited only to her elite friends, but which may also include Claudia. The image of Anna cancelling herself is particularly intriguing, as it seems to give her agency within the scope of the film medium — she can remain a character through the mystery surrounding her disappearance, and a thought in the heads of other characters and the viewers, but she is no longer objectified.

The beautiful images used by Antonioni in the scenes of searching for Anna are nearly nothing as well — barren landscapes that at once encompass emptiness and infinity. Sam Rohdie explains the tension between the panorama and the plot: “...where the peripheral is extended and enlarged, as on Lisca Bianca in the search for Anna, in which the empty landscape displaces the narratively full search, and in which, by the fact of that emptiness new forms can take place, of love (in the narrative), and of sight

(in the images)” (92). While there is certainly this tension of emptiness and fullness, the landscape itself can occupy both, as the terrain is not truly empty, but littered with rocks, with cliffs, with water, waves and foam. Thus, there is the outward conflict between the plot and the landscape, but also the internal conflict within the landscape itself (also perhaps with the plot — not all characters search with the same vigor), which mirrors the dichotomy created between the full but aloof Claudia and the empty but autonomous Anna. When the camera tracks away from characters and over terrain, there is suggestion as to where Anna may be, as well as the elevation of the landscape to importance above the plot; this dual function serves two purposes for the audience: to advance the plot’s mystery and to cause waiting and introspection. In this manner, Antonioni is setting up the audience to find a neutral between suspense and pause.

The viewer is not aware of Claudia’s will-to-possess Anna until the day after the initial disappearance, allowing the sense of time, the act of waiting, and the uncertainty as to whether Anna will return to sink into her consciousness. She rises with the sun rises, though she may not have slept, and looks out onto the horizon. Then she fingers the dress she wore yesterday, seemingly not wishing to wear it again, and walks to her bag to see if she has any articles of clothing in it. Searching, she suddenly feels a foreign object: the blouse that she had been trying on yesterday with Anna. Though Anna had told Claudia to keep it, Claudia left the room without it, and Anna placed it in her bag, as a surprise. Claudia’s careful handling and caressing of this garment is magnified by Antonioni’s close-up of her hands that tracks up to the haunted, distant look on her face before quickly cutting to a long shot of the sea. The garment in this scene is meticulously

tied to memory, both Claudia’s memory and the audience’s memory, as we can once again feel Anna “with the skin of [our] eyes” (Marks 127). Although Claudia does look at the garment for a moment, the majority of her recollection takes place while she is staring off in deep thought, as her hands clutch the fabric, and as we, the viewers can almost touch the satiny feel of the blouse. Laura Marks explains memory as belonging to the sense of touch more than vision: “Objects, bodies, and intangible things hold histories within them that can be translated only imperfectly. Cinema can only approach these experiences asymptotically, and in the process it may seem to give up its proper (audio-visual) being” (131). Antonioni attempts to convey tactile memory in this scene with this visual display and uncharacteristic use of close shots, establishing a disjoint with the rest of the film, which enters into a different sense and new mode of viewing. This cherished garment will be Claudia’s entryway into replacing Anna.

The only person who notices that Claudia is wearing Anna’s shirt is Anna’s father when he arrives later in the day. Claudia brings two books to him that were in Anna’s bag (Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is The Night* and *The Bible*), and begins explaining this to him, holding out the two books, but she stops short quickly, startled, in front of him. Antonioni does not at first give us access to Anna’s father’s face, as he is slightly off-screen, but we see Claudia’s reaction to his expression — she appears ashamed to be wearing his daughter’s shirt, and she touches it at the buttons along her sternum, then lets her hand follow the shirt along her side and eventually straighten the shirt out. She says, “Sì, è di Anna, mi ha dato ieri” (“Yes, it’s Anna’s, she gave it to me yesterday”), without any verbal cues from Anna’s father, and without referring to the shirt explicitly beyond the caresses of her hands

along the shirt. Claudia explains that she had not wanted to wear the shirt but found it in her bag and had nothing else to wear this morning, and ultimately she says she is sorry. Anna's father is rather stoic, but allows his lip to tremble, and he seems distracted by the blouse, only infrequently looking at Claudia's face. Eventually he shakes his head as if to dismiss Claudia's guilt, and raises his arm to touch Claudia's shoulder, or rather, Anna's shirt. Claudia's performance of Anna, even though it is not quite a conscious undertaking and seems happenstance, is jarring for Anna's father, and for him, too, touch is a function of memory; when he feels Anna's shirt, he can touch the nothingness that is now his daughter.

In the princess's villa on Sicily, it seems momentarily that the physical transformation of Claudia into Anna is complete. Claudia had been sitting in a bedroom trying jewelry on, as though a method of escapism, and later finds Patrizia getting ready for the evening's party, wearing a blonde wig. A dark brown wig is resting on the mirror, and Claudia puts it on. Again, Claudia caresses this tactile memory of Anna, and admires herself, making various expressions and then smiling. Patrizia states, "sembri un' altra" ("you seem like someone else") but does not suggest that the Other that Claudia has become may be Anna. Transformation or replacement allows for new possibilities within the film's construction:

It is not that... a point is being made about the relativity of things in philosophic or ethical terms, but rather that this relativity offers the possibility of new relations and new identities, narrative ones and visual ones: in *L'avventura* the displacement of Anna and her replacement by Claudia, the refilling of an empty space and the return of story to the fullness of narrative (Rohdie 69).

While Rohdie believes that Claudia's filling Anna's "empty space" causes a return to the story, the filling (or partial filling) does not bring the same momentum of plot present in the early scenes, and this substitution remains incomplete. Still wearing dark clothes, Claudia has become another (darker) Anna, an imbalanced Anna, a neutral between herself and Anna. The "replacement" of Claudia for Anna is not a mere filling of voided visual space, but a tension between nothingness of being and totality of being, a seeking for the area that is in-between.

Toward the end of the film, Claudia manifests as a lighter Anna, wearing a white nightgown and going to bed, just before Sandro is about to go to the party and cheat on her, with yet another instance of Anna (the dark-haired prostitute wearing a black dress whom Claudia almost mistakes for Anna herself). Here, Claudia is the sacrificial Anna, the Anna who may have fallen off the cliff like the Liscia Bianca's shepherd's lamb. Thus, from a visual perspective the transformation from Claudia to Anna is never truly complete, as there is always a disjoint with the real Anna, yet as Claudia takes on accoutrements of Anna, she is searching for Anna in a metaphorical way, becoming a shadow of Anna and seeking the neutral between herself and her missing friend.

In addition to this visual manifestation, Claudia resounds Anna's voice throughout the film. When Claudia and Sandro are on the train on their search for Anna on Sicily, Claudia wants Sandro off of the train while she remains on it, exclaiming, "Non devi cercarmi più!" In this instance, is Claudia giving voice to the missing Anna? If Anna is alive somewhere, does she not wish to be found? The tension in the scene on the train retains all the trepidation that existed between Anna and Sandro in the beginning of

the film. Still, this does not have the same weight as a connection between Anna and Claudia's voice as when Claudia repeats "Mio, mio, mio" over and over again while her and Sandro make love on the grass. This is a happy (though possessive) reiteration of Anna's dismal "Perché, perché, perché" when she and Sandro were making love, after Anna said she was feeling awful and Sandro asked why. This repetition of words draws such a clear connection between the two women, especially considering that both are making love to the same man when they speak. In fact, each utterance is an echo in itself — Anna's own words echo each other, while Claudia's words are a reverberation of Anna's words, as well as a reflexive echo, suggesting the tenuousness of each of their individual existences. Are these true living women, or shadows and echoes of women?

Claudia's will-to-possess Anna is also in part manifested by her will-to-possess Anna's lover, as evidenced by her "mio"s. This relationship, however, is a bit different than Sandro's relationship with Anna. Rohdie writes:

...there is Claudia's happy comment to Sandro in *L'avventura* at the hotel room in Noto when he wants to go out into the town on his own: 'Tell me that you want to embrace my shadow on the walls': Claudia has replaced the lost Anna but her own presence is threatened by the return of Anna, and more tellingly, by an absence of feeling in Sandro, by the finding and, almost at the same moment, losing the pleasure of love, the certainty of having been found and identified (95).

Is Claudia merely a shadow of Anna, or do her shadows have a separate charge? As discussed above, when Sandro and Anna were making love in an early scene, Claudia

stood in the doorway's threshold, her physical body outside, but her shadow within, in the same world as Anna and Sandro. Does her shadow experience a different level of autonomy? Or, does Claudia metaphorically follow Anna as the shadow follows the body? Considering Rohdie's comment, it is possible that the shadow can also be a manifestation of Sandro's love for Claudia, or his displaced love for Anna upon Claudia. Interestingly as well, Claudia insists for Sandro to verbally declare his love for her, but he balks, or answers cutely that she knows, or declares it but takes it back jokingly. Between Sandro and Claudia is another neutral, as the two struggle with their opposing definitions of love.

Despite Rohdie's commentary that Sandro lacks feeling for Claudia, there are some moments during which he declares that he wishes to marry her and that they must run away. These charged though fleeting desires are in confrontation with Antonioni's schema of waiting and wandering within the film: Sandro is attempting to break these confines in favor of rash action. When Claudia and Sandro are on the train (after Claudia says she does not want him to search for her), Sandro declares: "Claudia, Claudia, non aspettiamo più. Dopo sarà troppo tardi, vieni via con me." At this point in their relationship, Sandro and Claudia have not been waiting long for anything, so how can they be waiting "more?" Sandro's impatient statement seems to echo Anna's early comment that Claudia will wait while Sandro and she make love, suggesting that Claudia has been waiting for Sandro since the moment Anna said "aspetterà." If this is so, Claudia has wanted to possess Anna, through means of her lover or otherwise, throughout the entire film, and may have to wait forever.

The last scene features the looming Mount Etna, an echo of the volcanic Aeolian Islands earlier in the film, but here is a much larger symbol that has been more greatly integrated in consciousness and folklore. Sandro and Claudia, and even the lost Anna, are stagnant and dormant just like Mount Etna, waiting for something to happen. Clara Orban discusses the significance of this scene:

The appearance of a dilapidated church and bell tower in the background alludes, perhaps, to their decaying relationship. The use of a dark concrete wall and of Mt. Etna in the backdrop as framing devices leads to interpretation of the scene. Peter Bondanella reminds us that Antonioni intended this shot's composition to be male figure/wall/pessimism versus female protagonist/volcano/optimism, "to provide a beautiful but unconventionally inconclusive ending to this problematic work" (213). Perhaps this last piazza, empty except for a lover she may be abandoning and who has betrayed her, again recalls the security that other empty spaces in the film afforded her. In this film, Claudia dominates empty locales, but is dominated by populated ones; absence and presence constitute the two nexuses of the adventure. (15-16)

Not only does this final shot recall the island scenes, but also the scene of Sandro and Claudia on the bell tower, happily ringing the bells, symbolic of a healthier relationship and better communication. After the affair, or the appearance of a new Anna, their relationship is at a turning point. In this scene there is also the wall versus the volcano, suggesting the tension between man/architecture/artificiality and nature. While Orban

treats absence and presence in location (that is, empty spaces versus cities, and the intersections between the two), this runs alongside the absence of Anna but the presence of Claudia. As there is a search for Anna, there is a search for the neutral in all facets of this work. And though, conceivably, the characters may discover a solution to any of their myriad conflicts, the audience is ultimately in never-ending suspension, always in a state of waiting.

In Barthes's "Dear Antonioni..." he writes, "There is a way in which your art is ... an art of the interstice," and it is within this small intervening space that Antonioni's neutral may flourish, if only temporarily and unstably (66). Barthes appreciates Antonioni for the uncertainty that is developed in his films, and this uncertainty gives rise to the *topoi* of waiting, wandering and lack of resolution. As Anna and Claudia play out as opposites and complements, exist in dichotomies of being and nonbeing, dissolution and transformation, there is a tenuous neutral that wanes and waxes, as the viewer is allowed to pause and reflect, meditate and wait while the action and inaction unfold on the screen. *L'avventura's* treatment of conflict results in a space for the neutral, for the interstice, such that we may continue to seek it, as we seek Anna still, after the light of the film has been replaced by darkness.

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PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE

A LITTLE BIT OF THIS

## Rhinocéros

Lourd Rhinocéros  
Corps **énorme** em prisonné  
Dans la boue du fleuve

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

# Violence and Visual Virtuosity: Tarsem Singh

## Dhandwar's *Immortals*

by Antonio Sanna

### Rhinoceros

Clumsy Rhinoceros  
Massive body, captive  
Of the muddy river

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

**F**ast-paced action, blood and violence in an ancient past when brutality was opposed by acts of heroism, gods fighting against each other, stunning sceneries and spectacular costumes: these are the main ingredients of Tarsem Singh Dhandwar's *Immortals* (2011). The plot basically revolves around the search for the mythological weapon known as “the Epirus Bow” by Hyperion (Mickey Rourke), King of Heraklion. Such a powerful weapon would allow the cruel tyrant to free the Titans from their subterranean imprisonment and subsequently to rule over the entire Greece and the Olympus. In order to discover the location of the Epirus Bow and achieve his mischievous ends, Hyperion captures the Sibylline virgin oracle Phaedra (Freida Pinto). The story's actual protagonist Theseus (Henry Cavill) appears on the scene later, during the preparations for the evacuation of his village in the Kolpos peninsula. He decides to join the battle against the ruthless king only after firstly witnessing the (unnecessary) murder of his mother by Hyperion and then being imprisoned in the salt mines. After one of her prophetic visions – often experienced as a violation of her privacy and a renunciation of her own conscious personality in exchange for a female authoritative voice and position – Phaedra convinces Theseus to escape with a small group of slaves and to oppose Hyperion's plans of dominion. The story, however, seems to proceed with

no real pathos, sometimes limping from a scene to the next and, except for the numerous fights and brutally-violent murders, apparently lacks a unifying perspective and centre of attention. It is for this reason that the film has suffered from the many (not utterly unjustified) critical attacks against its implausibility and its lack of sense and unifying logic (Sharkey) as due to a script which “defies synopsis” (Brunick) and presents viewers mainly with a series of fights interspersed by minimal dialogue in between (Markowitz).

The matter is further complicated by the complete lack of adherence to the original Greek myth. Indeed, there are no allusions to the young Greek man’s adventures, such as his encounter with the witch Medea (Graves 333), his journey to Crete and encounter with Ariadne (Leeming 379), his subsequent fight against the Amazons, the federalization of Attica and the visit to the underworld (Graves 349-63). For this reason, the story could be defined as a very creative re-elaboration of the myth of Theseus, rather than an adaptation of it. Another major deviation from the Greek myth is due to the characterization of the Titans not as the actual blood relatives of the twelve Olympians, but as equal deities who have been defeated during the ancestral and primordial war in the heavens (narrated at the beginning of the film) and have been imprisoned underground and buried deep within Mount Tartarus. The Titans are portrayed as anthropomorphic beings, with grey and cracked skin: chained standing upright, clamped onto iron rods, they are decaying statues angrily conscious by aeons of their failure in conquering the skies. They are not the “primordial forces” (Vernant 16) representing the brutality of natural phenomena, as is the case of Cronos in Jonathan Liebesman’s *Wrath of the Titans* (2012). They rather resemble the fallen angels of John Milton’s 1633 *Paradise Lost*, who are possessed only by

“the thought both of lost happiness and lasting torments” (I, 54-56).



*The Titans inside the underground cage ...*

*Courtesy of Universal Pictures*

An interesting aspect of the narrative is represented by Hyperion’s “overtones of sexual sadism” (Brunick): the ruthless king embodies a sexual menace towards the entire Greece because he has decided to eradicate all enemy male offspring and simultaneously wants to impregnate every young woman in order to have his own features reproduced in the following generations. It is for this reason that his army is made of castrated subjects, who are loyal to him especially out of fear. Rourke’s basso-profondo voice, which Todd McCarthy interprets as “an intimation of the seismic waves he intends to unleash upon the entire Greek cosmos”, as well as his calm tone and detached behaviour make the character all the more distasteful for the viewer, especially because the cruelty of his

sadistic violence is never mitigated by a single spark of regret or hope of redemption.

The point of the film is not adherence to the Greek myth, realism or historical accuracy. It is the undeniable artistry of its director, who has enriched this production with what Kurt R. Oselund calls “ornate oddity” and Markowitz defines as “pop-baroque splendour”. Tarsem had previously gained popularity for his much appreciated works *The Cell* (2000) and *The Fall* (2006). However, the latter is still a better film than *Immortals*, both for its moving and compelling plot and its stunning visuals, the story having been filmed in tens of beautiful locations all over the world, locations that have been rendered all the more fascinating by the presence and actions of the characters and all the more colourful by means of their costumes. *Immortals* has instead been visually inspired by Caravaggio’s hallmark “*tenebrism*, that is to say, muted contrasts between white and black” (Rothwell, 196). It is indeed a dark film, often too dark to distinguish many particulars of the set designs. Although we must certainly recognize that “from cinematography to costumes to set design, each visual aspect was clearly planned down to the smallest detail” (Weitzman), viewers could probably find the film’s visuals over-designed and could be distracted by many unrealistic details such as the perpetual (amber) light.

Specifically, it appears that everything in the *mise-en-scène* tends to be dramatic: the computer-generated sceneries are vertiginous, with rocky and bare mountains, dusty valleys, imposing temples, majestic walls, deep pits, and high cliffs facing a dark and oily sea, whose appearance specifically recalls the Romantic paintings by Théodore Géricault (such as “The Raft of the Medusa”) or by the Spanish Francisco Goya (“The Shipwreck”). On a first viewing it is evident that none of these locations is historically-accurate (the

story is allegedly set in the year 1228 B.C.E.) and does not correspond to any real place in Greece or the world at large. The main characters are always on the edge, both physically – as Roger Ebert has pointed out when arguing that they “all seem compelled to live as close to the edge as possible” – and thematically, because they are perennially in danger of being brutally disfigured, raped, tortured or murdered.

The same historical inaccuracy is evident in the costumes by late designer Eiko Ishioka, Academy Award winner and close collaborator of Tarsem’s work, who nevertheless further confirmed her unique talent in decorating the characters with bewildering and splendid costumes, from the Olympians’ golden capes and the virgin Oracles’ red lamp-like extravaganzas to the armours worn by the Greek army (recalling Jacques Louis David’s “The Oath of the Horatii”) and the frightening masks and hoods of Hyperion, which visually indicate the king’s animal nature.

An unexpected development of the narrative is represented by the religious evolution of Theseus. Indeed, near the beginning of the film the protagonist tells his pious mother: “the gods are children’s stories”, lamenting the absence of the deities in the moments of need. Later, when being advised by the oracle to bury his mother’s body, Theseus explicitly declares: “I do not believe in the gods”, although he has actually been tutored for all of his life by Zeus, masked as an old man (interpreted by John Hurt), who has acted as both “his Plato-like guardian” (Oselund) and his fight instructor. The young man acquires his faith in the gods only when he (casually) finds the Epirus Bow inside the labyrinth where he buries his mother’s body. In a curious reversal of roles, it is then the severe Zeus (Luke Evans) who appears in front of the mortal man and affirms: “I have

faith in you, Theseus. Prove me right”, after unwillingly killing Ares for transgressing the law forbidding any god to help the group of rebels against Hyperion’s men. Theseus thus evolves from a common man despised by the inhabitants of his village to the heroic defender and saviour of Greece and, by extension, humanity as well as from a disbeliever to a member of the family of the Olympian gods.

Intermingled by the actions of the human beings on the earth are the scenes that portray the gods reunited on Olympus, a cast which includes only five of the original twelve Olympians, all female deities such as Hera and Demeter having been excluded with the exception of Athena (Isabel Lucas). In a gorgeous marble temple suspended over Greece, the Olympians look at human affairs with preoccupation, while assuming a series of poses that seem to recall the subjects of Michelangelo, especially in the film’s penultimate shot which almost peels “The Last Judgement” from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. However, because of their elaborate and bizarre helmets and beautifully-sculpted bodies, the Greek deities portrayed by Tarsem do not inspire reverence or are an embodiment of almighty power, but rather seem to belong to “the least heterosexual photoshoot ever commissioned by L’Uomo Vogue”, as Tim Robey has affirmed.

Contrary to the Greek myth is also the fact that the Minotaur, the nemesis of Theseus, is not Asterion, the bull-headed monster that was born from Parsiphaë’s intercourse with a white bull and that requires a periodical sacrifice of fourteen Athenians (Graves 337, Apollodorus 98). Rather, he is a human being (Robert Maillet), Hyperion’s strongman, known as “the beast”, whose costume has been perhaps partly inspired by Salvador Dalí’s paintings. It then seems legitimate to wonder why a hybrid creature such

as the real Minotaur from the Greek myth has not been included in a fictional universe already populated by mighty gods that are visible to humans. Such a character is instead represented as the “baptist” of Hyperion’s new recruits, whom he literally castrates, thus becoming the executioner of their reproductive capabilities. Theseus encounters him in the centre of the labyrinth, which is actually a sanctuary and catacomb for the dead of his village. The violent fight between the hero and “the beast” occurs in a very elaborate set characterized by stairs filled with red petals and vaults lighted by candles. In this sense, Tarsem’s version would seem to represent the allegorical significance attributed by critic Robert Graves to the Theseus myth. Indeed, Graves argues that Theseus “was an hero of importance, and must be given the credit of having harrowed Hell, in the sense that he penetrated to the centre of the Cretan maze, where Death was waiting, and came safely out again” (366). The hero’s defeat of the mortal enemy and his return to the surface in the film are equally exemplary of the defeat of death. After a few minutes of grunts, groans and thuds, the most memorable detail of the fight is however the close up on the dying villain’s eyes before Theseus decapitates him.

The bloodshed reaches its apex in the great final battle, which physically occurs on a triple level: the two armies clash inside a claustrophobic and apparently metallic tunnel, the hero and the villain fight inside an ornate temple, and the gods and the Titans decimate each other deep inside the mountain. These alternated scenes are spectacular and satisfying for the viewer, especially those portraying the wrath of the Titans, who wildly give vent to their rage against the golden battalion of well-armed Olympian gods. The fight between Theseus and Hyperion is instead the most brutal and less chivalrous of

the whole film, the two adversaries using every mean technique to wound and kill each other, and leads to a quite unexpected tragic end of the story (although it alludes to the possibility of a sequel too).

*Immortals* will be certainly appreciated by those members of the audience who like fast-paced action and fight sequences. On the other hand, the spectators who expect fidelity to the original source (the Greek myth of Theseus) as well as those who demand historical accuracy or realism in the representation of the events shall not be perhaps put under the spell of the film's glorious visual style and its frequent references to many celebrated paintings. Tarsem's work has therefore many flaws, but it is undeniably a masterpiece of visual art.

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## Les blés

Brûlure d'été  
Epis gonflés de soleil  
Sous les feux du soir.

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

**Wheat field**

Scorching summer burnt  
Wheat ears bursting with sun  
In the evening fire

—Anne-Marie Moscatelli

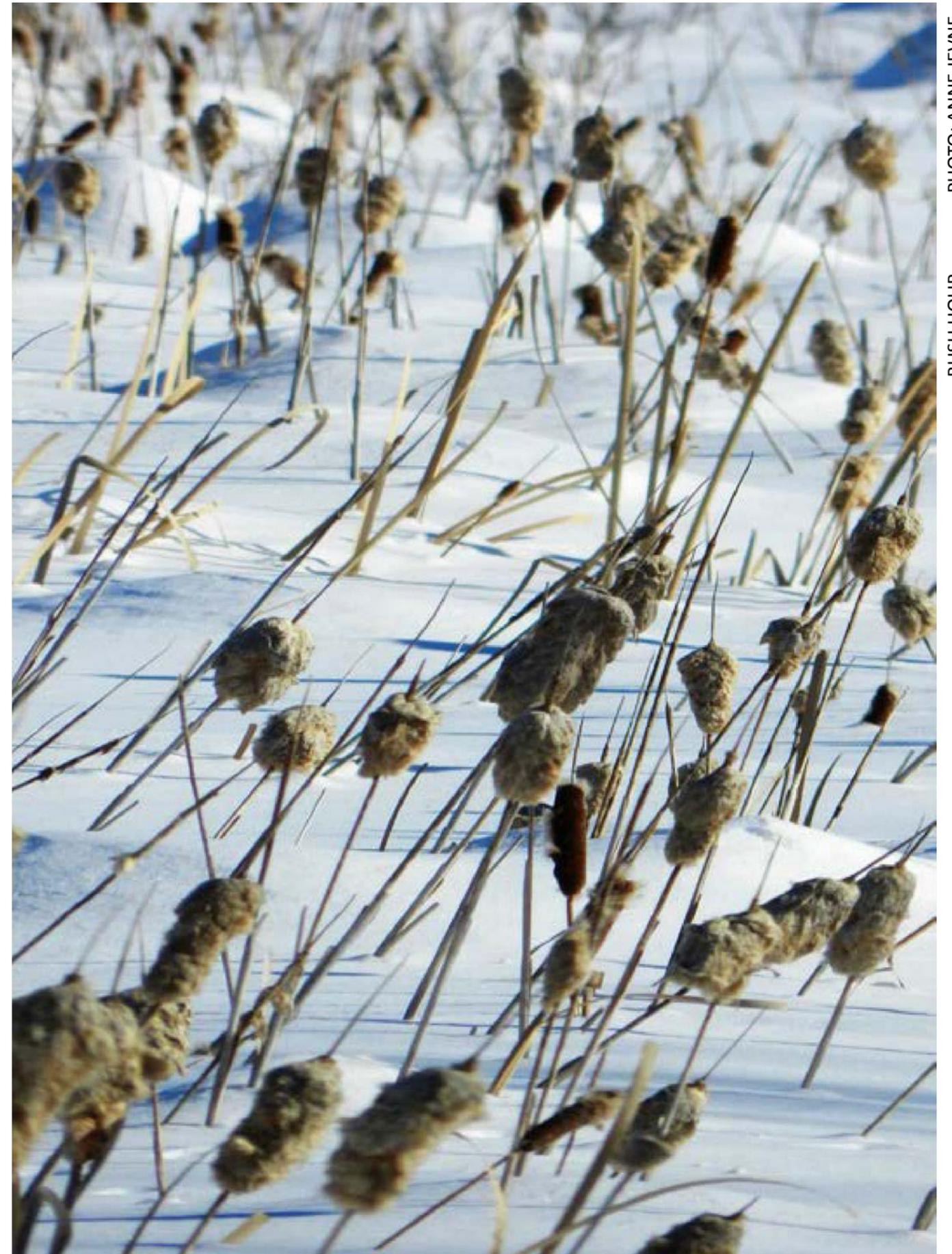


PHOTO: ANNE JEVNE  
RUSH HOUR

# Love Shouldn't Hurt

by Chloe Rolufs

Blow after blow, each one coming harder and harder, hurting more and more. The only thought racing through my mind was, "Get me out! Make it stop!" When mom had finally decided that she had hit me enough she stood me up and sent me to my room. Struggling down the hall I glanced back just to see her crumble to her knees landing with a thud on the filthy floor of our weathered trailer, and begin to sob. Painfully I entered my dark disgusting room. The paint was peeling off the walls leaving the ugly brown panel board exposed with the very sporadic and random fist holes, reminders of all the times I had lost my cool. The smell still gets me every time, as if something had died in there; it was so bad it could on occasion make me gag. The shattered window keeps my room cold from the winter wind that howls day and night.

Making sure to latch the door behind me I took a deep breath and tried to collect myself, steady my nerves and stop my muscles from shaking so bad. Feeling the blood trickle down my face I slowly reached for the rag I hid under my mattress that rest on the warped hard wood floor. I tenderly wiped my still throbbing wounds, for a moment I paused, wincing in pain, listening, as my heart pounded, and my ears rang. My eyes won't focus I could hardly make out my own hand in front of my face. The blood on my face had become sticky, not yet dried, as I once again tried to clean myself up I smeared it across my face, catching an open wound a little harder than I would have liked, I threw the rag in anger and gave up. My eyes watered and my muscles quivered with every painful breath. While the events of the previous hours danced through my mind. When mom brought home one of her greasy, grubby, guy friends...

*The white wall, the faded curtains, now pink from the years in the sun. So neglected they hung low enough they touched the floor. The shelves and shelves of books covered in dust, most likely not opened in the last thirty years, the solid oak desk that sat in the corner only a few stray pens and the odd note stuck on his desk. The red lay down chair opposite the desk obviously well used and paired with a small wicker chair, much more modern, almost not fitting in with the rest of the room. Behind was a wall of success stories, a cure, to be understood.... Never*

*The therapist sat in his chair and while he wrote; didn't say a word. Only the occasional glance brought him away from his paper sitting on his lap. He took a sip of water and returned It to where it*

*had originally sat in between the two on a small dark wooden coffee table; with a small nod of his head, motioned for the story to continue.*

He smelled like booze and he really needed a bath, he was missing teeth and was every kids' worst nightmare. He stumbled all over the place and could barely stand on his own feet. I guess this was one of those times I should have bitten my tongue and not said anything because that when mom flew right off the deep end. I tried to run but that only seemed to make it worse. When she finally caught up to me, she pulled me in with a handful of my shirt; she grabbed me so fast that I flew back and landed flat on my back, looking up at her gasping for air. Her hair was a mess and she could hardly stand up, hands clenched into fists resting at her sides she kept screaming at me, that if I was better she wouldn't have to do this, and that it was all my fault. As one swing was followed by the next.

These would be the worst eighteen years of my life, the constant abuse at home and at school. If I ate more than my share or what mom thought was my share I was beaten. She'd have me up before the sun to do chores. The water in the sink would burn my hands, turning them red and covering them in huge painful blisters that never healed and the smell of bleach made my head ache for hours. Then she would send me and my brothers to school in rags just to be made fun of and teased, to be the outcasts, the nobodies.

Every day we would walk home together trying to imagine what it would be like to have two parents that both loved us and took care of us. When we turned the corner and saw the beer bottles scattering the lawn, the vehicles that never ran and the complete disarray, could successfully wipe all those dreams away in an instant.

*Sitting up straighter now obviously more interested the therapist fussed his glasses and once again motioned for the story to continue.*

One night after she had beaten me and sent me to my room, I was fed up and needed a way out. I was desperate. I grabbed only a few things and twenty dollars, climbed out my window and dropped to the ground. Turning to run I came face to face with mom, wobbling, and very drunk. She grabbed the front of my T-shirt and pulled me in, close enough I could see the fire in her eyes like the kind I had never seen before, the kind that could bring you to your knees. We both froze, staring at each other, waiting for the first move. She jumped at the chance, giving my shirt one last twist around her fist and started to screaming, slurring her words beyond all recognition. I could barely make the out but even if I couldn't hear the words, I knew how it went, useless, a waste and if I was lucky a disgrace. There were defiantly worse, but I was hoping for the best.

In desperation and frustration I grabbed the closest thing I could get my hands on; I hit her just like she had hit me, over and over again. Until she lay limp, until her raspy breaths died down and finally became extinct. My breath was jagged and shallow, completely exhausted and wobbly myself; I gave in. I let myself relax, sitting on my knees beside her body, as small beads of sweat formed on my forehead. Surrounded by complete darkness I looked up only to see both of my younger brothers staring right into my soul. No words were spoken, they weren't needed, I had hit her so hard that nothing but the neck of the bottle was left in my hand.

*The therapist sat in his chair not moving for what seemed to be an eternity, staring off into space, almost lost in thought. Coming back to reality with a shake of his head he simply wanted to hear more. He needed to know how it all ended. Looking back now wish I would have ended it there, stopped then, but I didn't.*

My brothers and I frantically tried to wash the blood from our skin. The boys wept, but I couldn't find it in myself to shed a tear. After all those years she beat and tortured me she deserved whatever she had coming, she was an evil woman, a waste of skin and should have never been given the gift of life

*The therapist dropped his pen and I watched as it rolled across the floor. Calm and collected on the outside but shaking and horrified inside he asked me blunt, complete out right, where is she?*

*We stared at each other only now realizing that I had said too much finding any reason to call it a day we ended it there. Leaving the office I was sure that after what I had just said he would go to the police and I had to be long gone once that happened.*

I took one last look at my childhood home as I packed a few things and locked the door behind me. I threw the bag in the car and walked around the back of the trailer to where the deep freeze sat. Struggling through the maze of broken bottles twisted metal and broken hearts I stood there listening to the freezer hum trying to work up the nerve to open the lid. Pulling the blue weathered tarp off the top what I saw shocked me. A bloody hand print, too big to be one of mine little loan the boys as I lifted the lid, my stomach was in knots. It's been years since I have seen her; now looking down at her cover in ice; her blue complexion gave me an eerie feeling, like she might reach out and grab me again. My stomach sank like a bottomless hole, twisting into knots, I couldn't do it. Slamming the lid I turned and walked away from her forever.

As I hit the interstate, leaving town for the first time in a long time I....

Smiled

# BOOK REVIEWS...

**Abe Kobo, *The Frontier Within*. Richard F. Calichman, ed. and tr. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.**

**John Butler**

## *Japan a via media*

Kobo Abe (I use the more familiar Westernised name-order) who died in 1993, is well-known as one of the most significant writers to have emerged out of post-war Japan. He began his writing career as a poet (having taken a medical degree on the condition he did not practice), and went on to produce work in all literary genres, from drama to *belles-lettres*. Abe was also one of the first modern Japanese science-fiction authors, and he collaborated on filmscripts based on

several of his novels, the best-known, perhaps, being *The Woman in the Dunes* (1962).

Other novels likely familiar to Western readers are *The Ark Sakura* (1984) and *Kangaroo Notebook* (1991); plays by Abe available in English translation include *The Ghost is Here* (1958) and *The Man Who Turned into a Stick* (1969). His essays are less well-known, and this collection seeks to remedy the deficiency.

To Western readers Abe usually appears as an existentialist, which is, at least at first, not that surprising, since he admitted to being influenced by Western authors like Kafka and Dostoevsky as well as philosophers such as Heidegger and Nietzsche. To that end, as Professor Richard Calichman notes in his fine introduction to this volume of Abe's essays, he has been characterised by critics as "the most

un-Japanese" of modern Japanese writers, because he often appeared less "exotic" than they expected, or dealt with themes which somehow were not to be found in others' productions. Indeed, Calichman identifies a tendency in the west to actually *want* Japanese literature to be full of kimonos, cherry-blossoms, geishas and other Japanese "things," otherwise they were not really seen as authentic. When Abe came upon the scene in the 1960's, many readers were startled, but soon reconciled themselves to his work by defining it as "Western-influenced," and therefore critics were able to categorise him as somehow "avant-garde" from a Japanese standpoint, yet indebted to Western cultural or philosophical ideas from another, and thus could be readily interpreted from that angle.

The publication of this book of Abe's essays has as its purpose the

broadening of Western perceptions of this writer. The essays deal with matters of social concern, with what Matthew Arnold would have called “criticism of life,” and range from the purely literary to essays entitled “Discovering America,” the title essay, which deals with anti-Semitism, and “Possibilities for Education Today.” The theme of Abe’s essays, however, applies to all of them; as Calichman puts it, Abe is concerned here with “articulating a notion of the social in which individuals are not co-opted or appropriated strictly as parts within a unified and comprehensive whole, but are rather granted a measure of freedom through which to explore the world and others (including, significantly, the self as well as others) in all their alterity.” In other words, as Thomas Lamarre states rather more succinctly on the back cover, Abe wants “to produce a non-fascist mode of existence within art and literature.” And here I’d like to offer a few mild words of criticism: Richard Calichman’s introduction, at times, seems too geared towards

readers steeped in lit-crit jargon, as the word “alterity” suggests in the passage just quoted, and concepts such as “essentialism” should have been more thoroughly explained, and there’s also the unfortunate phrase “impacts the other,” a glaring example of modern misuse (97), as “impact” is not a transitive verb. However, Calichman is, after all, Professor of Japanese Studies at the City College of New York, as well as the author of two books on Takeuchi Yoshimi, the late distinguished Japanese cultural critic and China scholar, and we should perhaps not be too surprised when the lit-speak creeps in or the inner sociologist rears his head!

Of the essays in this collection more suited to a general educated reader I’d recommend “Discovering America,” “Possibilities for Education Today” and “The Military Look.” For literary specialists, there is “Poetry and Poets (Consciousness and the Unconscious)” and “Theory and Practice in Literature.” However, readers should be warned that Abe’s prose is often

philosophical, reflective and occasionally quite difficult to understand; he has an enviably profound grasp of complex thinkers such as Sartre, Marx, Darwin, Heidegger and Georg Simmel, and he sometimes cites or refers to lesser-known figures such as Karl Löwith, Julius Lips, as well as a whole range of Japanese writers from the educator Yukichi Fukuzawa (whose *Autobiography* may be familiar to some Western readers) to novelists such as Sei Ito, whose name is practically unknown to English readers. Fortunately, Professor Calichman has thoughtfully provided a useful glossary of Abe’s references, although it seems odd that in a book that will probably be read primarily by literary scholars he needs to gloss figures such as Poe, Kafka, Einstein, Freud and Tolstoy! The depth of Abe’s knowledge and command of Western thought, history and culture can be plumbed simply by looking through this glossary, and it is extremely impressive.

Of the essays in this book, “Discovering America” may be taken as an

example of what to expect from Abe, and demonstrates amply his “criticism of life.” Calichman notes that Japanese writers critical of America have often been ignored or dismissed by American scholars, and upon reading this essay, which was written as far back as 1957, the reader can see why. It was less than two decades after Japan’s defeat in the Second World War and it was in the beginning stages of the Cold War; at that time Abe was still a member of the Japanese communist party (he was thrown out a few years later), and believed that the Americans, who still occupied parts of his country, were not to be trusted. He believed that they were the aggressors in both the Korean and Vietnam wars, and he understood American “democracy” as a myth which concealed the imposition of state power, to which Abe was implacably imposed. Abe does not stop with attacking the United States as imperialists; he raises questions about discrimination against blacks and against Jews (a topic he returns to in the

title-essay), and compares the plight of these two groups with what had been happening in Nazi Germany. Abe is too subtle to suggest that the Americans are Nazis, however; the point he makes is more applicable to the Nazi Party’s behaviour in the 1930’s, when Jews were excluded from German life. For Abe, the prejudice against blacks is even worse, “far more violent and nihilistic than anti-Semitism,” as he put it, ending with the striking words “The Nazis believed that Jews had to be killed, whereas American farmers never even saw the need to kill blacks.” What horrified Abe was the disguise by which the United States concealed its real motives; the Americans did not blatantly thrust people into gas chambers, but advanced its persecution subtly and with great propagandistic sophistication, by which it fooled the so-called “free world” and pulled the wool over the eyes of its own people effectively and completely. These themes appear again and again in the essays, examined from different angles and giving

profound insights into human existence.

Abe is not just a polemicist. His prose is straightforward and incisive without being strident, and he often employs understatement or flat language. His use of foreign sources serves to make Western readers sit up and take notice; Abe is not an isolated Japanese scholar venting his rage on a world he doesn’t really understand, but a man who has a thorough grasp of Western culture, history and literature. He is aware of the dangers of both collectivism and over-individualisation, and his essays may be read as those of someone looking for a *via media*, and someone who knows that there is a real connection between art and life. If we can find a way to exist in a “non-fascist” way within the confines of art, then there is some hope that life outside art can perhaps begin to imitate it.



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Ben-Ami Shillony,  
Ed. *The Emperors  
of Modern Japan.*  
Leiden: Brill, 2008.

John Butler

## *Considering the divinity of the Emperor*

Why should anyone care about the emperors of modern Japan? The answer here is for anyone to read; they were and are important to Japanese society and culture, and, as the only surviving line of emperors in the world today, they are interesting in their own right. What special powers did they have? How do the Japanese people feel about them? What possible

relevance could they have in today's society, devoid as it is of any concept of mystery, imagination or sense of tradition and history? The essays in this book answer all these questions and more; they discuss imperial ideology, the emperor's role as a war leader (not just Hirohito's alone), how they were represented visually to their subjects, and how powerful and influential their wives were. Dr. Shillony, who is Emeritus Professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and a widely-published authority (his publications include *Enigma of the Emperors*) on the subject, has assembled a worldwide and world-class group of scholars to address themselves to a wide range of topics, from Akira Imatani's essay "The Strange Survival and its Modern Significance" to Ben-Ami Shillony's own "Emperors and Christianity."

There are essays on all the individual emperors from Meiji to Akihito and on other topics, including, of course, the perennial discussion of Hirohito's "war-guilt." All the essays are written in (mostly) non-technical language, and all are accessible to general readers, which is one of the great strengths of this excellent and timely volume. Any readers who thought that the Japanese emperor was merely a quaint anachronism will be disabused when they have finished this book.

Of particular interest to this reviewer were Julia Thomas's "The Unrequited Gaze: Emperors and Photography," and Takeshi Hara's "Taisho: An Enigmatic Emperor and his Influential Wife." When we look at early photographs of the emperor Meiji, we are struck with how stiff and

uncomfortable he looks in his old-style formal court robes; as Professor Thomas notes, he is placed against a "blank formal background," which makes him seem small and not very impressive. By 1888, however, the background has shrunk and Meiji appears commanding and imperial in his western-style uniform glittering with medals and orders. His father, the emperor Komei, would never have allowed himself to be portrayed that way, and indeed he consistently followed a policy of extreme hostility towards foreigners and their ways. The very fact that ordinary Japanese people could now actually "see" their emperor was a huge step in the direction of change in Japan after centuries of closed palanquins in which the emperor travelled when he left the palace. Even most courtiers would only

know the emperor as a presence behind a screen, but now photographs could be seen by anyone. Julia Thomas's paper takes us into the psychological and subliminal world of imperial photography, and is an example of the interesting and unexpected angles taken by several of the writers of this collection. Similarly, Professor Hara's essay on the Taisho emperor and empress Teimei re-evaluates the emperor and his role; Taisho has often been dismissed as an eccentric at best, mentally-handicapped at worst, but we are shown that he was, amongst other accomplishments, a capable linguist and a poet, as well as being a man who sought to understand, especially whilst he was Crown Prince, the ordinary people of Japan by actually engaging some of them in conversation. His unfortunate bouts of

ill health eventually led to his virtual withdrawal from government or even from public sight, but the national outpouring of grief at his death was genuine. His wife, the empress Teimei, played an active and important role, often filling in for her husband, and continued to exert influence well into the reign of her son Hirohito.

These papers, and others in the collection, together serve to give readers a multi-dimensional perspective of the Japanese monarchy, highlighting both its role in the past and projecting its possible future. The Japanese in general are not as nationalistic and prone to seeing no faults in their monarchy any more, but they have a healthy respect for it and the monarchy has returned their goodwill by behaving itself responsibly and with dignity. Apart from the unfortunate

breakdown suffered some not very many Japanese Americans never understood. years ago by the current believe that their emperor is Empress Michiko (she even divine, but, as Shakespeare lost her voice) and some once noted, “there’s a problems concerning the divinity doth hedge a king/ current Crown Princess, Rough-hew it how we may,” there have been no scandals and that is something the

such as have been occasioned by the British royals, and these incidents generally evoked sympathy rather than displeasure. The Japanese press maintains a polite distance from personal lives of the Imperial family, which of course helps minimise the effects of anything out of the ordinary. The monarchy may have become, as the Americans hoped when they occupied the country in 1945, more open, but the mystique is still there;



*Empress Sadako with the Prince of Wales in 1922.*

This collection of essays will go along way to explaining why this is still the case.



**Johanna Skibsrud,  
*The Sentimentalists.*  
Vancouver: Douglas  
and Macintyre, 2010.**

**Gary A. Kozak**

### *Tragic and poetic*

Johanna Skibsrud is a native of Meadowville, Nova Scotia. She is a graduate of Concordia University’s creative writing program and has a Ph.D. from the University of Montreal. Her first novel, *The Sentimentalists*, won the 2010 ScotiaBank Giller prize. Her other works, both collections of poetry, are *Late Nights with Wild Cowboys* and *I Do Not Think That I Could Love Another Human Being*. A collection of short stories, *This Will Be Difficult to Explain and Other Stories*, appeared in 2011; the same year Skibsrud was short-listed for the Atlantic Poetry Prize. She currently resides in Montreal.

Johanna Skibsrud’s first novel, *The Sentimentalists*, is a tragic first person narrative about Napoleon Haskell, a Vietnam War veteran who endured a meaningless life in North Dakota while residing in a trailer before relocating to Canada to stay with the father of one of his fallen comrades. Napoleon’s daughter discovers that his life is in deterioration. The rest of the novel is about the relationship between these two somewhat unfortunate people as well as the affects his wartime service has on his life and on their relationship. The story is told as a set of memories through the narrative voice of the daughter.

Skibsrud’s distinctive literary style is lyrical, languid and melodious. There is an absence of action or argument. This following passage demonstrates style:

....the boat, after that first summer, was also abandoned. My father working on it only in fits and

starts, and, except for a single, brief renaissance.... ceased finally, long before I might have remembered it.

The description of life growing up within the context of her family’s issues is the main point of the novel. Superficial details of each event are relayed with intimacy. It can come across as somewhat tedious at times. The unique feature of Skibsrud’s writing is her application of poetic elements. This is due to her experience as a poet and her novel should be appreciated for this, as it gives her style a rhythmical element that moves in patterns with every paragraph. For example:

Helen and I always got stuck in the middle when we drove, on account of my father’s legs being longer than our own, and his smoking. We could never relax there, but

sat straight as pins, our knees bent in toward the gearshift, cringing away from his spontaneous, unbearable hugs, and waiting for the relief of the yell that we shared every time he lit up a smoke.

Minute details of everyday occurrences are mainly used as she is focused on this rhythmic style rather than content. The narrative is slowed down to provide the reader with the opportunity to appreciate personal impressions and the overall environment. There are some similarities in Skibsrud's use of poetic prose with Japanese writers such as Natsume Soseki, although Skibsrud does not use the *haiku* form.

The narrator telling the story is unnamed and is not given a personality, which is a technique often employed by "stream-of-consciousness" writers such as Virginia Woolf, and, like Woolf, Skibsrud uses

the narrative as the vehicle for discussing the other characters, mainly the father. Despite her lack of character, she is capable of showing frustration and melancholy. Unfortunately, we never learn what persuades her to make certain decisions. The technique is less impressionistic than that of Woolf; Skibsrud infuses a number of realistic touches, which vary the prose and perhaps help keep readers interested. Nevertheless, readers never lose sight of the fact that for Skibsrud, what is important is always beneath the surface, not on it.

In the end, though, the poetic element is the strongest feature of Skibsrud's novel. It dwells on contemplation at the expense of plot and the emotion appears frigid. The narrating character's motive in this novel seems to be unclear at times. She doesn't commit herself to family relationships or war memories. Ironically, we never get full appreciation of the father's suffering in the war. This is Skibsrud's first novel and it is not a bad start. It would be interesting to see if her writing

becomes more ambitious in time.



**Tuson, Penelope, Ed. *The Queen's Daughters: An Anthology of Victorian Feminist Writings on India 1857-1900*. Ithaca Press, 1995.**

**Sue Matheson**

### *Not everyone's cup of tea*

Edited by Penelope Tuson, *The Queen's Daughters: An Anthology of Victorian Feminist Writings on India 1857-1900* is a collection of essays by Victorian women interested in the project of social reform in India. Generated by the British Library's Colloquium on Resources for Women's Studies held in London

in April 1989, *The Queen's Daughters* is a response to the need for more widely available primary sources for feminist colonial history and the subject of women's involvement in the British imperial enterprise in India in the nineteenth century. If you are interested in feminist colonial history, the British Empire, and/or what some women had to say about India in the nineteenth century, then this is the book for you.

Published by Ithaca Press, *The Queen's Daughters* (there are 341 pages of it in total) showcases a selection of out-of-print material drawn from a wide range of women reformers and activists in the second half of the nineteenth century. Harriet Martineau, Mary Carpenter, Annette Ackroyd Beveridge, Florence Nightingale, Josephine Butler, Pandita Ramabai, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Cornelia Sorabji, Flora Annie Steel, Annie Besant, and Mary Frances Billington, for example, introduce their readers to a variety of subjects: the position of women in India, the state of medicine in

India, the abolitionist cause in India, the situation of the high-caste Hindu woman, the deplorable nature of infant marriage in India, female life in the field and the factory, and the legal status of women in India.

Penelope Tuson has done a thoughtful job while selecting illustrations for and editing these manuscripts. In her "Preface," however, she treads on dangerous critical ground—noting, on the one hand, that the ideas and perceptions found in the writings presented form "a multidimensional view... firmly based at the centre of the imperial structure," while claiming, on the other hand, that Martineau, Carpenter, Beveridge, Nightingale, Butler, Ramabai, Fawcett, Sorabji, Steel, Besant, and Billington are *Victorian feminists* who "constructed their own images of empire and imperialism...and represented Indian women and Indian womanhood to their readers" (viii). Retroactively applying the term, feminism, to these writers' works charges them politically, by encouraging readers to read them out

of a modern paradigm that the writers themselves, who considered themselves to be *campaigners* for women's rights, would have found unthinkable.

Tuson's "Introduction" also places a twentieth-century grid on the Victorian speakers in this text. Although she notes that "British 'feminist' interests are sometimes difficult to distinguish from a wide range of female reform and philanthropic activism" (5), no definition of what these interests are is offered. One finds oneself wondering if Florence Nightingale's concern for sanitation is common sense rather than "feminism" (5). One also questions how "British and American feminists... in the context of Victorian feminism and India"... could have provided a link with "indigenous women's organisations and campaigns...against which the reality of British feminist constructions of Indian women could be measured" when the term, feminism, did not enter the English language (according to the O.E.D.) until 1894 and

when it was first introduced it did not mean what it does now (6).

Notwithstanding these questions (and one abysmally bad poem entitled “Englishwomen in the Rebellion” by Isabella Blagden who claim to fame was nursing Elizabeth Barrett Browning through her last illness), *The Queen’s Daughters* is an interesting read. In it, one encounters women engaged in the activity of Victorian social reform directly. Several are notably good writers, others (as in the case of Florence Nightingale) are disappointing.

Like most Victorian reformers of other countries and cultures, these women did not visit the places and people which concerned them. Instead they depended on others for their information. Nevertheless, despite her lack of personal experience with her subject, the excerpt from Josephine Butler’s pamphlet (containing selections of from Elizabeth Andrew and Kate Bushnell’s report to Josephine Butler 1898) to be well worth reading.

Born in Northumberland in 1828, Butler was the daughter of a radical agricultural reformer who held strong non-conformist convictions. Her *Personal Reminiscences of a Great Crusade* (1896), which charts her organization of the campaign against the Contagious Diseases Acts of the 1860s which regulated prostitution in British seaports and garrison towns, is considered her most outstanding work. An active member of the ‘British Committee for the Abolition of the State Regulation of Vice in India and the Dominions,’ Butler was largely responsible for Elizabeth Andrew and Kate Bushnell’s visit to India in 1891 under the Committee’s auspices.

Elizabeth Andrew and Kate Bushnell’s observations on Cantonment Life in India are informed their interviews with “over three hundred Cantonment women, held to prostitution by the iron law of military regulation, collected together by Government procurers” (197). All the stories they gathered are

wrenching, especially the list of circumstances that brought women and young girls to work as prostitutes for the British Army which concludes this article.

Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s paper, “Infant Marriage in India, 1890,” is also heartbreaking. Like Butler, Fawcett too did not visit India. Married to liberal MP and Cambridge professor of political economy, Henry Fawcett whose campaigning on behalf of Indian reform earned him the popular title of ‘member for India,’ Millicent Garrett Fawcett never visited India. It was because of her husband’s interest in India that she became well informed and developed her own interest in imperial reform.

Another writer who never visited the subcontinent, Harriet Martineau travelled around America, Egypt, and Palestine before working as a leader writer for the London Daily News and regularly submitting articles on India. Her “Modern Life in India, 1857” is compelling and very well written. A journalist,

novels, travel writer and popularizer of history, Martineau also engaged in political analysis. Educated at a Unitarian school, she wrote her first article for the Unitarian journal, *Monthly Repository* when she was nineteen. Popular, versatile, and prolific, she reached wide audiences. Her best known work, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-34) was first released in a twenty-four-part series which sold up to 10,000 copies a month and supported herself and her family after the collapse of her father’s business in 1929.

Included in this collection, another writer who never visited India but drew attention to a wide range of Indian social reforms including education, village sanitation, irrigation, the causes of famine and rural poverty is Florence Nightingale. I suspect that unless one works in a medical profession, sanitation is simply not an exciting subject. To make matters worse, Nightingale had statistics (and lots of them) instead of anecdotes to offer. I’m afraid that I found

Nightingale’s “How Some People Have Lived, and Not Died in India, 1873” to be a disappointing for the casual reader. As source material for researchers, however, it would be pure gold.

Only four women in this collection really experienced India. Well, Cornelia Sorabji and Pandita Ramabai were born and lived their lives there. Frances Hoggan, one of the first women to be a doctor in Britain, practiced medicine in India. Mary Carpenter supervised a girls’ school in Bombay. Flora Steel opened a school for girls at Kasur and was a member of the Provincial Education Board of the Punjab.

As Tuson points out, the value of *The Queen’s Daughters* lies not so much in what it transmits about India in the nineteenth century as in what it reveals about the minds of women who were interested and active in Victorian social reform in other countries. This volume really is a collection of “what [these] writers said and thought about India” rather than a history of India itself (viii). As such, I can

certainly recommend this book to readers interested in British imperialism, nineteenth century social reform, and Indian social history. For those who are interested in stories about the Taj Mahal and the Khyber Pass, I’m sorry, but *The Queen’s Daughters* just wouldn’t be their cup of tea.



## CONTRIBUTORS

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