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Recovering Italian Ancestry in the Work of Italian American Poets

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Abstract:

Poems written by Italian American poets included in *Unsettling America*, an anthology of ethnic poetry edited by Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan in 1994, focus on a common theme, the sense of otherness felt by these poets when they were young in school and even within their own Italian American families. These poets confess to the psychological abuse they suffered that caused them to hate their Italian selves as well as the Italian language and force them to shed the parts of themselves that other people found offensive. The poems, however, also testify to the poets' awareness of what was lost as these poets embark on a journey of self definition to recover their own Italian identities and the Italian language that they were forced to shed.

Keywords: normative, confessional poetry, otherness, difference, assimilation

In 1994, Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan published *Unsettling America: An Anthology of Contemporary Multicultural Poetry*, a truly multicultural collection of poetry that they divided into five parts, "Uprooting," "Performing," "Naming," "Negotiating," and "Re-Envisioning." Throughout the collection, regardless of where they appear, poems written by Italian American poets share one theme in common, the sense of otherness that Italian Americans felt as young people at school where they were marked as "others" by their Italian names and often abused and made to feel different. These poets write about high school teachers who refused to pronounce their names correctly and, in many cases, even punished them for being different. Although they are all adults, far removed from those years spent in high school, these Italian American poets still remember and now confess to the psychological pain that they suffered in the hands of their teachers who basically taught them to hate their names, their looks, their language, everything they were as Italians. Unable to fight back, these young people, little by little, shed pieces of themselves so that others would start seeing them as "American," and one of the things they now admit with regret to giving up is knowledge of the Italian language, an irreplaceable loss. The poems written by Italian American poets and included in *Unsettling America* examine the pain felt by these writers when they were young and attempting to create a

self. These poems confess to the pain the poets suffered in the hands of others, but they also document a journey of self definition and self awareness that has lead them to value and appreciate who they are as Italians in America.

Explaining the difference that she finds in the cocky self assurance of male confessional poets like Lowell and Berryman and the not-so-self-assured "confessions" of female poets like Sexton and Plath, Sandra M. Gilbert, in "'My Name Is Darkness': The Poetry of Self-Definition," claims that the male confessional poet like Lowell or Berryman "observes himself as a representative specimen with a sort of scientific exactitude. Alienated, he's nevertheless an ironic sociologist of his own alienation because he considers his analytic perspective on himself a civilized, normative point of view" (Gilbert 1977, 445). In contrast to this "normative" white, male point of view, the female confessional poet, even though she is also white, "seems to feel no such paradoxical ease with her own anxieties" (Gilbert 1977, 445). Gilbert claims that the white, female confessional poet, "even at her most objective she feels eccentric, not representative; peripheral, not central" (Gilbert 1977, 445). She is not central because "the male confessional poet—Lowell, Berryman, Yeats—writes in the certainty that he is the inheritor of major traditions, the grandson of history" (Gilbert 1977, 446). The female confessional poet does not share the long history of male produced poetry nor the male poets' cocky self-assurance. Instead of writing and thereby confessing with certainty, the female poet "writes in the hope of discovering or defining a self, a certainty, a tradition" (Gilbert 1977, 446). Unlike her self-assured male counterpart, the white, American female confessional poet writes as if she is "striving for self-knowledge" (Gilbert 1977, 446) in order to define a self that is not "normative," not completely understood.

Sandra M. Gilbert's understanding of how the work of white American confessional women poets differs from the work of their male counterparts is useful in understanding the work of both male and female Italian American poets who have recently been writing about the pain they suffered as children in the hands of people who considered them inferior simply because they were Italian. Although these poets may have been white, they were not white enough to be part of the "normative" white group. In "Real Presence," Anthony Lioi explains that "as scholarship in Whiteness Studies has shown, many of the peoples now considered 'white ethnics'—Ashkenazi Jews, southern Italians, the Irish—were not entirely white when they arrived in the United States during the great migrations that ended in 1924" (Lioi 2009, 141). The Italian Americans may have looked white, but the color of their skins did not protect them from the ridicule of other more established Americans. Thus, Italian American poets who suffered discrimination because of their "difference" are now confessing their pain through their poetry. As Sandra M. Gilbert sees white women confessional poets writing "in the hope of discovering or defining a self, a certainty, a tradition" (Gilbert 1977, 446), Italian American poets now write to define their pain and to understand what happened to so many of them during their youth in this country. They were marked as the "Other" and made to suffer the trauma of ridicule not only in the hands of their classmates who were too young to know better

but also in the hands of their teachers, educated adults, who should have known better than to target their students simply because they were different.

Susan J. Brison argues in "Acts of Memory" that "trauma survivors often eventually find ways to reconstruct themselves and carry on with reconfigured lives." However, for people who have suffered the abuse of others, especially during childhood, "working through, or remastering, traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one's own" (Brison 2002, 68). To surpass the trauma inflicted by others, the object of abuse must be able to work through the pain; he/she must evolve so that the pain can be transformed into something better. Regina Barreca argues in *Don't Tell Mama* that "Italian Americans live (and have always lived) a life not inherited, but invented" and that invention of the self has made them "aware of their own process of transformation from citizens of another country to residents of a new land (however long ago the journey was made)" (Barreca 2002, XIX). This process of transformation is evident in the work of Italian-American poets who are now writing to define an Italian-American self, but the process demands that they admit to what happened to them and examine it.

In "Having the Wrong Name for Mr. Wright," Helen Barolini examines the shame of being made to feel wrong. She admits that, even though she was born in the United States, "It was hard to think of myself as American" because "those foreign-type people I saw at weddings or at Christmas, /the ones who talked funny and looked wrong, / —*they* were my relatives" (Barolini 1994, 148). In these lines, Barolini confesses that she feels different from the others around her, as if she is not a real American, and she recognizes the difference in her own relatives who are "not the comely and jolly Americans / of *Saturday Evening Post* covers" (Barolini 1994, 148). People who look like her and her relatives do not appear on the covers of American magazines as symbols of America. For Barolini, marginalization at school keeps her from recognizing herself as an American, a member of the mainstream group. Her sense of being an Other is so severe that, as a student in high school, the poet does not know what to write on the box marked "Nationality" when "at school or at the Y or on camp applications / the forms to be filled always had a blank for / 'Nationality,'" but the poet "never knew what to put down." She admits, "I was born where I went to school and so were my parents, / but I didn't recognize myself as American, / Should I just write 'foreign'?" (Barolini 1994, 148).

Clearly, being born in the United States does not make Helen Barolini feel American, and she has to ask herself how to define her status on the form that she must fill out. The poet's confusion over her sense of self in America is the result of her difference, her being made to feel as if everything that defines her is the wrong thing to be, but Maryfrances Cusumano Wagner, in "Miss Clement's Second Grade," confesses to something more sinister, being the victim of abuse in the hands of her teachers. The speaker in Cusumano Wagner's poem is named Maria, not Marie, which obviously marks her as foreign, and the poet writes that "As Maria shaped vowels, /

she wished to be a Smith," but in this part of the poem she wishes to be a Smith not only so that she could be "white" but also so that the teacher would pay attention to her and she "could hand out crayons / like Evelyn Brown, / have her papers on display" (Cusumano Wagner 1994, 200). The student who looks different from other students in the classroom gets noticed by the teacher only when she makes a mistake, which is why the poet confesses that

> During quiet writing,
> when everyone seemed the same,
> she almost forgot
> the hours locked in the teacher's closet,
> missing how to take two from eight. (Cusumano Wagner 1994, 200)

The speaker in Cusumano Wagner's poem worries about her Italian name, which is not Smith, but the punishment that she receives for making a mistake in Math is severe, an attempt to break the spirit of Italian school kids and force them to submit. Denise Nico Leto also attests to the violence suffered by Italian American children in "For Talking" when she writes about "Angela Di Martini & I talking / Miss Philpot screams at us / to come to the front of the room" and adds that the girls walk to the front of the room "shaking with fear" because they know the teacher will hit "the backs of our hands with a ruler / for talking" (Nico Leto 1994, 164). Richard Gambino notes in *Blood of my Blood* that "second-generation children were forcefully impressed in public schools with the doctrine of assimilation in American ways, a program that made them feel odd and guilty about everything in their own identities from their mannerisms, clothes, and food to their operatic, vowel-filled names" (Gambino 1998, 255). When everything that defines the self comes into question, remaining true to one self becomes very difficult, which is why Barolini wonders if she should write "foreign" to define who she is and also why the speaker in Cusumano Wagner's poem almost avoids mentioning her being locked in the teacher's closet.

Like Helen Barolini, Maria Mazziotti Gillan remembers in "Public School No. 18: Patterson, New Jersey," how "Miss Wilson's eyes, opaque / as blue glass, fix on me" as she states "'We must speak English. / We're in America now.' / I want to say, 'I am American.' / but the evidence is stacked against me" (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 380-381). The poet looks different from the other children in the classroom, so she does not feel that she is American enough. She admits that

> At home, my words smooth in my mouth,
> I chatter, and am proud. In school,
> I am silent, grope for the right English
> words, fear the Italian word
> will sprout from my mouth like a rose,
> fear the progression of teachers

in their sprigged dresses,
their Anglo-Saxon faces.

Without words, they tell me
to be ashamed.
I am.
I deny the booted country
even from myself,

want to be still
and untouchable
as these women
who teach me to hate myself. (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 381)

Being constantly targeted as an Other by teachers and other authority figures leaves a mark on this young woman who learns "to deny the booted country" and admits in "Growing Up Italian" that she "read all the magazines that told me / why blondes have more fun," a mistake that leads her to look "for a man / with blond hair and blue eyes / who would fit right in, / and who'd give me blond, blue-eyed children / who would blend right in" (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 383). Gambino points out in *Blood of My Blood* that, to survive the pressure of being made to feel different, "the children soon became aware of the realistic necessity of being Americans in language, manners, and general modes of behavior," so they made "the soundest possible compromise. They rejected the Italian language and the larger Italian culture" (Gambino 1998, 257). The rejection of Italy is obvious in Robert Viscusi's "Autobiography" where the poet plainly states that "in my house we had an elephant named Italy" (Viscusi 1994, 275) who "kept sitting on chairs and breaking them" and no one knows "what to do with her," but sadly the speaker is "waiting for her to die" (Viscusi 1994, 276). The rambunctious elephant named Italy can neither be controlled nor killed.

In "The Bucket," Rose Romano claims that everything that is wrong with her and her life is the direct result of her Italian ancestry. She attests to many losses and suggests that her being Italian is to blame for them.

It's almost my fault
I didn't get those jobs
or those apartments or
those friends. I could
have changed my name, kept
my mouth shut. I'm light enough.
Not all Italians can say that. (Romano 1994, 326)

Although the color of her skin is light enough to allow her to pass as something other than Italian, she is still haunted by the realization that she is Italian everywhere she goes, and this is not always a good thing in a country where people discriminate against Italians. The speaker in this poem loses her job and possibly even her friends as she is also denied the right to rent apartments simply because her being Italian American makes her different.

In "Having the Wrong Name for Mr. Wright," Helen Barolini attests to the way Mr. Wright focuses on her difference by making a point of mispronouncing her name and the names of other "foreign" students in his classroom. For some reason, Mr. Wright simply cannot pronounce difference, so he repeatedly ignores the student's attempt to teach him how to pronounce her name. The poem opens with the speaker stressing the proper pronunciation,

> "Pietrofesso," I'd repeat to Mr. Wright, the science teacher in
> Junior High
> (or to Miss Fiske, English; Miss Conan, History)
> "P-i-e-t-r-o-f-e-s-s-o," I'd spell out, mortified,
> "Stefana with an f, Pietrofesso,"
> Staff is what they called me, my last name slurring into Peterface-oh.
> Later I was known as Petrify. (Barolini 1994, 147)

Barolini follows up the account of her experience with "What I felt could only be known / by the other wrong names in my class" (Barolini 1994, 148), kids whose foreign sounding names make them the target of ridicule from other kids or indifference by their teachers. These kids are "signaled alien" because of names that Richard Gambino refers to as "operatic, vowel-filled names" (Gambino 1998, 255), but "Mr. Wright grimaced and garbled our names in roll-call" (Barolini 1994, 148) and never apologized for making his students feel as if something about them was wrong.

One of the clearest signs that Italian names create problems for Italians appears in Denise Nico Leto's poem, "The Mary Morelle Show," where she claims that "the pressure to assimilate / performed miraculous mutations" (Leto 1994, 90). The mutations manifest themselves in the many changes expected of Italian Americans. Mary Morelle, a television host, is told that television "makes a big nose / even bigger. / So she got a new one / a little, slightly upturned / less Italian one" (Leto 1994, 91), but the effort to assimilate also forces a different kind of change because "the United States / took their own / Italian names / and spit them out / in shortened versions" as "Giovanni became Jonny became Jon" and "Cavacini became Cacine became Caci (Casey)" or "Alfonsina became Alfy became Al" and "Letinoni became Letino became Leto became Leto (Lido)" (Leto 1994, 90).

> What was Italian became no one
> what was American became everyone.
> To be both was to be someone else.

> Brief, clipped endings
> were survival. (Leto 1994, 90)

To survive, Italian Americans change their names, even their looks, giving up parts of themselves in order to fit in among people who do not even consider them Americans; this process of shedding parts of a culture seems innocuous, painless, but it has clearly left a painful memory for Italian American poets who now remember their discomfort at being made to feel as if they were outsiders in their own country.

In order to fit in, to be considered part of American culture, far too many Italian Americans also gave up their ancestral language. Fred Gardaphé in "We Weren't Always White: Race and Ethnicity in Italian American Literature" points out that, "For Italian Americans, 'making it' has come with a high price tag. It has cost them the language of their ancestors—the main means by which history is preserved and heritage passed on from one generation to the next" (Gardaphé 2002, 187). Giving up the Italian language becomes almost a condition of becoming American, and even those who wanted to keep the Italian language found it difficult because, as Richard Gambino explains in *Blood of My Blood*, when he was in high school in the 1950s, he and other students "bound for college" were "advised to study French" (Gambino 1998, 254). He also laments that he "attended two other high schools, one in Manhattan and one in Nassau County," but "neither offered studies in Italian" (Gambino 1998, 254). Because he was unable to study Italian in school, Gambino knows that he has a "poor degree of literacy" in the Italian language, and he admits that this is "typical of second- and third-generation Italian-Americans. We have not mastered a literate command of the old tongue" (Gambino 1998, 255). Not being allowed to study Italian constitutes a great loss for Italian Americans as they attempt to define themselves because, as Edvige Giunta points out in *Writing with an Accent*, "language is a manifestation of cultural identity" (Giunta 2002, XI).

In "Why I Don't Speak Italian," Arthur L. Clements attests to his own loss of his ancestral language. Even though the poem opens with the line, "God knows, teaching the Renaissance I could use it" (Clements 1994, 82), the poet confesses that he never learned the language of his ancestors when he was a child and adds that

> To visit Rome, Venice, and Florence,
> where I could identify Da Vinci's drawings
> by their left-handed strokes,
> I bought a recorded language course. (Clements 1994, 83)

Although he is accomplished in his field, capable of identifying a painter's work by his stroke, this Italian American college professor must learn the language of his ancestors when he visits Italy, and he admits that he never learned to speak Italian because he was ashamed, but not because he was the subject of abuse or ridicule. Instead he remembers that

My Aunt Clara told childhood stories
about being called *dago* and *guinea*,
hurt by friends' juvenile jokes:
"when Italian tires become flat
dago wop, wop, wop, wop."
Once when I was four,
to console my swarthy aunt I told her
she was almost as beautiful
as a blonde. (Clements 1994, 82)

Telling his aunt that she is "almost as beautiful / as a blonde" suggests that the poet has a very low opinion of his Italian aunt's looks, which mark her as different from the "giant, golden-haired barbarians" whom the poet claims his "dark, civilized / Roman ancestors" (Clements 1994, 83) admired.

"Why I Don't Speak Italian" also testifies to the connection between self-hatred and the rejection of most things that define the poet as Italian, like the Italian language and his aunt's Italian looks. Telling his aunt that she is "almost as beautiful / as a blonde" is a cringe-worthy statement that clearly states what the poet values, and it is not his aunt's dark complexion. Shame also leads Maria Mazziotti Gillan, when she was a child, to wish her Italian father were a different, more "American" looking man. She writes in "Arturo,"

I told everyone
your name was Arthur,
tried to turn you
into the imaginary father
in the three-piece suit
that I wanted instead of my own.
I changed my name to Marie,
hoping no one would notice
my face with its dark Italian eyes. (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 379)

However, as an adult, this Italian American poet knows better than to feel shame for her father, and she even develops enough self respect and appreciation for her Italian culture to reclaim her name. The last stanza of this poem testifies to her appreciation of her Italian father, and states

I smile when I think of you.
Listen, America,
this is my father, Arturo;
I am his daughter, Maria.
Do not call me Marie. (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 380)

The poet recovers her father's Italian name and her own as she also learns to value her father for who he is, an Italian American man who struggled to support his family in America.

As if looking Italian did not make these poets feel different enough, many have also had to contend with the mainstream American delusion that being Italian automatically provides all Italian Americans with a connection to the Mafia. George Anastasia argues in "Sinatra's 'Associations' with the Mob" that even famous Italian Americans like Frank Sinatra were not exempt from the pernicious influence that the alleged connection to the Mafia had on him "just because his name end[ed] in a vowel" (Anastasia 2002, 15). The FBI even investigated Sinatra because he associated with other Italians, men like Charles "Lucky" Luciano, Sam (Momo) Giancana, and Joseph "Joey Fish" Fischetti, who were suspected of criminal activities, but nothing was ever found to connect Sinatra to any crimes. Richard Gambino calls the image of the Mafia "a cross laid across the shoulders of every Italian-American for upwards of a full century" (Gambino 1998, 275), so Italian American poets often deal with this issue in their poems. In "Mafioso," Sandra Mortola Gilbert refers to the "Mafiosi, / bad uncles of the barren / cliffs of Sicily" (Gilbert 1994, 71) and provides as examples

> Frank Costello eating spaghetti in a cell at San Quentin,
> Lucky Luciano mixing up a mess of bullets and
> calling for parmesan cheese,
> Al Capone baking a sawed-off shotgun into a
> huge lasagna—
> are you my uncles, my
> only uncles? (Gilbert 1994, 71)

Gilbert obviously fears the cultural connection that she shares with these notorious American criminals because people outside the Italian American community, specifically the media, tend to associate her with them even if she is not a criminal. She wonders if these men are in fact her "only uncles." Curiously, Sandra Mortola Gilbert publishes under the names Sandra Gilbert or Sandra M. Gilbert, with the offending obviously Italian surname Mortola either left out or reduced to an abbreviation.

In *Blood of my Blood*, Richard Gambino documents the history of the Mafia in the United States and its alleged connection to criminals in Italy. Gambino claims that what the mainstream American media perceived as Italian criminal behavior had its roots in the ancient Italian mistrust of authorities. He explains that even though "crime in the early Little Italies was almost exclusively an affair of Italian criminals against Italian victims," the victims "were loath to go to the police for help" because "in la via vecchia the authorities were oppressors and certainly no source of relief or protection. These immigrants preferred to suffer extortion rather than co-operate with the police or the stranieri" (Gambino 1998, 278). As a result of this secrecy that protected criminals within their own communities, the Italian community becomes suspect in the eyes of the law and the media.

> Italian secrecy based on mistrust of official authorities brought American alarm, in turn bringing American investigation, in turn bringing on more Italian mistrust and fear of outsiders and thus more evidence of secrecy, which in turn caused more alarm and investigation—and so went the cycle. (Gambino 1994, 279)

According to Gambino, by 1906, "*The New York Times* called for a special police force to combat what it termed organized crime among the low-class Italians of New York" (Gambino 1998, 282). By 1909, "the cycle of mutual fear and distrust between Italian immigrants and the larger American community was out of control" which leads to "a confused but incessant and widespread maligning of Italian-Americans that continues to this day" (Gambino 1998, 283). By the time notorious gangsters like Frank Costello in the early 1900s, Lucky Luciano in the early 1930s, and Al Capone from 1925 to 1931 appear, the image of the Italian as criminal was well ingrained in the mainstream American mind, and all Italian Americans had become suspect.

Even though Italian Americans were white, they were still marked as different from the other white Americans. Through the insidious and relentless hateful behavior of people who should have known better, like school teachers, Italian Americans were forced to deny their homeland and were shamed into forgetting their ancestral language. Because their names usually ended in a vowel, Italian Americans were also suspected of committing crimes even if they themselves had no connection whatsoever to the people who were in fact committing those crimes. Italian Americans suffered from guilt by nomenclature, and this caused them undeserved trauma. However, as Susan J. Brison states in *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self*, "it is a curious feature of trauma narratives that, in the right circumstances, narrating a traumatic memory can help to defuse it" (Brison 2002, 71). Writing poetry that allows them to define themselves, Italian American poets are reclaiming their Italian names, learning to value the Italian language, and making peace with their Italian looks as they cultivate a sense of pride in their ancestry in spite of everything they have lost. David Eng and David Kazanjian point out in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* that "as the question 'What is lost?' is posed, it invariably slips into the question 'What remains?' That is, loss is inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained" (Eng and Kazanjian 2003, 2).

For Italian American poets, what remains after much trauma and loss is a rediscovery of their ancestry and an embrace of the Italian language. In "American Sonnets for My Father," Daniela Gioseffi marks the process of recovering what remains by honoring the memory of her "tired immigrant father / full of pride and propriety" (Gioseffi 1994, 160), a man who "worked too hard, an oldest child of too many, / a lame thin boy in ragged knickers" (Gioseffi 1994, 159). Giovanna Capone claims that being "Italian American / means my living habits / are cultural ceremonies, not quirks." She adds,

> my skin color is olive, not "white"
> and the hair spreading down my arms and legs and over

the top of my lip
is a dense garden
cultivated for centuries
by Neapolitan peasants (Gioseffi 1994, 181-182)

Capone is not ashamed of how she looks even if her looks do not fit the Anglo-Saxon standard valued by Arthur Clements. Even the hair growing on her upper lip is now valued as a sign of her ancestry.

The same Arthur L. Clements who looks down on his aunt's Italian looks writes a lovely tribute to his grandfather in "Elegy," where he remembers a "gentle man" who "journeyed past Liberty and the Island / to a dark wine cellar in this new world" (Clements 1994, 274). Clements' grandfather was one of the many Italians who flocked to the United States and brought with them an ancient culture that his grandson is now only discovering. Like Clements, Diane di Prima, in "April Fool Birthday Poem for Grandpa," praises the man who "would love us all, would thunder your anarchist wisdom / at us" (di Prima 1994, 318), and even a more established poet like Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes a poem about "The Old Italians Dying," a poem that in its oddly humorous and sardonic way honors the old Italians who, for years, "have been dying / all over America." Ferlinghetti writes that

For years the old Italians in faded felt hats
have been sunning themselves and dying
You have seen them on the benches
in the park in Washington Square
the old Italians in their black high button shoes
the old men in their old fedoras
with stained hatbands
have been dying and dying
day by day. (Ferlinghetti 1994, 15)

Ferlinghetti's first stanza stresses the significance of what is happening to these men, who are dying, but with them also dies a different way of being. Clements Spahr points out that this poem "depicts the dying sociocultural landscape of San Francisco's Little Italy" as it opens with a "nostalgic commemoration of Italian American everyday life that is disappearing" (Spahr 2015, 176). The old men represent what is disappearing now that they themselves are dying.

Ferlinghetti's "The Old Italians Dying" reads like a love letter to men who are marked by their difference and represent an ancient culture that, as Spahr points out, is beginning to disappear. Unlike the poets who confess their pain and the abuse suffered at the hand of people who dislike them, Ferlinghetti does not confess his own pain at being marked as an Other as he was growing up; instead, he leaves himself out of the poem and focuses on the old Italians. He describes them as

the ones who feed the pigeons
cutting the stale bread
with their thumbs & penknives
the ones with old pocketwatches
the old ones with gnarled hands
and wild eyebrows
the ones with baggy pants
with both belt and suspenders
the grappa drinkers with teeth like corn
the Piemontesi the Genovesi the Siciliani
smelling of garlic & pepperonis (Ferlinghetti 1994, 15-16)

These men were different in the way they dressed and the way they behaved, feeding pigeons even when the city forbade it. They could easily be the grandparents of the Italian American poets whose poems are the focus of this essay. Ferlinghetti however does not focus on the prejudices that the old men encountered when they arrived in America. Instead, he simply describes them to point out what will be lost now that they are dying.

The old men celebrated in Ferlinghetti's poem are stubborn and set in their ways. They did not allow America to influence their thinking. They may have lived in America, but their loyalties remained with Italy, even when they knew that it was dangerous to align themselves with the men whom they admired. Ferlinghetti points out that these men are

the ones who loved Mussolini
the old fascists
the ones who loved Garibaldi
the old anarchists reading *L'Umanità Nova*
the ones who loved Sacco & Vanzetti (Ferlinghetti 1994, 16)

The old Italians aligned themselves with foreign ideologies even when it was dangerous. Clements Spahr points out that the old Italians in Ferlinghetti's poem were part of the Left and "are important reminders that a vital part of America's cultural and political history is disappearing with these old Italians" (Spahr 2015, 176).

The younger poets who are the focus of this essay are very aware that the old Italians are dying. They are aware of what has been lost to them, but their poems also testify that they have embarked on a journey of self-discovery to the core of their Italian ancestry. After many years of feeling that she was inferior to people who were not Italian, Maria Mazziotti Gillan, in "Growing Up Italian," learns to "celebrate / my Italian American self, / rooted in this, my country, where" she claims that

all those black/brown/red/yellow
olive-skinned people

soon will raise their voices
and sing this new anthem:

Here I am
and I'm strong
and my skin is warm in the sun
and my dark hair shines,

and today, I take back my name
and wave it in their faces
like a bright, red flag. (Mazziotti Gillan 1994, 384).

Italian American poets have emerged from years of feeling marked by their difference to appreciate that difference and recover not only their personal histories but also their common language.

In "Shattered Identities and Contested Images," Neil Jamieson claims that "good poetry often succeeds in jiggling our perceptual screens in ways that enable us to see both the past and the present in new and sometimes more useful ways" (Jamieson 1992, 75). This happens because "Those who 'make' history, like the 'makers' of poetry, can juxtapose elements in unfamiliar ways, illuminating previously unperceived dimensions of interconnectedness, deeper patterns of meaning, helping their audience to redescribe themselves and the world in more satisfying and more humane ways" (Jamieson 1992, 75). People who read the poems written by Italian American poets included in *Unsettling America* come face to face with the pain inflicted by prejudice on a group of young people simply because they looked different from mainstream Americans. These poets force their readers to face an unpleasant part of our communal past as they confess their pain and attempt to redefine who they are as Italians in America. This is what Michael Dowdy claims that "poems of embodied agency" do as they "figuratively enact the exchange—and thereby the transformation—of experience with readers" (Dowdy 2007, 36). The work of these Italian American poets transforms their experiences into the communal stories of a group of people who suffered but are now embarked on a journey to self-discovery. Confessing their pain makes possible the journey back to language, culture, and their Italian selves.

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The Dark Psyche of Self-Destruction in Poe's Haunted House and Landscape

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Abstract:

As J. O. Bailey notes, Poe held a "land of dreams in his mind." Poe's dark, mist-wreathed landscape resembles the gloomy atmosphere in his haunted architecture that confines human beings within a grotesque world. If this weird geography, his haunted house, is "a peculiarly personal land of dreams" (Bailey), then Poe reaches out for a psychological journey or dreams of humanity through an eerie nature, inter-crossing the weaker realm of humanity and the realm of Spiritual universe/sublimity (Dennis W. Eddings) or terminating in an abyss. This article will concentrate on Poe's scheme of self-destruction in dreams and the psychological journey of the imp of the perverse. This perverse demon, possessing the power to de-materialize the outer stable state, is allegorized as a decayed house or a haunted landscape in the ambience of sadness where an ethereal character completes its self-destruction in a secluded place.

Keywords: The Fall of the House of Usher; Dream-Land; Ulalume; the Imp of the Perverse; self-destruction

Introduction: The Imp of the Perverse

James Tuttleton in "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe" portrays Poe as a poet who encountered a series of predicaments in life while seeking "a primal Paradise" beyond his trials. Poe's creations are evidence of a poet's "passionate means of trying to unify the fragmented world of fallen reality, to recover from the primal alienation produced by the Creation itself" (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"). While Poe grasped a poet's world of beauty in "an Ideal World marked by a Unity and Oneness occurring in some primordial far-off antiquity" (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"), he suffered from the trials of predicament in real life. The more closely he approached the world of the poet, the more predicaments he

encountered. It is not plausible that Poe was unable to support himself financially: Poe was adopted by an affluent family and loved by his foster parents, received a good education, and had friends who helped him develop his literary career. Poe scholars associate Poe's miserable life with his tendency toward perverseness. Poe would have had a secure life if he had not deliberately violated his foster father's principles (for example, he plunged into gambling, though he knew that John Allan "hated profligacy even more than overextended credit" (Kennedy 535).) He had the opportunity to obtain the position of government official, yet he allowed his intoxication to sabotage this hope. Poe might not have had a miserable life if he had avoided being influenced by this tendency toward perverseness. However, the irrational tendency that insulated Poe from a world of security led him to the world of poetry.

Since this drift toward perverseness led Poe to his downfall, this tendency is generally associated with the impulse of self-destruction. J. Gerald Kennedy in "The Violence of Melancholy: Poe against Himself" attributes self-inflicted injury and self-destruction to the imp of the perverse (537-538). In "The Imp of the Perverse," Poe identifies the imp of the perverse as an impulse that commits acts against his own self-interest. This impulse against self-interest is incomprehensible: Poe impetuously commits such acts, knowing well that such behavior would lead to reputational and financial ruin, and even cost him his life.

> We stand upon the brink of a precipice. We peer into the abyss—we grow sick and dizzy. Our first impulse is to shrink from the danger. Unaccountably we remain. By slow degrees our sickness and dizziness and horror become merged in a cloud of unnamable feeling...and yet it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. ("The Imp of the Perverse" 3)

The person is impelled by the imp of the perverse to approach danger since the impulse to approach danger overwhelms the impulse to shrink from danger. The existence of the perverseness is incomprehensible to "moralists" and "phrenologists" ("The Imp of the Perverse" 1). The imp of the perverse is irrational, but the incentives are very irresistible. Those who inflict self-torment on themselves can feel thrilled and delighted in self-injury. They fail to remind themselves of the result of approaching danger caused by the imp of the perverse, as the pleasure of self-torment is stronger than the impulse toward combativeness. The result is death; thus, the imp of the perverse is generally associated with the impulse of self-destruction.

The tendency to cause self-injury might be caused hereditarily or by one's environment.

Theodore Dreiser applies John W. Robertson's *Poe: A Study* to read Poe's life in terms of naturalism—a study of predetermination of heredity and environment:

> "I accept wholly," he [Dreiser] wrote, "his [Dr. Robertson's] theory of morbid heredity in the case of Poe with the corollary that 'he [Poe] was not always to be held responsible either for his words or acts.' He unquestionably belongs, as I have always thought, and as he makes clear, 'to that coterie of Sensitives who wear the fetters of heredity.'" (qt. in Riggio 516)

Poe was a victim in terms of naturalism, as he suffered from grief across his entire life.[1] His long-term grief might have been caused by the loss of his parents as well as the absence of parental love in his young age. As Kennedy indicates, "Poe's recurrent experience of orphanhood—of losing, again and again, his maternal nurturers and paternal protectors—deepened his melancholia, shattered his sense of self-worth, and intensified his need to inflict self-torment" (543).

Many of Poe's stories concern the imp of the perverse impelling his protagonists to act against self-interest, if indeed self-interest means living well in the physical world. Well-known perverse characters include William Wilson, the narrator of "The Tell-Tale Heart," the narrator of "The Black Cat," and Roderick Usher. When Poe's perverse characters act against self-interest, they desperately plunge into a world of abyss. Grief prevails among Poe's stories, whether it be the melancholy of the characters or the atmosphere of sadness in the environment. The mood of sadness is the most appropriate emotion for evoking perverseness. Affected by the imp of the perverse, Poe's characters incline to approach danger and seek to dehumanize themselves through their scheme of material collapse. This perverse demon possesses the power to de-materialize the outer stable state. He is allegorized as a decayed house or a ghoul-haunted space in nature where an ethereal character completes self-destruction in a secluded place. This essay will focus on the imp of the perverse—the dark psyche allegorized in Poe's house and landscape.

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

In "Triangulating Edgar A. Poe," Eric W. Carlson notes that death of Beauty mentioned in Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" is the most poetic effect, as her death (or dying) links Poe's protagonists to grief and death.

> He [Poe] stressed that "the pleasure which is experienced in consequence of contemplating 'the beautiful' as an effect...the intense and pure elevation of *soul*—not of intellect, nor of heart" (16) ...

> the highest manifestation of Beauty is its tone of *sadness*. "Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones... 'When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty*, the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetic topic in the world'" (19). The most popular of artistic effects in lyric verse is the refrain, which "depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought—and of repetition" (17-19). (Carlson 11-12)

"The death of a beautiful woman is the most poetic topic" because her death is the dissolution of the earthly subject-matter of the woman in the process of elevation to spiritual Beauty (Wilbur "Introduction"). In the theory of poetry or aesthetics, Poe legitimizes the emotion of sadness/grief/melancholy as the most appropriate affection; the emotions "are not the ordinary emotions of men, but a 'psychal' excitement appropriate to the mock-destruction of this world and dim glimpsing of another" (Wilbur 37). Grief effectively evokes the force of the dark psyche (the imp of the perverse) in the scenario of the collapse of the material physical world. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," to reinforce grief and the power of the imp of the perverse, Poe applies the techniques of the rhythmic music of monotone, the poem of "The Haunted Palace" as a parallel of the story, death-deferment scenarios, etc. The emotion of grief is reiterated in a form of monotone as if it is designed to achieve the effect of "incantatory power" (Carlson 12) on its poet-God/Roderick—the never-ending mourning of the dead. The theme of Beauty[2] is immersed into the music of monotone expressed in the description of the house and its surroundings. Poe's theme of the death of Beauty is accompanied with the theme of perverseness and of ultimate destruction. The rhythmic music of monotone echoes the dynamic orchestra of the house in the hypnagogic dream of Roderick. Roderick composes a poem entitled "The Haunted Palace," in which a monarch is haunted by his thoughts of destruction; the story about the monarch reflects Roderick's emotions. As David M. Rein says, "storytelling, like dreams, may reflect the teller's deepest feelings, unconscious and conscious" (367). This poem implies Roderick's design of his own death through grief; the poem predicts that Roderick will plunge into a profound abyss and be completely dehumanized/dissolved with Madeline.

Poe's house has a will of its own.[3] In "The Fall of the House of Usher," the decayed house has a dynamic force impelling its dwellers towards destruction.[4] The decayed house with its force of destruction represents the will of the imp of the perverse. It confines Roderick in his inward space of the mind, separating him from the "temporal, rational, physical world" (Wilbur 267). It is a "closed system" (Peeples 187) schemed by the master-artist Poe: the structure of merging destruction and life in a "closed system" is an illusion under the master-artist Poe (187). Roderick is irresistible to

the unconquerable force of the imp, and at the end of the story, he plunges into destruction. Wilbur argues that Roderick's destruction in the collapse of the house is blissful, as it is a destructive transcendence beyond the mundane world "corrupted by rationalism and materialism" (258).

> *The Fall of the House of Usher*, then, is not really a horror story; it is a triumphant report by the narrator that it *is* possible for the poetic soul to shake off this temporal, rational, physical world and escape, if only for a moment, to a realm of unfettered vision. (Wilbur 267)

Roderick cannot escape from the collapse of the house and its surroundings, since the collapse exemplifies what Allen Tate notes in "The Angelic Tradition": the reverse motion of the universe into its annihilation (Tate 252). The house is the will of an "angelic delegate of God" (252) who is "empowered to perform" annihilation of the material universe (252).[5] Roderick is the "angelic delegate of God" who executes the annihilation via the will of his imp of the perverse.

Poe details the dynamic force of destruction and the interaction of Roderick and his demon "the imp of the preserve" who is concretized as the House of Usher. "The Fall of the House of Usher" concerns the story of a man's encounter with his perverse imp in his psychological world. The destructive power, propelling Roderick toward destruction, is Roderick's imp of the perverse. The imp of the perverse "grows into palpability" ("The Imp" 3); the imp is real in an imaginary space, and the feelings that the imp evokes affect one's breath and cause palpitations of the heart. In the story of Usher's House, Poe concretizes emotions of grief, fear, and "the delight of its horror" ("The Imp" 3) through the designs of the house (a hybrid characteristic of the Gothic style, the Arabesque design, the Egyptian pyramids, and the Druid's Stonehenge)—its gloomy and muffled atmosphere, acoustic effects (e.g., sounds of approaching storms, shriek of a dragon in the story of *The Mad Trist*, a real shriek and cracking and ripping sounds from the house's vault, etc.)[6], and visual images of horror (e.g., the surroundings of the house, the dying Madeline, etc.). Affected by grief, Roderick impetuously approaches the danger as the atmosphere produced by the imp is so thrilling that he cannot escape from indulging in the pleasure of approaching death.

Grief and melancholy overwhelm Roderick. We do not know the reasons why Roderick is confined to his *prolonged grief*, but perhaps his grief reaction is a hereditary inclination, or is caused by an unknown disease in the Usher family. Why does Roderick immediately bury Madeline in the family tomb as she *has just passed away*? He chooses the family vault for her tomb because he protects Madeline from being exhumed, but he knows this entombment might

lead to a horrible result of premature burial because her *death* is caused by her illness of catalepsy—a neurological condition that might make her death a temporary lifeless phenomenon. Roderick schemes Madeline's premature burial to lead to his own death. It is Roderick's imp of the perverse who propels Roderick to bury Madeline. Roderick wants to intensify his grief over the loss of Madeline since he intends to use his feeling of grief to kill himself. Perhaps Roderick has opportunity to escape the influence of the imp when his friend tries to calm him by reading a medieval romance entitled *The Mad Trist*, but a piercing shriek in the romance and the noise of the outside storm evoke his recalling of Madeline's sufferings. Temporary relief from grief is merely death-deferment.[7] Madeline *revives*, painfully climbing out of the tomb, and in confronting her imminent death, she helplessly walks towards her brother. Roderick is so appalled by Madeline's struggle against death that he himself dies. The series of events—premature entombment, revival from a coffin that has been nailed shut, collapse of the twin into a corpse—sounds unbelievable; yet they must be incomprehensible as they exist not in real life, but in Roderick's dream of annihilation of materialism. Madeline is symbolic of "earthly, physical Beauty being immolated to Psyche" (Wilbur 26), and the process of her destruction is "the soul's struggle to free itself of earth and move toward the supernal" (Wilbur 11). Had Roderick released himself from grief, he would not have evoked the destructive force of the imp of the perverse propelling him to death through the scheme of Madeline's premature entombment.

The atmosphere of melancholy is ubiquitous. The will to dissolve is also ubiquitous; it occupies not only the unconsciousness, but also the environment, and it resides in its space in the form of melancholy and affects its beholders. Barton Levi St. Armand in "Poe's Landscape of the Soul: Association Theory and 'The Fall of the House of Usher'" applies the theory of associationism to the relationship of the environment and humans in Poe's house and landscape:

> The power of the landscape does not simply reside in the combination or association of its separate elements, arranged in a certain pattern or manner, which produces a corresponding resonance in the mind of its beholder: it resides in the landscape itself. The landscape *is* sad; its very essence is of melancholy and dolor and dread, for Usher's domain possesses a soul and not merely a self. (36)

Associationism theory[8] helps demystify the relationship of Roderick Usher, the landscape and the house, the narrator, and the ubiquitous power of destruction in the environment. Roderick's will (the will of self-destruction) has penetrated the surroundings of the house and the house itself before the narrator arrives and visits his friend, Roderick. The narrator enters the

mental world of Roderick as he enters the house. He is unable to understand what it is, though he senses some intense emotions of sadness within every object—tree, tarn, stone, etc.—in the landscape and/or house. Urged by his impulse of combativeness, the narrator is terrified and escapes the collapse of the house; he is "a rationalist to the end, refus[ing] to accept the full conclusions of his failed experiment in associationism because such acceptance would ally him directly with Roderick Usher" (St. Armand 37). In contrast, Roderick, whose mind extends its dark psyche into the visionary realm, eventually yields to death utterly.

Poe's "Dream-Land"

The landscape in "Dream-Land" is a world of Death. Its natural realm is intertwined with a supernatural realm. The atmosphere in the supernatural realm is grief/melancholy, and the speaker envisions Death in the supernatural realm that the inhabitants cannot see.

Critics have studied the geographical references in Poe's poem "Dream-Land." J. O. Baily in "The Geography of Poe's 'Dream-Land' and 'Ulalume'" believes that the geographic details in "Dream-Land" and "Ulalume" bear similarities to those in Belzubia in *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* or Mercator's North Polar region in "Nautical Chart of the World":

> If Poe's dream-land is his imaginative development of Belzubia, this stanza describes the route of travel to it. The traveler (or his soul) has gone northward to "an ultimate dim Thule." This outpost of the northern world is his starting point on the route "obscure and lonely," perhaps down the river shown on Mercator's "Chart" northwest of Norway, then over the edge of the world, past the "Eidolon, named NIGHT," or the "black rock" of the North Pole, to "these lands" that lie "Out of SPACE—out of TIME." (Bailey 517)

Belzubia in *Symzonia* is a land of "dark and evil" inhabitants, "originally exiled from Symzonia to Belzubia when the utopian state was established" (Bailey 516). In the translated version of Mercator's "Nautical Chart of the World" given by Fite and Freeman, there are four canals in the North Polar region that "flow with such current to the inner whirlpool, that if vessels once enter they cannot be driven back by any wind; and he said that nowhere was there wind strong enough for transporting grain" (qt. in Bailey 514). Thomas Ollive Mabbott takes Richard Wilbur's thought that Poe's "Dream-Land" is inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost*, II, 890-896 (Ronnick 41):

> Before their eyes in sudden view appear
> The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark

> Illimitable Ocean without bound,
> Without dimension, where length, breadth, and highth,
> And time and place are lost; where eldest Night
> And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
> Eternal anarchy ... (qt. in Mabbott 342)

In addition, the ultimate Thule in Poe's poem is found in Virgil's *Georgics,* 1.30, "tibi serviat ultima Thule" (Ronnick 41). According to Ronnick, Poe's geographic description in "Dream-Land" is similar to the landscape/ocean-scape in Seneca's tragedy *Medea* (41):

> venient annis saecula seris,
> quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
> laxet et ingens pateat tellus
> Tethysque novos detegat orbes,
> nec sit terris ultima Thule. (*Medea* 375-79) (qt. in Ronnick 41)
>
> [There will come an era in the following years during which Ocean will loosen the chains of things, when Tethys will reveal new worlds, and Thule not be a limit to the lands.] (*Medea* 375-79) (qt. in Ronnick 41)

In putting those references together, Poe's "Dream-Land" describes a world of a fallen state not inaccessible to the spiritual realm.

The speaker in "Dream-Land" falls into sleep and envisions the world of Death. James B. Reece in "Poe's 'Dream-Land' and The Imagery of Opium Dreams" notes that the graphic images in the poem have their counterparts in the opium-dream imagery that occurs in George Crabbe's "Sir Eustace Grey" (1807), Thomas De Quincey's *The Confessions of an English Opium-Easter* (1821-1822), and Water Colton's "Turkish Sketches: Effects of Opium." Images of "chasms, sunless abysses, and depths below depths" in De Quincey's dreams parallel "chasms, caves, and Titan woods" in Poe's "Dream-Land." Colton's description of the cataract has its counterpart in Poe's description of the waters in the poem. Crabbe's burning mountain and a steep cliff echoes Poe's "mountains toppling evermore." Poe uses the vision of the opium dream to produce the graphic effect of a world intertwining natural and supernatural realms. Guided by the imp of the perverse, Poe's speaker in the poem "Dream-Land" enters a state of

opium-induced reverie; in a trance, he envisions a supernatural realm beyond the physical world.

The situation in "Dream-Land" differs from the one in the "The Fall of the House of Usher." Roderick, as having entered the inward space/mind/dream and isolated from the rationalism of the physical world, is approaching Death. The collapse of the house into the landscape happens when Roderick reaches Death; it symbolizes the destruction of the material world. The speaker of "Dream-Land" has reached the world of Death. While the inhabitants still remain within their physical world, "a nightmare state of separation from the sublime Unity of the Spiritual Universe" (Eddings 6), the speaker does not indulge in the delusions of the physical world. Nonetheless, both Roderick and the speaker of "Dream-Land" are urged by their imp of the perverse in an atmosphere of melancholy.

The first two stanzas in "Dream-Land" can be compared to falling from Heaven to a corruptive physical world. The speaker in the first stanza is waking up as he has dreamed a dream wherein he has visited the Spiritual Universe: "I have reached these lands but newly/From an ultimate dim Thule—/From a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime,/Out of Space—out of Time." The speaker still contains a divine spark within himself, though he is trapped in the physical world after having fallen from the immaterial world.

In the second stanza, the speaker recalls his dream where he wanders in a supernatural realm. The landscape in his dream is a world of Death: "bottomless vales and boundless floods," "chasms," "caves," "Titan woods," "Mountains toppling evermore/Into seas without a shore," etc. The speaker sees a supernatural realm in the landscape which is an infinite abyss/nothingness. In contrast, the inhabitants of the physical world cannot see what the speaker sees. Those images for the inhabitants, as Eddings notes, are "grotesque and absurd" (7) in "the contradictory world of materiality" (7). For them, those images are "a hellish Miltonic Hades of gargantuan figures obscured in the dull, fire-red cast of its sulfuric atmosphere" (7).[9]

The third stanza describes "the inhabitants of the world of the living dead" (Eddings 7) in the physical world. The inhabitants in "Dream-Land" are hopelessly living with "a deluded hope in a world controlled by materiality" (Eddings 7). The inhabitants, since they obey the rule of materialism, symbolize the evil inhabitants of Belzubia. The speaker does not believe in the deluded hope. In dreams, the speaker sees "the swamp," "the toad," and "the dismal tarns and pools"; he sees Death, rather than the deluded hope. As the speaker senses the melancholy atmosphere that has penetrated the surroundings, those objects become supernatural. He hears "sad waters, sad and chilly," "by the grey woods," and "by the dismal tarns and pools." He sees ghouls dwelling in the world of grief. Images of sad and chilly waters and the ghouls

imply that the speaker indulges in the emotions of grief within opium-like dreams.

The fourth stanza is the turning point from a hellish landscape to "a peaceful, soothing region" in the physical world. Eddings suggests this shift occurs not because the inhabitants have returned to Heaven, but because they indulge in "a deluded comfort in the insane world of materiality" (7). "Eldorado" refers to the insane world of materiality. The inhabitants obey the dictates of the King, who forbids them to eye the Ideal: "Never its mysteries are exposed/To the weak human eye unclosed." Only the sad Soul knows the city of "Eldorado" is an incarnation of Death. With the help of the sad Soul, the speaker is perverse and refuses to agree with the King: he "would be able to deny the dictates of the King and enter the realm of the Ideal" (Eddings 8). In contrast, the inhabitants, loyal to the King, remain awake to fake ideals and shut their eyes to the Ideal.

The sad Soul is the speaker's imp of the perverse who urges the speaker to disobey the dictates of the King. In terms of associationism theory, the sad Soul is sentient to the melancholy atmosphere and transmits its sense of sadness to others. The ill angels and the ghouls are affected by grief and melancholy. "Dream-Land" intertwines the two worlds: the mind of the sad Soul and the King's delusive "peaceful, soothing region." The images in the landscape present a deluded hope for the inhabitants of the physical world, while they manifest the world of Death that only the speaker can envision. Accompanied by the sad Soul, the speaker senses the Ideal "shrouded" (hidden) in a supernatural realm.

The final stanza is the conclusion of the journey where the speaker takes the same route "in the opposite direction" (Eddings 8) towards the Ideal. Eddings argues that the speaker will successfully transcend to the realm of the Ideal. The journey in "Dream-Land" reiterates the theme of first awakening from the dream, and then the theme of recalling the images in the dreams and glimpsing the world of Death in a gloomy atmosphere. The destiny of the speaker—whether eventually transcending the chaotic world or not—remains uncertain, as he is still going through the same route "obscure and lonely." One thing is certain: he is being guided by the sad Soul in the landscape of Death, the imp of the perverse.

Poe's "Ulalume"

The poem "Ulalume" concerns the dramatic world of a grieving speaker-narrator who makes a journey towards the tomb of his lost lover, Ulalume. This psychodrama monologue begins with the scenery of gloom and sadness which reflects his grief over the loss of the beloved Ulalume. Later, the grief is repressed, and the speaker can resume daily dialogues with others as

he encounters Astarte, a bright rising star associated with Venus and sexuality. What follows is a conflict between the sensual self (the speaker) and the spiritual self (Psyche). Though the speaker persuades Psyche to stay in the sensual world with Astarte, he is still guided to the tomb of Ulalume. In the denouement, the emotion of grief returns and is aggravated, and the speaker recognizes grief as a reality. As he returns to the grave of Ulalume, the speaker returns to the scene of sadness—"my heart it grew ashen and sober"—and he might submit to death beside the tomb of Ulalume.

Critics have various explanations on the denouement of the protagonist's psycho-dramatic world in "Ulalume." David Robinson in "'Ulalume'—The Ghouls and the Critics" argues that the narrator, though he has left Astarte, does not reach the ideal world, but stays within the vortex of grief. Eric W. Carlson perceives that the protagonist, having recognized deluded hope in Astarte's sensual temptation and left her behind, returns to the grave of Ulalume and spiritually reaches "the unified organic tripartite self (the physical, the moral, and the intellectual or artistic)" (Carlson 37). The protagonist is "driven to despair in an effort to recapture his ideal integrity" (37). Lou Ann Kriegisch reads "Ulalume" as a poem that "contains a moral and philosophical sense of profanation arising from the Platonic conflict of sensuous love and spiritual love" (29). Joseph P. Kenyon in "Auber and Avernus: Poe's Use of Myth and Ritual in 'Ulalume'" identifies the narrator's guidance by Astarte as a journey to the underworld described in the *Aeneid*; this journey embodies "Poe's mental gyrations" (Kenyon 64) toward madness, and Astarte—in replacement of Ulalume—draws the protagonist to the world of love and death.[10] Psyche is the soul that "strives to bring the narrator's conscious mind back to rationality" (Kenyon 65), and she succeeds since the protagonist "finds, at the end, a reunion not with his Dying Woman but with his own sanity" (Kenyon 66). The explanations of the denouement, as we see above, are not identical. Only one thing is certain: the protagonist returns to "the ghoul-haunted woodland of weir" and his heart is "ashen and sober," remaining in a grieving yet tranquil state. "Ulalume" can be perceived as featuring a self-conscious move toward destruction through a deliberate scheme of aggravating sadness. Two factors support this view. First, Poe wrote the poem just as Virginia had left him; he created this poem as a reminiscence of his beloved, for he needed grief to connect himself with memories of Virginia. Second, as the geographic details in "Ulalume" bear an apparent similarity with those in "The Fall of the House of Usher," this poem is about the destruction of material world—the earthly deluded hope—as a result of extreme grief. "Ulalume" has the perfect literary structure for reiterating the emotion of sadness for the never-ending remembrance of the beloved.

The theme of "Ulalume" concerns the escape from (or repression of) the feeling of sadness and the return to the emotions of grief for ultimate dissolution. As the self seeks combativeness eluding his grief-stricken double through a deluded hope, indulging in sensuality, the imp of the perverse with "a strongly antagonistical sentiment" overwhelms its defense mechanism. At that moment, this grief-stricken imp reverses the situation, destroying the rational "I" and thus urging the self to destroy itself.

In the conflict between combativeness against the feelings of sadness and the spiritual soul's search for the dead, ghouls are located in the mental world of the narrator as a repressive force against grief. Carlson reads the ghouls[11] as the introspective self of the narrator, as the latter seeks oblivion of grief (the loss of Ulalume): a "ghoul-haunted woodland" as "symbolizing the buried self, where inhibitions, complexes, and rationalizations abound" (Carlson 30). Similarly, Robinson identifies Astarte as the tool used by the ghouls to elude sadness: the ghouls use Astarte, "the peace of forgetfulness" (Robinson 10), to "prevent the narrator's discovery of the tomb, thus saving him the return of grief" (9). The world of the ghouls—"the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir"—is an "inner landscape of imagery traditionally used both for death and sexuality" (Runcie 13). This sexuality refers to sensual love with Astarte, who helps him forget the loss of Ulalume. As the creators of Astarte, the ghouls might be merciful and well-intended as they prevent the narrator from grief. However, there is another force in the poem that guides the protagonist to death (the tomb of Ulalume). The real scheme in Astarte's comfort (combativeness against grief) is to draw the protagonist to fall deeper into the abyss of melancholy for the fulfillment of self-destruction. That "the ghoul-haunted woodland" reappears in the last stanza signifies that the protagonist still grieves for the loss of Ulalume; he is reminiscent of Ulalume as grief returns, and this grief is more aggravating than that in the previous two stanzas. The protagonist eventually circumscribes himself to the structure of a grief-shrouded world for self-destruction.

Astarte, a "nebulous lustre" star, symbolizes the opposite of the conscious Psyche, and the double of Ulalume, who holds a secret of the protagonist's lamentation and self-destruction. She appears in the fourth stanza as the rising star or the moon goddess with the "duplicate horn" or "miraculous/bediamonded crescent." She is the double of Aphrodite and Venus, and people confuse her with them:

> ...the Phoenicians sometimes confused Astarte with a moon goddess, represented in Oriental headdress art as the moon goddess with a crescent. As the great Asia Minor goddess of fertility and

> sexual love, she became associated with Adonis, and identified with Aphrodite and Venus. As Venus, she was both the Morning and Evening Star. (Carlson 31)

Astarte's "duplicate horn" is "a duplicate of the horn of Dian" (Bailey 520). She is the material correspondence to the spiritual Ulalume and is characteristic of the shadow light of Ulalume: an ideal vision (Mulqueen "The Meaning of Poet's 'Ulalume'"), "the illusory nature" (Carlson 33), and the "sensual beauty" "which the unenlightened man mistakes for true beauty" (Kriegisch 30). She appears when the protagonist seeks a replacement for Ulalume in the ghoul-haunted woodland; "Astarte is described as the temptation of sensual love to console him [the narrator] in his grief over the death of his former love" (Carlson 32); she is "a manifestation of Ulalume's 'secret'" (Runcie 13), with power in the skies and the underworld (corresponding to the Egyptian mythology of Hathor and the constellation of Leo and Virgo) (Kenyon 63-64). She represents a deluded hope, bringing temporary comfort—"the Lethean peace"—to the grief-striven protagonist (Kriegisch 30), and she is the media/material aspect of Ulalume, transporting the protagonist to the realm/grave of Ulalume.

The inner world of the narrator—extreme grief—is reflected in the environment/the landscape, which itself is an extension of the psychological world of the dark psyche into the visionary realm. The landscape of "Ulalume" is located in "the realms of the boreal pole," comparable to the description of Belzubia in *Symzonia* or Mercator's North Polar region in "Nautical Chart of the World" (Bailey). The name "boreal pole" comes from "Boreas," "who carries Psyche to Cupid's palace" in the myth of Cupid and Psyche (Kenyon 63). The narrator enters the landscape paralleling the environment of the house of Usher—a hypnotic trance-condition and grief-shrouded world. Through the use of tone, rhythm, repetition, monotony, and sounds (Carlson; Van Doorn), the narrator in the monologue depicts the hypnotic effect of the environment as it lulls him into the sadness enshrouded world. "The monotonous rhythm, the repetitious but slow beat, beat, beat with its lulling, hypnotic effect, emphasizes the non-rational state of the speaker's mind" (Miller "Ulalume Resurrected" 202). Hypnotism is necessary, as this world is circumscribed for Roderick Usher as well as for the narrator of "Ulalume." The denouement of the poem (the last stanza) returns to the first stanza—the scene of the grave of Ulalume; "my heart it grew ashen and sober" echoes "the skies they were ashen and sober" of the first stanza for the reiteration that the melancholy landscape has completely extended itself to the narrator's dark psychological world. Immersion in grief and ending in death is blissful for the narrator. As suggested in the title, the word "Ulalume" signifies

the combination of light and death. Palmer C. Holt notices "Light of the Dead" (qt, in Carlson 35) in the title; Mabbott suggests "the light of or in sorrow, or wailing" (qt. in Carlson 35); Runcie notes that "'Ulalume' is possibly made up of *ululare*, to wail and *lumen*, light. But *-lume* also is a homophone of gloom, womb and tomb" (Runcie 12). Kenyon identifies the Irish Gaelic *Ul-ul-loo* as a sound tied to the meanings of both magic and tomb (59). Both Astarte and Ulalume hold a "secret" (Runcie 12), as they are the double. The protagonist's temporary oblivion of sadness through emotion-repression and the sensual love with Astarte (as it begins in the fourth stanza) does not make the feeling of grief disappear, but instead strengthens the melancholy. Just as Poe needs the antithetical characters to repress or suppress the grief until the next outburst of emotions that brings back the memories of the bereaved love, so the psycho-dramatic world in "Ulalume" is structured with the dramatic love of Astarte for the return of the "Light of the Dead," for the perpetual immersion in the gloomy world of Ulalume.

In the last stanza, the narrator reaches the world of Death and asks himself, "Ah, what demon hath tempted me here?" The demon might be Astarte, the ghoul, or the narrator himself. The demon, who brings the protagonist back to the grave of Ulalume, is the incarnation of the perverse imp. As it happens, the imp of the perverse (the demon) appears earlier when the narrator approaches danger. As the narrator encounters Astarte and becomes obsessive with her, Psyche strives to pull him back: "Sadly this star I mistrust." Psyche, the "good counsellor and good guide" (Runcie 13), is the rational aspect of the narrator; Psyche is terrified as the narrator approaches Astarte, the double of Ulalume, who will eventually lead him to the grave of Ulalume. Urged by the imp of the perverse, the narrator violates his reason, Psyche, and finally reaches Death.

Conclusion

Within Poe's stories, physical space—landscapes, seascapes, architecture, etc.—is an embedded atmosphere of sadness reflecting and affecting the soul of man. Grief prevails among the environment, affecting human emotions, and the ambience of sadness in the environment evokes the imp of the perverse—the dark psyche impelling Poe's characters to approach danger and seek out dehumanization, dissolution, and ultimate destruction. Perverseness provokes irrationalism that might lead to annihilation. For Poe in *Eureka*, this annihilation stands for the spiritual transcendence to Divinity. Yet Poe demonstrates the horror of decaying materials rather than spiritual transcendence in most of his literary works—crime stories (murders), (pseudo)sciences, Gothic-mist environments, mental illness, grave-yard fantasies, etc. His literary

works center on the theme of the evocation (or aggravation) of grief and the feeling of fear in confronting one's imminent death. Poe's protagonists, whether they are plummeting into destruction or temporarily elude mental crisis as we see in the drama of Astarte schemed by the ghouls in "Ululume," cannot escape their ultimate destruction, since they are the designers of their own destruction. Poe sometimes uses death deferment to strengthen the effect of grief or the effect of fear in the drama of confronting imminent death. The problem that concerns human's irrational response, perverseness, is unsettled. Perverseness brings "destructive transcendence" to Poe's characters who design their own self-destruction, annihilating their earthly subject-matters. Perverseness is also a power against despotism, as we see in the poem "Dream-Land." Yet "the soul's reconstitution and purification in death" (Wilbur 28) via the power of the imp is connected to the soul's experience of suffering and horror before entering the blissful afterlife. Whatever the situation to which the perverseness leads, Poe perfectly creates the effect of grief; he presents a world of ubiquitous melancholy and allegorizes his house and landscape as an extensive space of dark psyche bonded to an ambience of grief and horror.

Endnotes:

1. Perhaps alcoholism is the most coercive fetter of heredity for Poe. According to *The Poe Log*, Poe's "predisposition toward alcoholism" might have been caused by a nurse who fed the infant Poe and his sister "gin and other spirituous liquors, with sometimes laudanum" to make them quickly fall asleep (Tuttleton "The Trials of Edgar Allan Poe"). Alcohol had a great impact on Poe: he was so "sensitive to alcohol that a single glass of wine would make him violently ill for days" (*The New York Times*, "Poe's Death Is Rewritten as Case of Rabies, Not Telltale Alcohol").
2. Poe's female characters like Ligeia and Eleonora symbolize spiritual beauty: "a positive 'psychal' force" or "clue to the psychal transcendentalism" (Carlson 13). Madeline symbolizes earthly beauty; she is structured around death or the collapse of the physical world in the process of her transformation. See Wilbur's "Introduction" in *Poe: Complete Poems*.
3. Richard Wilbur in "The House of Poe" identifies the House of Usher as the mind of Roderick. His house is actually his mind in the hypnagogic state: "The hypnagogic state...is a condition of semi-consciousness in which the closed eye beholds a continuous procession of vivid and constantly changing forms" (Wilbur 265). John T. Irwin sees this self-consciousness in Poe's space: "reflexiveness is associated with infinity in Poe's figurations of self-consciousness" (398). Stephen Rachman in "From 'Al Aaraaf' to the Universe of Stars': Poe, the Arabesque, and Cosmology" identifies Poe's Arabesque-designed house as "a trope of the reflexive, the infinite, and the self-conscious" (10).
4. Patricia C. Smith in "Poe's Arabesque" views in Poe's Arabesque-designed house "something kinetic—the motion toward unity—in a static medium" (45). This kinetic power whirling toward death and unity parallels Wilbur's statement that the House of Usher/Roderick's mind is on the verge of dynamic collapse. Stephen Rachman in "From 'Al Aaraaf' to the Universe of Stars': Poe, the Arabesque, and Cosmology" adds the elements of an Arabesque-designed house to Poe's house. As the light falls on the Arabesque-style house, it collides with its Arabesque design, symbolic of the mind of Michelangelo in "Al Araaf," and the protagonist thus dies: "It is a collision of the concrete

with the abstract figure: the concrete light ray…falling on an illustration of nonrepresentational labyrinthine abstraction (the Arabesque)" (10).

5. In the middle of the 20th century, close readings of Poe's works began to appear as psychoanalytic criticism on Poe waned. Significant Poe scholars offered alternatives to psychoanalysis: Edward Davidson, Allen Tate, and Richard Wilbur. See "Introduction: The Unfolding Investigation of Edgar Poe," page 7.
6. For the further study of how sounds (phonetics, phonology, metrical arrangements, etc.) generate the sense of emotions in Poe's poetry, see Studniarz's *The Time-Transcending Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe: An Explanation of the Mechanics of His Poetic Speech*.
7. Death-deferment prevails among Poe's stories. In "The Pit and the Pendulum," the narrator cannot be isolated well in the dreaming mind where he is surrendering to death. Though he collapses into a trance and perceives the image of a demon in his dreams, starvation forces him to awaken from his reverie. Moreover, the odor of putrefaction and the sound of the pendulum-like knife that intrude in his dream cause stimuli and thus the interruption of the dream. In *Pym*, Pym is well-protected within the hideout of a whaling vessel, the *Grampus*. Nevertheless, the sensation of hunger urges Pym to look for an outlet leading to the above-ground world, symbolic of the mundane world of rationalism and materialism.
8. The theories of associationism are associated with Lockean empiricism, Romanticism, reverie, and emotions:

   > …the philosophy of Associationism, a mode of thought which took its impetus from Lockean empiricism…As Wylie Sypher writes in a chapter entitled "Psychological Picturesque: Association and Reverie" in his suggestive study *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*: "In its early phases this psychology is mechanistic—nearly behavioristic; but it was changed by Coleridge and the romantics to an 'organic' theory of imagination, a power to envision another higher order of reality, or even to create it, as in a dream"… reverie involves the particular pleasures of private recollection as well as an overall emotional appreciation for larger aesthetic categories such as the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque…(St. Armand 34-35).

9. Thomas P. Haviland in "How Well Did Poe Know Milton?" identifies Miltonic style in Poe's literary works. The second and third stanzas of "Dream-Land" resemble Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." Haviland notes, "'Dreamland' certainly feels the magic of 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso,' particularly the second and third stanzas with their preponderance of trochaic tetrameter and the unmistakable lines (31-32)" (857).
10. Kenyon reads Poe's "Ulalume" in terms of the Celtic ritual of wailing for the dead, in addition to referencing Egyptian and the Greek mythology. Mythology that Kenyon mentions includes the myth of Aeneas, the myth of Psyche, the cypress tree, Mount Erebus, Boreas (the North Wind), the goddess Hathor, mythical references to the constellation Leo and Virgo, and the journey to the underworld.
11. The ghoul in ancient Arabic folklore "belonged to a diabolic class of jinn (spirits) and were said to be the offspring of Iblīs, the prince of darkness in Islam": "A *ghūl* stalked the desert, often in the guise of an attractive woman, trying to distract travelers, and, when successful, killed and ate them. The sole defense that one had against a *ghūl* was to strike it dead in one blow; a second blow would only bring it back to life again." See the term "ghoul": https://www.britannica.com.

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The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg: Building a Nation Through Alienation

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Abstract:

Alienation is a concept that dates back to the Old Testament to define idolatry where man worships idols and kneels in front of his own creation, thus alienating himself from his potential and his true self-worth. The modern usage of the term identifies the individual as alienated and this can occur between any group of people, as long as there is some person(s) or thing(s) alienated from some other(s). In this paper, I use the concepts of self, other and alienation to look at *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*, a fictional travelogue in Persian, often credited with creating a national consciousness among Iranians at the beginning of the 20th century, awakening the nation to the terrible conditions of the time and making the people aware of the need for political change. The main protagonist, Ebrahim, is an expatriate Iranian, born and raised in Egypt, who loves and adores his homeland. On his first ever trip to the country, however, he is disappointed with the state of the country and goes on to create images of self and other. I identify this process in the way he projects Iran as a country against all the other countries in the world.

Keywords: alienation, Iranian nationalism, fictional travel diary, self and other

Introduction

The end of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mark the important era of nationalisation and nation building in Iran. This was the period when Iran as a nation changed from a feudal society to emerge as a constitutional monarchy. This period of nationalisation culminated with the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, while the years between 1905 and 1911 are considered as the period of the Constitutional Movement. During these years, "increased contact with the West, accompanied by a quickening tempo of modernization, the political awakening of the people, and the propagation of a need for change in the country's political and legal life" are recognised as the causes of the movement (Kamshad 1966, 31). At the same time, literature also played an important role in the political developments of the period, culminating in the production of what has been termed by many as "literature of revolt" (Kamshad 1966, 35), which came into being before, during and after the Revolution of 1906.

This literature includes poetry and prose, and is seen in the form of the press, political and satirical essays as well as novels and prose fiction (Rypka 1968, 355; Hillmann 1988, 293). One notable work considered by many as responsible for awakening the nation is *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*[1] by Zayn ol-Abedin Maraghe'i. The book appeared at the beginning of the 20th century and is often seen as a forerunner to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906. In what follows, *Travel Dairy* is examined with a look at the construction of Self and Other(s) in order to show how the main protagonist, Ebrahim Beyg goes on to alienate Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world. The Others looked at as points of comparison and contrast include Muslim countries, Europe and the West, third world and African countries, and Iran's past. In each case, Ebrahim laments the current state of Iran, and alienates Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world and even its own past.

Alienation

Alienation is a concept that dates back to the Old Testament and was used to define idolatry where man worships idols and kneels in front of his own creation. Hence, instead of experiencing himself as a creator, he becomes a subject of his own creation, thus alienating himself from his potential. The modern usage of the term, however, dates back to Hegel who equated man's history with that of his alienation or *Entfremdung* (Fromm 1961, 47). According to Hagel, alienation is when the "'finite spirit', the human self, 'doubles' itself, externalises itself, and then confronts its own other being as something separate, distinct and opposed to it". Both social and spiritual alienation are related to each other. The Self achieves its evolution first through alienation from itself and then recognising its own alienation, thus achieving "[s]ubjectivity, individuality, and freedom." In other words, the Self attains individuality and freedom through interaction with others, which can conquer its own alienation by becoming active in society and the world (Sayers 2011, 3-4).

An important aspect of alienation is the feeling of "becoming" alien to something. It is not enough when a person is alienated from something from the beginning. But rather, he/she should have "become" alienated to it. Therefore, there must be a period of time when the person feels at one with something, and then later it becomes alien to him/her. In Hegel's sense, it is the social substance that is alienated from the person, whereas today it is the individual that we consider as alienated (Schacht 1971, 36-41). This feeling has occurred in various stages and at different times throughout history, from the ancient period up to the modern times (Kaufmann 1971, xiv); and also between any group of people, as long as there is some person(s) or thing(s) alienated from some other(s) (Kaufmann 1971, xxii). Hence, even a country can become alienated from other countries and the rest of the world.

The definition used in this paper is that offered by Robert Ankony and Thomas Kelley (1991), wherein they define alienation as "a condition in social relationships reflected by a low degree of

integration or common values and a high degree of distance or isolation between individuals, or between an individual and a group of people in a community or work environment" (121).

Alienating Iran from the Rest of the World

The idea of nationalism and Iran as a nation state was a novelty in Iran at the end of the 19th century. Despite many people bearing sentimental feelings for the country, Iran did not exist as a modern nation state, not in the sense defined by Benedict Anderson in his ground-breaking work *Imagined Communities* (Cole 1996, 37). Three groups are generally recognised as being responsible for the emergence and spread of nationalism and ultimately the Constitutional Revolution of Iran. They are the merchants, the clergy and the intellectuals. Each group had become tired of the terrible conditions in Iran for various reasons. For instance, the religious were worried about the increasing dominance of foreigners and the influence of their customs and practices; the merchants had grown tired of financial problems and the existence of no laws; government employees and the educated were angry because of the decline of the administrative apparatus and the autocracy of the incompetent government. To the point that both the court and the king became a subject of their severe criticism and disapproval (Dastgheib 2005, 61).

At the same time, a number of factors played a role in pushing Iranians to develop and modernise their nation. One such is the introduction of modern education and newspapers. The very first press entered Iran relatively late in 1817, followed in 1819-20 by another press from England; and then in 1824-25, a press house was opened in Tehran (Avery 2007, 818). The first newspaper in Iran, however, was opened in the year 1857. During the same year, the first Iranian modern school, the Dar ol-Fonun (Polytechnic) was also established. The Dar ol-Fonun was also the place for the State Printing Press which was in charge of publishing work on modern science and foreign languages. The scope of the work carried out by both the Dar ol-Fonun and the newspaper was, nevertheless, very limited (Avery 2007, 823; see also Fazeli 2006, 40). It was not until the end of the 19th century that more newspapers, often in opposition to the government, were introduced and journalism entered Persian literature (Atabaki 2008, 145).

All the non-official papers were produced outside Iran, and some had to be smuggled inside (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 193). There was also an increase in the number of newspapers bought and read among the public. This is true of both the period before and after the Constitutional Revolution. The majority of the population was illiterate at that time, and hence, in addition to reading, listening was considered as an important step in becoming aware of the news, or even books. There were also others who, despite being illiterate, would obtain the papers and take them back to their villages. The papers were, then, either read or heard by the general public in places such as coffee houses (Nabavi 2005, 317; Atabaki 2008, 150; Avery 2007, 829). This was not limited to newspapers only, and other works, such as fiction and novels, were also read and listened to by the public.

The introduction of journalism in Iran was also a helpful factor in the development of literature where journals and newspapers became a vehicle and medium for the publication of literature, especially poetry. Many poets published their work in the newspapers that were often produced by themselves. Toward the end of the 19th century, prose literature became the medium for fiction, and rivalled poetry. As a result, prose gained a simpler and plainer style and became the more suitable means of conveying the social and political aspects of literature. The writers were influenced to a great degree by the developments in the West. They did not, however, look at their own culture as the source of problems. For they believed in the superiority of ancient Iranian culture as compared with the West's (Avery 2007, 862). Journalism, on the other hand, became an important influence on the style of prose. Social and political reform was achieved mainly through journalism. It also became the medium through which dramas, short stories and novels were written and developed. They further helped in advocating national consciousness and social and political reform (Yarshater 1988, 33).

In addition, Iran's progress towards reform was considered very slow at the end of the 19th century. Furthermore, concessions and privileges granted to foreigners resulted in people's resentment and anger. Consequently, the king and the court were seen as responsible for handing Iran over to foreigners and "unbelievers". These led to a demand for the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and became pivotal in its establishment (Lambton 1961, 124-25; see also Dastgheib 2005, 64-65). On the other hand, the reformists lamented the present weakness of the country, comparing it with both its glorious past and the advancement of Western nations (Gheissari 1998, 20).

Along with a number of other works of fiction and newspapers, *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg* has been credited with awakening the nation to the terrible conditions of the time and making the people aware and in demand of political changes and social reforms. The work contains harsh criticism against Iranian society, and looks at society from an outsider's, and thus impartial, perspective (Balaÿ and Cuypers 1987, 37). Accordingly, while highlighting the urgency of education using "imaginary conversations", the book discusses the causes of Iran's backwardness in terms of both economy and culture. Furthermore, both the Shah and the government are also severely criticised, calling for a reform of the government to limit and control their power, while also retaining Iran's independence (Zarinebaf 2008, 197). *Travel Diary* appeared in three volumes during the Constitutional Period.[2] Though all three offer criticism of the court and the country to various degrees, volumes 2 and 3 are much weaker in terms of their contents and plots and they did not have the same effects on the people as volume 1. Hence volume 1 is also the subject of the current paper.

Travel Diary has a two-fold goal which makes it unique compared to other works in the same period. One is to criticise the current conditions, and the other is "to create a utopian picture of modern society and political structure" (Akbari 2005, 76). Consequently, it can be seen to be the only work that criticises both the political power and society, while other works in the same

period focus only on one aspect – which is mostly social criticism (Akbari 2005, 93n16). The fact that the main protagonist is the son of an Iranian merchant born and raised outside of Iran, helps with "articulat[ing] wide ranging social critiques". This allows Ebrahim to both belong to Iranian society, and at the same time be "alien enough to retain a critical view on [his] surroundings." Thus "[t]hrough travel writing, in both its factual and fictive forms, emerges a new form of literary imagination carved from new social contexts" (Rastegar 2007, 99-100).

Travel Diary tells the story of Ebrahim, an expatriate born in Egypt to Iranian parents, who, despite not having spent any time in Iran, is a patriotic lover of his country. On his one and only trip to the country, however, he is much disappointed with everyone and everything he meets, and comes to criticise everyone, from the nobles and notables to the religious authorities and even the ordinary people. He complains of the condition he finds the country in, including the state of schools and education, the mistreatment of the people by the officials, the hypocrisy of the clergy men, and the lack of respect for law and order.

Maraghe'i, the author of *Travel Diary*, spent a large part of his life outside Iran in voluntary exile in the city of Istanbul. He was both a reformist and an optimist, hopeful for Iran to build a better future based on its glorious past (Fazeli 2006, 63). Similarly, Ebrahim, the main protagonist, has features that help to pinpoint Iran's social problems at the time. The fact that he is the son of an Iranian expatriate helps in making him part of Iran while at the same time "alien enough" to be able to criticise and hold a critical view of Iranian society (Rastegar 2007, 99). All throughout the book, Ebrahim compares and contrasts Iran with the rest of the world and on every occasion, he paints a somewhat negative and dark picture of Iran, asserting that "Iran, relative to the other countries of the world, is ruined" (77). However, instead of offering just one Other as a point of contrast against which to depict the Self, Ebrahim compares Iran with multiple Others.

He looks up to other Muslim nations and alienates Iran in terms of its backwardness and poor state. For instance, after going to the bath in Iran for the first time in the city of Mashhad, he is disgusted by the state he finds it in and is appalled by how the people accept the bath's conditions as Islamic and even clean. Lamenting the state of Iran, he compares it with other Muslim countries: "In the baths of other Islamic lands such as Egypt and Ottoman lands, the water for ablutions is protected and flows from a spigot so that a person performs ablutions on one side and on the other gets cold water from a spigot, which has a stream of warm water that is completely clear and sparkling and he drinks it" (39). Elsewhere, when Ebrahim is talking to the Foreign Minister, he find the fees Iranians have to pay in Mecca when performing Hajj to be unfair compared with what people from other countries pay: "To rent a camel or donkey from Jidda to Mecca for which the others – that is, Muslims from the Ottoman lands, Egypt, Indonesia, and the Caucasus – pay thirty ghorush, he [the Iranian agent in charge] gets two hundred ghorush from an Iranian, which is thirty times more than theirs" (86). There are other instances in the book where Ebrahim presents the alterity of Iranians as compared with other Muslims in the world and draws a distance between them. In all these instances, Iranians are

shown as isolated and alone compared with others in the Muslim world, hence alienating them from the rest of the world.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Iran was still quite unknown to Western imperialism. This status, however, changed quite quickly because of the start of the Napoleonic wars and the emergence of imperialist powers in Iran (Paine and Schoenberger 1975, 3). During the 18th century, there were only a few Iranians who had been to Europe on business and they all held a sense of cultural superiority toward others (Ringer 2002, 147). At that time, the West was almost completely unknown to Iranians (Gheissari 1998 21). This is despite the fact that in the earlier centuries there had been relations between Iran and Western nations. In fact, since the 18th century, Europeans had become more aware of Iran than Iran could have been about Europe. With the downfall of Shah Soltan Hossein (1668-1727) in the early 18th century, the state of Iran had become too unsettled to allow Iranians to travel to Europe. Furthermore, the industrial revolution taking place in Europe was completely unknown to Iran and Iranians. However, Iran's contact with foreigners increased during the early 19th century, at least at the official level (Avery 2007, 821). Iranians gradually became aware of these changes starting with the many defeats of Iran at the hands of Europeans (Balaÿ and Cuypers 1987, 11). In addition, at the beginning of the 19th century, a number of conflicts took place between Europeans in Iran and Asia which led to the introduction of foreign economy and military in the court of Iran, introducing Iran into the world political area. Soon, Europeans competed over Iran in achieving concessions and privileges. Furthermore, the introduction of the telegraph connected Iran with India and Europe, thus increasing Iran's contact with the outside world, and in particular Europe. Iran's many military defeats in the wars with Russia and Britain, led Iranians to compare themselves with the West, and consequently make an effort to progress and pull themselves forward (Dastgheib 2005, 63). On the other hand, a number of Iranians were sent to Europe which led to the introduction of printing in Iran (in 1812) and thus ultimately brought a number of modern and scientific achievements into the country. This meant that more books and book production became available. At the same time, there was also an increase in the prose and poetry produced. The new simple writings as well as the translation of Western works led to the introduction of new ideas and ultimately the Constitutional Movement (Dastgheib 2005, 64).

Iran's contact with the Western world increased during Naser od-Din Shah's reign (1848-1896). Toward the end of the 19th century, there were a greater number of people who were aware of the West and the liberal movements in Europe. This group also increased its influence through their writings (Lambton 1961, 125) and did their best to enlighten the people and awaken them from ignorance and slumber (Balaÿ and Cuypers 1987, 12). Around that time, the three principles of nationalism, modernism and constitutionalism were very influential in Europe. Consequently, the Iranian intelligentsia looked to Europe as the source of modernism and nationalism, and thus regarded these ideas as the steps toward achieving a strong and modern Iran (Fazeli 2006, 29). At the same time, many of the intellectuals lived abroad and thus became

familiar with European languages, or had access to translations of great European works. They were to a great degree influenced by the modular form of nationalism. In addition, they were met with modernity taking place in Europe and thus became the resources needed to reform the Self. As a result, these intellectuals came to conceive of Iranian nationalism. They had, however, to struggle for self-respect caused by Iran's lack in terms of technology and military as well as economic inferiority (Cole 1996, 35).

Although Iran during the Qajar period was affected to a great degree by foreign policies and businessmen – especially those of Russia and Great Britain, and to a lesser extent France – it was never declared a colony, and was not "overrun" as much as some of its neighbouring countries (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 179). Hence, despite eventually coming to bear the status of a semi-colony (Foran 1991, 799), its independence was guaranteed, even if only on a formal level. Nation-building and nationalism in Iran, therefore, should not be looked at from a post-colonial perspective, but rather as a post-imperial process (Keyman and Yilmaz 2006, 435). Since Iran was never formally colonised, nationalist intellectuals were never pre-occupied with liberating Iranians from colonial rule. They were as such more concerned with Europe and its progress, and did their best to prove Iranians capable of such progress and advancement. While many early Iranian nationalists, such as Akhundzadeh and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, held a superiority complex towards Arabs and Islamic culture, at the same time they felt inferior to Europeans (Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 467-68).

The contrast between Iran and European countries was further outlined in the translation of books that were published in the 19th century. These works, many of which were translated under Naser od-Din Shah's order as a source of celebrating the monarchy, had the reverse effect of pinpointing the differences between Iran, its shahs and its poverty with European monarchies, its growth and its success, thus undermining the Qajar monarchy (Abrahamian 1982, 58). In addition, travelling became the means through which Europe and its civilisation became available to Iranians (Afshar 2003, 279). It was mainly through the traders and working class that liberal or radical ideas entered Iran. Many of them who travelled to nearby countries became aware of the reforms happening in places such as Transcaucasia, Turkey and even India. Subsequently, they moved to propose ways for changes in the government that would enable Iran to become a strong modern nation and free from foreign control (Keddie and Amanat 2008, 192). On the other hand, one of the important positive aspects expressed in these works includes the admiration of the advancement of the West in terms of science, technology and innovations. This aspect of the superiority of the West was expressed by Iranians as a desire to see Iran reclaim the glory of its past days (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 33-34).

Travel diaries are always regarded as "representations of the cultural 'other'" (Lindsay 2015, 27). Hence many Persian travelogues came to define Iranians' dissatisfaction with the conditions in their own society, ultimately criticising Iran's backwardness compared with the West and its social and political advancements. (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 39). *Travel Dairy* is

considered as one of these works where European societies along with their new technologies and developments are used as points of reference when criticising Iran and Iranians (Akbari 2005, 76-77). On this point, Ghanoonparvar (1993) writes,

> The author of *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beyg*, who like his protagonist had spent most of his life outside Iran, was relatively familiar with the progress made in Western countries. Like the writers of travel diaries on visits to the West, he also takes advantage of various opportunities to report on the progress made in Europe and to juxtapose it with the conditions that Ebrahim observes and describes in Iran. (42)

For instance, when Ebrahim is giving a short summary of his entire trip to Iran, he says: "From getting shoes to hats, they [Iranians] are perforce in need of Europeans. What did we do in the days when we didn't have commercial intercourse with Europeans? Didn't our business advance? Why did they overcome us in that intercourse of theirs and make us in need of them? It's clear that their reason was our ignorance. We weren't satisfied because of our narrowmindedness with respect to that we ourselves had" (230).

In various places and under different conditions, Ebrahim compares different parts of Iran with Europe and the Western world. When he is in Marand and learns of the number of children who died because of smallpox, he becomes aggravated and angry at people's lack of knowledge when it comes to illnesses and the ways to treat them. He then goes on to speak of Germany and how they have treated their children to avoid them dying at a young age. He attributes "extreme laziness, indolence, and lack of knowledge and information" as the reasons behind people's inaction towards and acceptance of the disease and its aftermath (219). Similarly, when in the city of Qazvin and going through the bazaar, Ebrahim compares the city with other cities in Europe, and presents a negative picture of both Iran and Qazvin, thus alienating the country and people. Speaking of European cities, he says: "A person can trace the splendor and commerce in those places because of the abundance of traffic of the people and the occupation with business." He then brings in the cities of Iran as a contrast: "The cities are all dilapidated and like graveyards." And goes on to paint a very negative picture of Iran (141).

Elsewhere, when talking about the population of Iran, he goes on to mention France, that even though it is smaller than Iran, it has four times the population of our country. He states this difference to be due to the emigration of so many Iranians to other countries caused by the cruelty and oppression of Iran's rulers (230). Furthermore, he speaks of the labourers and their work, comparing the West with Iran. He mentions England as a country with prosperous printing houses and schools, as wells as "a respect for knowledge" that he would very much like to see in his own homeland. Compared with this, he mentions his countrymen who "are employed in the lowly jobs of foreign nations," who have left their home in the hope of finding a job, and all this caused by "ignorance" (242).

On the other hand, while giving a positive picture of the West, the Persian travel writers of the 19th century also expressed the images of the West in negative terms. Comparing and contrasting the Self and Other, these visitors applauded some features of the Westerners, while downgrading others such as their beliefs and customs (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 12). Similarly, Ebrahim maintains an approval of the West and Westerners while at the same time revealing a disapproval of the relations between the governments of Iran and Western powers that result in the West taking advantage of Iran and Iranians. For instance, when he comes to meet and speak with the Foreign Minister, he complains about how the foreign officials mistreat Iranians and the affairs in Iran, and all because the government of Iran accepts these matters and even treats the people in worse ways: "Perhaps the excesses that the foreign ambassadors and consuls do in Iran, they themselves have copied from the ambassadors and officials of Iran. When those who are the protectors of the rights of the subjects plunder them themselves publicly, what expectation can they have from foreign officials?" (85). Hence, the Westerners are portrayed with a positive image in terms of their progress, but negatively with regards to their taking advantage of Iran (Ghanoonparvar 1993, 42-43).

Although modernisation in Iran was expressed mainly using Europe – and to a certain degree Japan – as the example to look up to (Kurzman 2005, 147), in *Travel Diary*, Ebrahim also refers to third world countries as points of comparison against which Iran is shown to be backwards and behind. Hence, he presents an image of alterity that takes on manifold aspects. To emphasise Iran's backwardness, he talks of the plus points of having railroads, and complains of their lack of existence in Iran:

> Every person from foreign countries who passes along those roads will be surprised indeed at the hardiness of the Iranians and the ignorance of the state and the great men. As is well known, railroads have been built and stated up everywhere in the world today. The blacks of Ethiopia and the Sudan, and the wild people of Africa are profiting from the benefits of it. Only the unfortunate Iranians have remained bereft of that gift. (163)

He, therefore, presents Iran alienated from every country in the world, painting a grim picture of Iran and Iranians, separated and alone.

There are also numerous instances where he mentions Iran and Iranians as inferior to the rest of the world. For instance, towards the end of his travel diary, he goes on to explain the situation in Iran, comparing it with the rest of the world: "Today, all over the world, there is none more unfortunate that [sic.] the Iranian nation." And then brings in African nations to show just how terrible the situation in Iran is: "There is even a measure of civilization among the blacks of Sudan and Ethiopia. They possess human rights to a degree, and day by day their inclination is towards progress" (228). The same idea was expressed in different formats and newspapers and by various people in the year 1906. For instance, a newspaper spoke of the backwardness of Iran which had positioned it behind other countries, while a preacher wailed

the lack of progress in Iran, declaring "the savages in Africa and negroes in Zanzibar" to be making progress and moving forward "towards civilization, knowledge, labor, and riches" (Kurzman 2005, 145).

The tendency to glorify ancient Iran was very common during the early stages of nationalistic feelings. For some authors and intellectuals, this meant a return to the pre-Islamic state which they used in their formation of Iran's national identity (Kurzman 2005, 149). In their nationalist discourse, many regretted the current conditions of Iran, while maintaining a nostalgic view of Iran's glorious past.[3] Similarly, in *Travel Diary*, there are several dynasties and timelines to which Ebrahim refers when talking about a golden past. They range from the mythical kings, and the pre-Islamic dynasties, to the times closer to the Qajar dynasty, such as that of the Safavids (1502-1736) and Nader Shah (1688-1747). One of the four things he mentions as a point of glory and praise for Iran is the Caravanserais that, according to him, were built by "Shah Abbas the Great", a Safavid king who ruled Iran between 1588 to 1629. On numerous occasions, he asserts these places to be "very impressive and splendid" (199), praising them highly for their "vast stores of water where, if a thousand pilgrims arrive, they can relax and drink some wholesome water" (46). He then goes to speak highly of Shah Abbas and "the laudable deeds of that great and just man" (48) over almost three and a half pages. In the process, he alienates Iran and Iranians from the past of the country, painting a glorious golden past and comparing it with the negative image of the present. On numerous occasions he speaks highly of Shah Abbas, calling him "great" (46), "noble", "a lover of good works", "high-minded", "enlightened", a "lion-hunting hero" (47), "just" (48), "kind" and "prestigious" (49). After recalling some of the deeds of Shah Abbas in terms of the roads and the caravanserais he had built, Ebrahim mentions how reading the summary he has provided of the past will make anyone sigh and cry, since "[t]oday, we have to envy those happy days" (50).

On another occasion, when in Ardebil, he goes to visit the tomb of Shah Esma'il, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, whom he considers to be "the adornment of the pages of our national and religious history", and starts complaining about the present conditions (151). Here he combines kingship and religion: "Lift up your head from the dirt of mercifulness and see to what extent your vile successors have degraded and discredited that religion and state" (152). He further calls upon other kings and princes, complaining of the present situation. In Ardabil, for instance, he spends a day in "Narin Fortress", an old castle from hundreds of years ago. While there, he suddenly becomes tired of the state in which the fortress has been left, uncared for and left to ruin. Upset and angry, he turns his face toward "the direction of Qom" and calls upon Shah Abbas and Abbas Mirza,[4] complaining of the present conditions, regretful of the state Iran has fallen in, and wishing for the old days (153-4). Hence in his presentation of the glorious past of Iran, he juxtaposes it with the present state and provides an altered image seen in contrast to the terrible conditions Iran has fallen in.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to show how the main protagonist of the novel, Ebrahim goes on to alienate Iran and Iranians from the rest of the world in order to create the sense of national consciousness and a national identity amongst its readers. It looks at the concept of Other presented in the book and uses it as a point of contrast against which to create the Iranian Self. The Other as presented in the work takes on multiple meanings: The Muslim world, Europe and the West, third world countries, and Iran's golden past. Each of these Others was used as a point of contrast with the present state of Iran, drawing attention to the conditions of the country as compared with the rest of the world.

The book's sharp criticism of society made it a favourite among the readers while at the same time a problem for the authorities. Such that for a long time, many read the book in secret. The work awakened national consciousness and made Iranians aware of the similar situation in which they had all been, so that reading it felt as if awakening from a slumber and realising that everyone in the country felt the same (Kasravi 2013, 52-53; see also Kamshad 1966, 17). In addition, the importance of the book also lies in the fact that for the first time in Iran a Persian travelogue had turned into "an instrument of communication", enlightening the public opinion. The purpose of the book was to educate the people against old habits and superstitions. Accordingly, the author who was well aware of other countries' progress and development, compares them with the terrible conditions of Iran and Iranians' backwardness. The protagonist, Ebrahim, teaches the readers how to criticise social and political conditions, giving the work a historical perspective and importance (Rahmanizadeh and Najafi 2016, 38-41). Through the use of alienation, the author of the book, Maraghe'i aimed to highlight the terrible conditions Iran was in at the time, and at the same time wished to project a more hopeful and positive picture of the country if his dream and utopia were to come true.

Endnotes:

1. Unless otherwise stated, all references to the work are from the English translation of the book by James D. Clark, titled *The Travel Diary of Ebrahim Beg*, published by Mazda Publishers in 2006, from hereon shortened to *Travel Dairy*.
2. There are doubts about the exact date of publication of the first volume. According to Aryanpoor (2008), it "seems" to have been published first in Cairo and then in 1888 in Istanbul (309). For Kamshad (1966), however, the first volume was published without a date in Cairo (17). On the other hand, in the introduction to the book in Persian, 1903 has been mentioned as the date of publication (Maraghe'i 2014, 11), while in the forward to the English translation of the book, Ghanoonparvar states that it was published in Cairo between 1895 and 1902 (Clark 2006, ix). In the introduction to the third volume of the work, written in 1327 AH/1909 CE, Maraghe'i states that the first volume was written "12 years ago" (538). This would make the year 1315 AH/1897 CE as the year of publication. On the other hand, in the first volume, the narrator mentions reading *Ketab-e Ahmad*, a work by Talbov published in 1896. This would make the year 1888 as the date of publication incorrect. See also Balaÿ and Cuypers 1987, 38.

3. See Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 465-67 for examples of this type of writing.
4. A Qajar crown prince and military commander who died in 1833.

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Making Modernity Magical: Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and the Reenchanted Chronotope

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Abstract:

In his 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol* Dickens takes the sensations usually associated with alienation and disenchantment in the nineteenth century and reappropriates their language and energy to reenchantment. We can therefore read *A Christmas Carol* not only as the conversion narrative of Scrooge from bad capitalist to good capitalist, as has been done many times, but also Dickens' reckoning with the possibilities afforded by modern life and modernity as a narrative device in his turn to the biographical form. In essence, Dickens charts a move forward which allows the strangeness and uncanny sensations of modernity to explode out into webs of possibility made possible but not limited by the conventions of the realist novel.

Keywords: The novel, Dickens, A Christmas Carol, disenchantment, time, chronotope, Victorian literature

How many ghosts visit Ebeneezer Scrooge on the fateful Christmas Eve when he is forced to reckon with his misdeeds? Initially one might respond that there are three ghosts, but ultimately readers or viewers of the many adaptations of Dickens' 1843 novella *A Christmas Carol* land on the correct number, four, after accounting for Jacob Marley. A more open-ended question: how long do the events of the novella take? Literally, the afternoon of December 24th to the morning of the 25th: less than twenty-four hours. In another light, some seventy-five plus years, as Scrooge's entire life from boyhood to old age and beyond are presented to the reader. A third possibility: impossible timelines which contradict and intertwine render the question unanswerable, but suggest something truly aspirational and universal through the narratological schematics of Scrooge's Christmas Eve. Read as a direct response to the developing technology which opened up new relationships between time and space, Dickens' novella reorients the energies of modernity and the anxieties toward the pace of change in a web of reenchanted potentiality, borrowing the trappings of the realist biographical novel. Far from a simple conversion narrative from bad to good capitalist, Dickens' story features

a chronotopic arrangement which challenges the reader to reconsider literary representations of humanity in the modern world.

Max Weber famously argued that the "fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations" (Weber 1946, 155). The typical narrative of the British realist novel as a genre maps this disenchantment process, the "transition from ritual, feudal, agricultural, and cyclical time to modern, secular, historical time, when evolution itself becomes the dominant hermeneutic for plotting human social events" (Slaughter 2009, 109). The realist novel became the dominant narrative form through the nineteenth century, making sense of the rapidly changing and industrializing world by channeling modernity into characters who navigate their changing circumstances nimbly, typically undergoing a drawn-out process of integration into their vocation and into society. Readers for nearly two centuries have enjoyed the story of David Copperfield, the boy with a dead mother and a step-father who hates him, building his own extended family and achieving middle-class bliss while penning what amounts to a fictionalized guide on how to replicate his success. *David Copperfield* is very much the model British novel in the mid-century, loose and baggy but also circumscribed and tied together neatly, addressing various facets of potential social problems along the way. It is strange, then, that nonfiction writing, particularly essays relating to new technologies, became the unlikely home of decidedly atypical discourse which seems very magical, describing a world which doesn't seem disenchanted in the least. The social scientist Thomas Carlyle, for example, wrote that "Railways are shifting all Towns of Britain into new places: no Town will stand where it did, and nobody can tell for a long while yet where it will stand...I perceive, railways have set all the Towns of Britain a-dancing" (Carlyle 1870, VII).

Carlyle's dancing towns are by no means the only eccentric descriptions of life post-railway, nor are his–admittedly creative–descriptions of England's geography necessarily wrong. Heinrich Heine, a contemporary writer on the continent, exclaimed that he felt "as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door" (Heine 1853, 360, translation Schivelbusch). Travel by horse and coach in England, according to Dionysius Lardner, "before the establishment of railways, did not average eight miles an hour" (Lardner 1850, 36). Even the early trains of the 1840s were calculated by H. G. Lewin to travel "between 20 and 30 miles per hour" (Lewin 1968, 95). Travel by coach, with horses which needed to rest, was utterly incomparable to the trains which could travel three or more times faster. Wolfgang Schivelbusch summarizes the warped geographic perspective: "A given spatial distance, traditionally covered in a fixed amount of travel time, could suddenly be dealt with in a fraction of that time; to put it another way, the same amount of time permitted one to cover the old spatial distance many times over" (Schivelbusch 2014, 33). To some, who had become familiar

with the space around them and their place in it, this was an "[a]nnihilation of time and space" (Schivelbusch 2014, 33). The apparent contraction of space caused a twin phenomenon: on the one hand, areas once considered too far for travel became accessible; on the other hand, Schivelbusch cites William Wordsworth's petition to keep vacationers away from the Lake District, as the remotest places became dots on a railway line. The imaginary cartography working in the mental landscapes of the earliest railway patrons, with the map of available places growing while space was also shrinking, is obviously impossible, but not at all untrue.

As with space, Victorians also felt a fierce protectiveness over what they saw as the conventions of time which were being threatened by the railways and modern clocks. An 1851 article published in *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* claimed, "Time, our best and dearest possession, is in danger. [Inhabitants were] now obliged, in many of our British towns and villages, to bend before the will of a vapour, and to hasten on his pace in obedience to the laws of a railway company! Was ever tyranny more monstrous or more unbearable than this?" (Garfield 2016, 5). An 1868 London study by Alfred Haviland suggested, on shoddy science, that people running on railway time aged faster and died sooner than those on 'natural' time (Haviland 1868, 10-15). The authors of these and the above essays and treatises borrow language as much from fairy tales as they do science and technology. Dancing towns, rapid aging, and the hijacking of time and space are presented adjacent to plain language describing the late era of the industrial revolution in England and Europe more broadly. In facing the unknown, the Victorian essayists revert to superstitious and supposedly outmoded linguistic modes.

Modernity is experienced paradoxically: space in England expands and contracts, more Sinbad's sleeping whale than a fixed island, and time passes at different speeds which run in cycles both mechanical and naturally occurring. Novelists reckon with this in familiar ways which are almost too obvious to state, as entire ocean voyages can span either a sentence or several hundred pages, and years of time can breeze by in less prose than is used describing a sip of coffee. *A Christmas Carol* is remarkable because, decades before the great modernist novels which gleefully play with readerly expectations regarding the arrangement of space and time in the story world, Dickens conspicuously draws attention to the artifice in his chronotope. Rather than smooth over the rough edges, Dickens' narrator–and the characters in the novella–point to the incongruencies and strange happenings, acknowledge their impossibility, and continue along anyway. This tenuous and experimental framework is made possible because Dickens, like most novelists of his era, turns to the biographical form in his attempts to represent modern life holistically, which grants "the discretely heterogeneous mass of isolated persons, non-sensuous structures and meaningless events...a unified articulation by the relating of each separate element to the central character and the problem symbolised by the story of his life" (Lukácz 1988, 81). In the explosion of space and time which humbles Scrooge and chips away at his superlative egoism, he is therefore both central and actively decentered by the structure of the novella. Subject to the tumultuous winds of modernity in a non-realist mode,

Scrooge is also the purchase for the narrative, as without his fictional life at its center the form of the novella would crumble into meaningless fragments.

The novel genre itself is of course vital. What Bakhtin called the "peculiar structure" of the novel generally is perfect for the purpose of explicitly achronological storytelling (Bakhtin 1982, 5). The ghosts encourage Scrooge to, arguably, recognize the heteroglossia inherent to the novel, its calling card; we might imagine the ghosts as voices which threaten Scrooge's absolute autonomy who also demand that he allow other voices and perspectives into the narrative beyond his own. As a protagonist, Scrooge has long undergone scrutiny on account of what Elliot Gilbert termed "The Scrooge problem," namely that Scrooge's snap transformation, the entire undoing and rewriting of his ethics and morals, occurs literally overnight (Gilbert 1975, 22). He remarks that "often there is a measure of discontent in even the most positive emotional response of the serious reader to this book. It is a discontent arising from the obvious disparity between the way in which moral and psychological mechanisms operate in the story and the way in which they seem to the reader to work in the 'real world'" (Gilbert 1975, 22). Only in the world of the novel, as opposed to actual reality, can Scrooge "elude the control of fixed moral convention and religious orthodoxy, which Dickens perceives as insufficient unto his world" (Polhemus 1980, 91). What Dickens conjures to address the sudden character turn Scrooge makes is in fact "a particular narrative form" which emerges through the form of the story itself rather than "a concept, theory, or disposition" of didactic morality (Miller 2008, 3).

It is worth outlining the timeline which caused Scrooge, as early as the Second Stave of the novella, to declare that "it isn't possible" (Dickens 2003, 53). The novella begins "Once upon a time–of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve" (35). Scrooge goes to bed after Marley visits "past two" (53). He eventually awakes on Christmas morning. Marley tells Scrooge to "Expect the first [spirit] to-morrow, when the bell tolls One...Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of Twelve has ceased to vibrate" (50). The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge on a journey to his childhood, and the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come fast forwards past Scrooge's death. The narrative spans, in the course of one single night, four nights and an entire life from cradle to grave. It is only slightly facetious to consider that, in his back and forth motion through time, Scrooge likely would have landed on himself in bed several times as he returned to it; if the first spirit visits at midnight, but Scrooge fell asleep at two, negative two hours had passed. Marley speaks of future visits on subsequent nights, while the following ghosts seem to be operating in their own temporal states regardless of what Scrooge's clock, or Big Ben, might read. Therefore, it is prudent to abandon any pretense that Dickens is attempting to keep realist time, and take him up on imagining the possibilities that open up when it is left aside.

Scrooge, however, does not at first abandon this realist mode of timekeeping. Before the arrival of the first spirit, Scrooge finds the possibility that he has lost track of time, that time can no longer be kept track of, "an alarming one" (53). The reason is "because 'three days after sight

of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order,' and so forth, would have become a mere United States' security if there were no days to count by" (53). Scrooge meticulously keeping track of time allows him control over his finances, and thereby over his life. Money is power, and money allows Scrooge to keep time, his own and others'. What is at stake here is Scrooge's ability to impose his will upon others, to consummate the fantasy he imagines earlier which is predicated upon his conditional "If I could work my will" (36). When Scrooge can rely on time to be linear, orderly, partitioned cleanly, he can expect when his debtors will owe him money, when his investments will yield dividends, etc. To Scrooge, the entirety of interpersonal relationships, of time itself, is "Cash payment as the sole nexus between man and man," as Thomas Carlyle described (Carlyle 1870, 66). Scrooge listens to the clock approach one:

> "Ding, dong!'"
> "A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.
> "Ding, dong!"
> "Half past!" said Scrooge.
> "Ding, dong!"
> "A quarter to it," said Scrooge.
> "Ding, dong!"
> "The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly, "and nothing else!" (54).

Scrooge's counting depends on the continuing cooperation of time in ticking forward in predictable, measured, modern ways. Modern clock time is meted out in equal and perfect intervals. To abandon this premise would be to abandon the systems through which Scrooge has amassed and continues to hoard his money. It is therefore in the frustration of the fantasy of order and power that Scrooge converts from miser to saint.

The Ghost of Christmas Past is fittingly "a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man" (54-5). The ghost is old and young simultaneously, impossible but indicative of its purpose, as it will take Scrooge from youth to age. As the spirit leaps through time with Scrooge in tow, the original pretense of a single night becomes meaningless. Alternatives to clock time are offered in overt and covert forms. The spirit is a candle, a white figure with white hair, a white tunic, and a flame above its head, representing an older form of timekeeping (53-4). Likewise Fezziwig 'keeps time' in leading the dance (63). The temporal journey Scrooge undergoes causes Scrooge to remark that "an icicle must have got into the works" of the clock; the physical journey, to his boyhood schoolhouse, takes place in a pair of short sentences, "they passed through the wall [of Scrooge's house] and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished" (56). The ghosts function as temporal trains, shuttling Scrooge to and fro across time and space in relatively little space on the page, as easily as a digressive passage into a character's memory. What makes these

forays striking in a way that 'mere' literary representations of memory are not is the physical dislocation and chronological whiplash which accompany them.

The Ghost of Christmas Present pushes the chronotope of the novel into particularly unique territory, as it shows Scrooge events which are, in theory, going to happen within the next hours, but which will never actually happen. Scrooge, still in his miserly mode, demands of the spirit, "To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it" (74). Scrooge takes the position of student, but the language of exchange remains. The sky lightens and darkens several times, while still ostensibly remaining within the period of Christmas Day. Scrooge broadens his spatial horizons, down into mines and out into the open ocean, while also peeking in at dinner parties which either are happening or will happen shortly. The dinner party at his nephew's house, for example, is the very same party which Scrooge was invited to attend in the First Stave, and which he *will* attend, despite his present absence, in the final section of the text. Dickens creates forked timelines, "diverse kinds of time that narrative structures have the potential to perform" (Matz 2018, 26). In his narrative, Dickens manifests "a belief that the landscape of time thrives by narrative cultivation"; Scrooge must be redeemed not only in the present moment in his bed, but across a much broader span of time and swath of space through the conspicuous cultivation by the narrative structure, by the spirits within the story world and by Dickens' hand outside it (Matz 2018, 26).

The final spirit demands of Scrooge something existentially terrifying and very apropos in the Victorian moment, imagining something beyond the scope of his own life and context, and indeed something outside of time itself, death. Rather than showing events which have happened or are happening, the final ghost evokes the possibility of, essentially, infinite possibility. Scrooge is old, and already an unlikely hero in Victorian fiction. Rather than leave Scrooge as an aged, minor figure in a larger work, Dickens centers him. His perception that "Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead...But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change" is a utopian vision of the future which follows from the bizarre chronotopic journeys Scrooge has undertaken, but which diverts from the fear and disorientation typical when facing the unknown future in the period, best demonstrated in the aforementioned essays of contemporary thinkers (Dickens 2003, 108). Scrooge is able to think beyond the single, linear timeline of his life to imagine something beyond "that dark chamber" in which his body laid, not "ever present" but malleable and changeable (104). He has recodified his perception of time, and his place in it. Dickens, as he often does, asserts life: Tiny Tim "did NOT die," creating a new vision for what might be (116, emphasis Dickens). Only through the extensive making and unmaking of various potential timelines within the narrative can this possibility, or possibilities, emerge.

Scrooge ends up back in bed on Christmas morning, back in the time and place associated with the realist novel. He hasn't come back alone, however: twice Scrooge repeats "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me" (110). The 'I

will live' suggests that Scrooge will be rejecting the linear time and way of life he had been preoccupied with his entire life, not only for a brief visit, but permanently. Upon waking, he seems to be living up to his promise: "I don't know what day of the month it is!...I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!" (112). Old and young, lost in time and hysterical, Scrooge is reformed. In a final test, the bells ring out in a symbolic attempt to reassert the prominence of linear time, but they make only noise: "Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!" (112). Instead of looking to meticulous timekeeping for a source of order and an affirmation of his power, Scrooge revels in the possibility which opens when he simply enjoys the music of the bells without concern for their function. The impossible resolution to live in three times at once, for three times at once, thereby trumps the steady ticking of linear time. By the end of the novella, Scrooge has recognized that he exists in a "character system" as a node in a network far greater than himself, but which he must still participate in (Woloch 2006, 302). Scrooge's egoism has been eroded, but he is left better for it. In a move only possible in Dickensian thermodynamics, something has been created from a net loss: rather than overwhelming others with his ego, Scrooge becomes the guardian and benefactor of the health and survival of many others in the next generations.

Scrooge's narrative is on the one hand evergreen, as the countless reimaginings of the story attest, but on the other precisely what Erich Auerbach argued about the French novels of the early nineteenth century, wherein "the gen-eral historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieux" (Auerbach 2013, 473). Nothing of Scrooge's conversion narrative, in other words, could have come from a pen a moment before it did so from Dickens', in the precise time and place that it did. This is something that has perhaps been lost in the films, stage plays, and television specials which reimagine the novella: Dickens' story emerged from a very specific environment which was disorienting, new, and in a heavy state of flux, and Dickens' blend of narrative enchantment in a disenchanted world was a conscious choice that worked against the grain of the prose narratives of the era. Writing about death in the story world but applicable to this manifestation of a non-realist narrative mode in the face of disenchantment, Walter Benjamin explains that the novel "is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else's fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger's fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about" (Benjamin 2006, 373). Scrooge undergoes a reenchanting of his world which is counterfactual to the very real disenchanting of the world outside the story, but which was certainly alive in the language and thoughts of contemporary essayists and philosophers. Readers of Dickens can straddle the line between the familiar and the uncanny which pivots on Scrooge's conversion narrative, which ends precisely when the forces within the story world threaten to

break the container and render it mere noise rather than the careful experimentation with and exploration of possibility.

Dickens' charm, as it so often does, comes from the choice to reorient disorientation and fear by converting them to laughter and utopian possibility. Even as the world becomes alienating and harder to know, Dickens, via the ghosts and through Scrooge, offers readers a lifeline in the storm of modernity that might yet endure. Dickens would return to his more familiarly realist novels throughout the rest of his career, but this relatively early foray into the headwind of encroaching modernity stands out amidst his oeuvre as perhaps his most compelling laboratory for making sense of changes in the real world which have come and will inevitably continue throughout the lives of his Victorian contemporaries and beyond.

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Michael Ondaatje's Struggle between Reality and Fiction in *In the Skin of a Lion*

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Abstract:

This article investigates Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* in the light of Frank Kermode's theory of fiction. It argues that the narrative's form acts as an important medium by which Ondaatje inscribes the tension between showing respect for the contingency of reality and delivering a satisfying, consoling story. On the one hand, deeply aware of the gap between knowing and living, Ondaatje shows distrust of neat patterns in representing Toronto's past; the narrative resists linear narrative order to create a multidimensional world that allows different versions of reality to co-exist. On the other hand, the author recognizes the human efforts to counteract time and endorses establishing plots to make sense of one's life span; the text presents consoling moments of synthesis that illuminate the protagonist Patrick's existence in time. The study highlights the correspondence of Ondaatje's poetics and his thematic concern with the pursuit of meaning; by experimenting with its form, Ondaatje's narrative encourages us to reflect on sense-making as well as the ways of sense-making.

Keywords: sense-making; *In the Skin of a Lion*; Kermode; nonlinear structure; spatial form

Introduction

Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* (henceforth *ISL*) fictionalizes the lives of European immigrants and the working class who remained outside the mainstream society of Toronto in the early 1990s. Imaginatively and poignantly, it restores a social milieu of complex cultural predicaments and tensions. The novel can be considered as a bildungsroman of Patrick Lewis, as he is the only character whose self-discovery is intimately related throughout, and the narrative's progression relies on his ever increasing understanding of the world and consequent actions (Schumacher 1996, 4). Specifically, *ISL* focuses on how the identity of a "white" subject develops in dialogue with subjects of other ethnicities, demonstrating the heterogeneous influences involved in Patrick's self-seeking and questions the essential binaries of identity (Lowry 2005, 69). It is suggested that to achieve self-understanding and self-representation, one needs to find his voice within a cacophony of voices (Yew 2016, 16). In rendering this process of coming-of-age,

Ondaatje's narrative widely practices postmodernist aesthetics. Both Rochelle Simmons (1998) and Winfried Siemerling (2005) make an analogy between *ISL* and cubism; they argue that the fragmented form, by interweaving different planes of reality and time, presents an openness to the space of the other and echoes the work's thematic concern with the interaction among diverse ethnic groups. Similarly, Michael Greenstein (1990) investigates the text's intertextuality and draws a symbolic relationship between the dialogic form and Patrick's discursively-constructed identity. Julie Beddoes (1994), from a different perspective, examines the tension between the novel's radical class politics and its postmodernist poetics; she contends that the politics of the characters' action (for example, Patrick's attack on the Scarborough waterworks) is obscured and complicated by the highly experimental formal devices.

Reading *ISL* thus greatly concerns not only making sense of one's life—as Patrick's self-exploration embodies, but also making sense of the ways one makes sense of life—as the text's experimentation on form shows. This makes it apt to read *ISL* vis-à-vis Frank Kermode's theory of fiction. In *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Kermode famously argues that "No longer imminent, the End is immanent" (1967, 25). According to him, because we are deeply uncomfortable with the fact that our lives only form a short period in the middle of endless time, there is a need "to speak humanly of a life's importance in relation to it" (4). We hence come up with plots, or "fictive concords with origins and ends" (7), to bear the weight of our anxieties and hopes and make sense of our span. In humanizing time by giving it form, what is *chronos* becomes *kairos*: the former is passing time, or simple chronicity, whereas the latter is a point in time charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end (47). These fictions are nevertheless limited in operational effectiveness. The "clerkly skepticism" (10) reminds us that fictive concords are mental structures that are conditional and revisable, unable to fully explain the complexity and vicissitudes of reality. As a result, we continuously invest in coherent patterns that, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and the middle on the one hand, and feel compelled to do constant adjustments in the interest of reality and control to show respect for things as they are on the other hand (17). Kermode further relates the theory of literary fictions to the theory of fictions in general and argues that reading is likewise concerned with "the immanence of the intemporal in the temporal" (1978, 588). In his view, novelists often face the problem created by "the divergence of comfortable story and the non-narrative contingencies of modern reality" (Kermode 1967, 128). The tension between the two reflects in that even though a literary fiction rejects neat and inclusive patterns, time will always reveal some congruence with a paradigm, provided that the work has something to communicate (129), not to mention that confronted with the denial of easy satisfactions, readers will take the challenge to creative co-operation and attempt to supply the suppressed connections (139).

This article reads *ISL* in the light of Kermode's theory and investigates how this literary fiction embodies the tension between *chronos* and *kairos*. Ondaatje tries hard to do justice to a chaotic and discontinuous reality; deeply aware of the gap between knowing and living, he shows

incredulity towards neat patterns in his imaginative reconstruction of Toronto's formative period. Despite so, Ondaatje also feels the necessity of redeeming this contingent reality and delivering a satisfying story; in a largely discordant textual world, he still recognizes the efficacy of fictive concords and allows comforting moments that illuminate one's existence in time. This struggle is illustrated by the narrative's organization that privileges space-logic over time-logic. Specifically, the former reflects in the rejection of simple, linear narrative order, and the latter lies in moments of synthesis which highlight the reflexive relations among segments within the text. It is my contention that the form of *ISL* functions as a crucial medium by which Ondaatje negotiates the inadequacy as well as the power of using paradigmatic forms in sense-making.

The study starts by investigating how *ISL* acts on clerkly skepticism and invalidates totalizing patterns in making sense of Toronto's history. To do justice to the nebulous nature of reality, the narrative juxtaposes various viewpoints, transgresses the boundary between fiction and reality, and constantly alludes to previous texts, resulting in a multidimensional textual world full of potentiality. The following part invokes Joseph Frank's analysis of spatial form in modern literature and delineates a correlation between the spatial form of *ISL* and the human efforts to work against mere chronicity. The plots that endow Patrick's life with form reside in the reflexive relations among different segments within the text, and they can be uncovered when we attend to moments that present temporal integration and the symbolic meaning of insect imagery.

A Discordant Textual World

Like fictions in general, literary fictions are invented, "under the compulsion of necessity" and "simulated by the outer world" (Kermode 1967, 40). Clerkly skepticism constantly alerts novelists to the limited explanative power of these mental structures and motivates them to make continuous efforts to challenge inherited forms so as to approximate the amorphous reality. For Kermode, a truly imaginative novelist should have a staunch respect for the contingent and not falsify reality with easy and paradigmatic forms (1967, 130). Ondaatje's work restores the non-contingencies of reality by presenting a multidimensional and fragmentary narrative refusing to be assimilated into a simple sequence or a unidimensional order. The application of the cubist collage, metafictional devices, and intertextuality disrupts the linear progression of the narrative; it also hinders readers from identifying plots and achieving apprehensions of the intemporal in the reading process.

ISL rejects a closed narrative structure primarily by defying linearity, with the circles of narrative widening to introduce new characters and their stories (see also Gamlin 1992, 71). The collage of different individuals' stories is reminiscent of Cubist paintings which, as John Berger observes, often capitalize on the multiplicity of viewpoints to break the continuity of the illusionist three-dimensional space and direct people's attention to the picture surface *per se*, and the consequent multiple perspectives resist any unified idea of what is being looked at (1969, 21-22). While *ISL* is mainly focalized around Patrick, it also constantly moves between Nicholas, Harris,

Clara, Small, Alice, and Caravaggio; instead of having a linear narrative told from a single, fixed point of view, Ondaatje chooses to frequently change the focalized character so as to present many stories from multiple perspectives. The resulting spatial complexity signifies the interpenetration of Patrick's and others' stories, reverberating the epigraph (which is also from Berger) that "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one" (Ondaatje 1987). Undermining a totalizing portrayal of Toronto's civic history, the narrative reveals the processes of *becoming* that reality (as opposed to simply recording it) and foregrounds the interaction among various individuals/groups that consist of it. For readers, the constant shift among multiple perspectives greatly spatializes the story world and diverts their attention to the synchronic relations between different layers rather than the narrative codes of causality and sequence. This effect is further intensified by the confusion over the chronological sequence of the represented events and temporal sections. In discussing narrative order, Gerald Genette distinguishes between the chronological order (the order defined by the occurrence of events in the world) and the textual order (the order defined by the presentation of events in the text) and calls the various types of discordance between the two "anachronies" (1980, 35-36). Such discrepancies exist extensively in *ISL* and one needs to make conscious efforts to recover the story-sequence. For instance, the linear development cuts off at the scene of Nicholas and Alice in the Ohrida Lake Restaurant after the rescue. Before moving on to the morning after the incident, the narration continually goes back and forth in time, recalling Nicholas's daily work on the bridge and his immigrating journey from Macedonia to Canada (Ondaatje 1987, 36-38; 41-44). In another case, readers are informed of Alice's death and Patrick's revenge for it long before the details of the death are revealed during Patrick's final confrontation with Harris (252-53). A more radical example is that the final car scene also prefaces the narrative: the circular structure obscures the difference between beginning and end, undermining the linear conception of the chronological order of events. As Siemerling puts it, *ISL* often creates "an oscillating, hologrammatic simultaneity of different possible assumptions for the reader—concerning identity of the speaker of a passage, of its point in time, and of its status with respect to reality" (2005, 100). The collage of the moments isolated in time and space displaces and puzzles readers, yet in the meantime builds a multi-dimensional world where distinct facets of the past exist simultaneously and inextricably. Ondaatje's work therefore not only allows different voices to speak out, but also holds an openness to the choreography of different possibilities and actualities.

The linear structure of *ISL* is additionally disrupted by the intervention from the discourse level. The narrative often presents moments of what Patricia Waugh calls "the ironic flaunting of the Teller", when the real author crosses the ontological divide and steps into the fictional world (1984, 141). For instance, the title of Berger's critical essay "The Moment of Cubism" is weaved into the text in the description of Nicholas's movement below the bridge (Ondaatje 1987, 37). At another moment, the philosophical concept *Tabula Rasa* (the theory that all knowledge comes from experience or perception) is invoked to illustrate Alice's first encounter with the

Macedonian community (41). Apart from these remarks on the content of the story, there are also comments on the construction of the story by which Ondaatje's voice exerts a more explicit presence. On how to use language to best portray Patrick's devastation in the wake of Clara's leave, the narrating voice reflects: "Sentences needed additions, parenthesis, to clarify not the information but his state" (90). The voice also points out the significance of art in organizing chaos: "*Only the best art can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and order it will become*" (152; original emphasis). The most conspicuous metafictional intrusion occurs in the following pronominal shift, when a first-person "I" openly admits to the subjective investment in the character Alice: "She [Alice] could move like . . . she could sing as low as . . . Why is it that I am now trying to uncover every facet of Alice's nature for myself?" (154; original ellipsis). As Waugh observes, third-person narrative with overt first-person intrusion engenders more metafictional dislocation, as an apparently autonomous world is suddenly broken into by a narrator—often the authorial figure—who is rooted in an ontologically different world (1984, 133). The intrusion of the author points to the constructed nature of *ISL* and poses questions regarding the relationship between fiction and reality.[1] In the final analysis, Ondaatje's imaginative reconstruction incorporates not only the dissimilar voices of different social groups in the formative period of Toronto, but also the mediating voice of the author from the creative/writing process. The narrative thus negotiates a territory fraught with contrastive, and sometimes conflicting, voices and "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1980, 131), laying bare the connections as well as the tensions among the subjects in representing the city's past. The fragmented and discontinuous form acts as a reminder that the civic history cannot be properly written without recognizing the co-existence and interchange of these voices. As the narrator corroborates: "Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story" (Ondaatje 1987, 163). *ISL* in this way identifies a simple narrative order as illusory: "It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And that is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline laterally" (Berger 1972, 40).

Another formal feature of *ISL* that denies readers a comfortable story is intertextuality. As Julia Kristeva famously claims, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double" (1980, 66; original emphasis). Ondaatje's work is highly self-conscious of this intertextual nature, as it invokes writers diverse in time and culture such as John Berger, H. G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, Anne Wilkinson, and the anonymous authors of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. The intertextual references first provoke reflections on how an earlier text bears on and illuminates the new one. For example, Alice takes Conrad's insight into the structure of nature—"Let me now re-emphasize the extreme looseness of the structure of all objects" (Ondaatje 1987, 141)—as a license for her political activism and reads Conrad's letter to Patrick to inculcate in him her idea. In Ondaatje' version, the letter was addressed

to a newspaper and conveys Conrad's belief that it is possible for "infinitely varied" men to unite and fight for an idea (141). Yet as Rachel Bower points out, the letter was in fact written to William Blackwood, a Scottish publisher, to appeal for a firm principled stance and praise Blackwood's magazine for not changing its soul (2013, 60). Ondaatje's appropriation puts this admiration for the unchanged soul in a time of fluid principles in dialogue with Patrick's response that ideology hates the private and is not human, inviting us to consider the tension between collective political actions and the specificality of individual experience. At one moment Patrick seems to subscribe to Alice's militant activism—he burns down a hotel frequented by the rich, but his conversion into a political agent is incomplete. As I will discuss later, this sabotage is driven by anger and loss, rather than belief. The allusion to Conrad urges the attention to the vertical dimension of literary word, in which "the word in the text is oriented toward an anterior or synchronic literary corpus" (Kristeva 1980, 66).

In addition, the references to previous texts disclose the myth of origins and invalidate the author's authority. As Kristeva puts it, an intertextual text makes the author "an anonymity, an absence, a blank space", and at the origin of narration, "we experience emptiness" (1980, 74). Since we cannot assume that the language in question gives us direct access to the subject who wrote, the notions of unity, authority, and truth can no longer be claimed, and intertextuality in this way serves the purpose of subverting unity and reason, and by extension all ideas of the logical and the unquestionable (Allen 2000, 41-46). For *ISL*, The shaping force of the ancient Babylonian *Gilgamesh* epic is first and foremost seen in the epigraph which both provides the work's title and heralds its thematic concern with mourning.[2] Later, the narrative invokes the epic again when it describes the tannery works' acquisition of the skins of the slaughtered animals (Ondaatje 1987, 136) and associates Patrick's drowse-off in the waterworks with Gilgamesh's famous slaying of the lions (254). In the ancient text, grieving over his friend's death, Gilgamesh dons the lion skin and goes on a quest for the meaning of death/immortality; analogically, in *ISL*, Patrick puts on animal skins (he also works at a tannery) and obtains the revolutionary ideas from the immigrants, undertaking a journey of self-discovery. Apart from this thematic alliance, *ISL* also finds structural underpinnings in the epic. *Gilgamesh* as we know it today is composed of fragmentary tablets which were compiled by scholars. This is a process of constant creation; with fragments found in different times gathered into a complete piece, new episodes are continuously included to fill gaps and meaning is ongoingly updated (Dolphin1999, 122-23). Ondaatje's work likewise presents an open-ended structure. The narrative starts with Patrick telling Hana the story of Alice when he drives to Marmora; it ends with a similar but different scene where Hana gathers Alice's story from Patrick when she drives to Marmora. The circular structure does not draw a full circle. The closing moment seems to return to the beginning, but the twist signals the resistance to closure, highlighting the tale-telling nature of the novel—like oral tales, *ISL* is dynamic and open to revision and interpretation. Notwithstanding these resemblances, it is worth noting that Ondaatje's work is by no means a simple reuse of the

epic. In fact, the modern text also constantly abuses the old one, inscribing many splittings and realignments of the mythical associations (Dolphin 1999, 128-129). For example, while in the waterworks Harris identifies Patrick with Gilgamesh, he does not mention the destructive part of the original story—the ancient hero not only falls on the lions, but also destroys and scatters them (see also Gamlin 1992, 72). The thematic and structural references to the epic prominently illustrate the dialogical dimension of *ISL*; with the two texts meeting, contradicting, and relativizing each other, meaning emerges vertically, from the interaction of the two, rather than horizontally, from the linear communication from the assumed god-figure author to readers. In making sense of the narrative, the readerly attention is drawn to symbolic relationships and analogy rather than substance-causality connections (see Kristeva 1980, 72); we are therefore obstructed from building an easy concordance between beginning, middle, and end.

In a bid to create a sense of reality and restore a civic space of diversity and dissonance, Ondaatje capitalizes on the devices of collage, metafiction, and intertextuality, and presents a highly dialogic and miscellaneous narrative. However, while Ondaatje takes pains to demonstrate a multi-layered and multi-dimensional world full of potentiality that works against any monolithic notion of Toronto's past, he never intends to completely abandon form and create chaos. The author asks us to be patient, assuring us that some consoling plot will be given: "The first sentence of every novel should be: 'Trust me, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human'" (Ondaatje 1987, 152). In what follows, I draw upon Joseph Frank's idea of spatial form and investigate textual details that provide readers with comfort and enable them to establish the connections suppressed by the fragmented form. It is my argument that to work out the coherent patterns that shed light on Patrick's life, one needs to attend to units of reflexive reference, specifically, moments of intemporal significance and the recurring symbols.

Counteracting Time: Imposing Fictive Concords on Successiveness

It is hard to ignore the similarities between Kermode's ideas and Joseph Frank's discussion on the spatial form in modern literature, although Kermode himself vehemently opposes this analogy.[3] Frank observes that modern narratives attempt to overcome the temporal nature of language with an atemporal narrative organization, and the basic principle of this organization is "reflexive reference", which requires readers to "suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal references can be apprehended as a unity" (1945, 230).[4] What he describes is a space-logic that demands a re-orientation in readers' attitude towards language: they need to work on reflexive relations among segments which are independent of the time-sequence of a narrative. As Jeffrey R. Smitten summarizes, Frank's spatial form has three manifestations: the use of verbal leitmotifs, the suspension of the temporal flow by the juxtaposition of synchronous events, and the contrast of the views of the same character at different times (1975, 209). For Frank, that spatialization enters fundamentally into the structure of language echoes exactly Kermode's idea that man needs plots to achieve temporal

integration: creating relations of meaning detached from pure succession exemplifies a tendency to counteract time by spatializing its flow (1991, 91).[5] Both scholars in fact stress the importance of finding plots in the temporal to achieve apprehensions of the intemporal in reading literature.

For *ISL*, the desire to escape from time is first inscribed in moments that bundle past, present, and future in a common organization. These are "historical moments of intemporal significance" (1967, 47), to borrow Kermode's words, or what Frank calls "a moment of time" (1945, 239). Units that juxtapose snapshots of Patrick taken at different stages of life play an important role in illuminating his self-exploration, particularly with respect to women and love. In one case, the music in the Thompson Grill throws Patrick across eras and brings back the memory with a girl when he was eighteen, before his arrival in Toronto. His mind subsequently skates across old conversations with Clara about Alice, and then moves back to the present. At this moment Patrick is watching himself within the past, trying to make sense of the women he had relationships with:

> The girl's eyes that night when he was eighteen were like tunnels into kindness and lust and determination which he loved as much as her white stomach and her ochre face. He saw something there he would never reach—the way Clara dissolved and suddenly disappeared from him, or the way Alice came to him it seemed in a series of masks or painted faces, both of these women like the sea through a foreground of men. (Ondaatje 1987, 133-34)

This travel in time and the juxtaposition of disparate memories indicate Patrick's urge to build connection with the past. Although he is yet unable to fully "reach" these women, who remain fuzzy and unclear to him, the effort to locate himself and find significance in these relationships is crucial for his self-discovery. Later on, Patrick makes progress in associating the present with a remote origin and finds some anchor in life. At the end of "Palace of Purification," Patrick mourns over the death of Alice. The memory pieces together their initial encounter, Canto's funeral, and their life together, making Patrick more aware of how he aches for her and for "those days that belonged to the moon" (167). The narration then moves to an atemporal and multi-layered space which encompasses all the great moments of their relationship, and where the two "sit in a field", "in the red and yellow and gold décor of the [Chinese] restaurant", and "the Macedonian café" (167). Simultaneous with their intimacy in this space is Patrick's recollection of his childhood: "When he was twelve he turned the pages always towards illustration and saw the heroes carry the women across British Columbian streams, across the foot of waterfalls" (167-68). As Patrick realizes, what he finds in the past is "a love story" (168) and what happens between him and Alice is likewise so. He simply wants to live in the good old days: "He does not wish for plot and all its consequences. Let me stay in this field with Alice Gull . . ." (168; original ellipsis). But plot will reveal, as the narrative later shows that Patrick's love for Alice leads to certain consequences. To mediate his loss of love, Patrick resorts to violence and sets the Muskoka Hotel on fire. As many scholars (Marinkova 2011, 110;

Schumacher 1996, 15; Gamlin 1992, 75) point out, his militant activism is motivated by sorrow and guilt, and it does not mean his complete conversion into a political agent. This causality is also detectable in Patrick's blasting of the waterworks. Confronting Harris, he inherits Alice's language—"'In a rich man's house there is nowhere to spit except in his face'" (Ondaatje 1987, 251)—and finally faces the death of his beloved one (251-52). While Patrick dozes off as he reminisces, the narrator picks up the recollection and helps him to restore the incident (252-53). The juxtaposition of two disparate moments—the present sabotage and the past traumatic event—corroborates Alice's influence on Patrick and the emotional drive underlying his radical action. In Ondaatje's experimental rendition of Patrick's life, these moments of junction offer a pathway centering around love through the character's interactions with the women in his life.

The desire to spatialize time also lies in the embedded "symbolic reference" (Frank, 1945, 234) or "verbal leitmotif" (Smitten 1975, 209). Images of insects are present throughout *ISL*, albeit in different times and spaces, and the significance of these images is often unclear by themselves. It is only by relating them to one another and viewing them as a whole can meaning be constructed; this time, we establish a different pattern undergirding Patrick's self-discovery, one that concerns the role of the immigrants in his constitution as a political dissent. Patrick's attachment to nature starts from his childhood. He would gaze on hoppers and moths and tune his senses to their noises; fascinated with the visits of cicadas and damsel flies, he is desperate to communicate with these prehistorical creatures (Ondaatje 1987, 9-10). The boy's obsession with insects is not explained, but the narrator assures us that it will be assimilated into a plot: "Years later at the Riverdale Library . . . There will suddenly be order and shape to these nights" (9). As revealed later, it is in there that the grown-up Patrick reads the official documents about the building of the Bloor Street Viaduct which mention little about the labours who actually built it (151-52). Indeed, it is insects that first connect Patrick with the immigrants. On a winter night, a blue moth brings the boy out of the house and leads him to a group of Finnish loggers skating on a land that does not belong to them. While "transfixed" (22) by them, the boy has no courage to step forward and join them. For the twelve-year old Patrick, the significance of this experience is beyond comprehension, though this moment is declared by the narrator as life-changing when he says that "nothing would be the same" (23). Years later in Ontario, that boy looking through the window and searching for moths appears again, and this time together with Clara. For Patrick, love is like childhood and it "opened him up", making him silly and relaxed (69). This might be why Clara evokes in Patrick his childhood affinity with insects: her dazzling clothes remind him of "a damsel fly" (63) and a tree fog bears witness to their lovemaking (69-71). As Patrick realizes his sole interest in her and no longer wants Ambrose Small (72), the search for Small becomes a search for Clara. This, according to Schumacher, initiates Patrick's pursuit of self-identity and guides him again to that vaguely perceived closeness to the immigrant community (1996, 8). It is Clara who entrusts Patrick with an iguana which literally brings him into contact with the Macedonians: the learning of the Macedonian words for iguana and

vetch—*gooshter* and *fee-ee*—initiates his communication with the group. At the end of Book Two, the moth image appears again, after Patrick's sabotage of the hotel. In the Garden of the Blind, he sees something familiar in Elizabeth's green eye:

> Her green eye echoes somewhere within him. *Aetias Luna*—and its Canadian name, *papillon lune*. Lunar moth . . . He had loved the lunar moth, its flare of the lower wing like signature, a papyrus-textured object whose small furred body he used to see pulsing on a branch or rock within his lantern night. (Ondaatje 1987, 179-80; original emphasis and my ellipsis)

Patrick is shocked into memory, discerning that the color of Elizabeth's eye is the same as one of the moths he used to study as a boy. This realization apparently offers Patrick consolations, as he feels at peace beside the blind woman: "He feels she receives all of his qualities, in this small garden, raucous with noise" (180). This moment exhibits a more conspicuous connection with the past and invites us to register a pattern that structures Patrick's life trajectory from a white village boy to a representative of the disenfranchised in Toronto. What purges his life of mere successiveness is his bond with the immigrants, which is planted long before, symbolized by his fascination with prehistorical and inconspicuous small creatures in nature; this little seed, nurtured by Clara's and Alice's love, gradually grows up and turns into concrete political action. Elizabeth's travelling gaze takes Patrick back to Bellrock, and more importantly, it allows the incipient revolutionary to see his intimate involvement in the histories of others (see also Marinkova 2011, 110). As Katherine Acheson points out, "insects inhabit a world which is alien, desired, and finally known by the speaker" (1995, 113) and it is in the insect world that Patrick first locates his desire for understanding and voice (114). Paralleling Patrick's engagement with and final embrace of the insect world is the gradual realization of his inextricable link with the disenfranchised. Patrick is better at making sense and gaining control of life when he treats his disparate moments with little creatures as a unity and establishes the reflexive relations among them. The space-logic of *ISL* here again demonstrates the human need for "interrelations of *kairoi* intimated by the action of *chronos*" (Kermode 1978, 585).

On a personal level, *ISL* endorses building connections between beginning, middle, and end so as to reach the discovery of coherent patterns. In due course, Patrick finds the organizations that give shape to pure temporal duration; he perceives "the interactions" and "a wondrous night web", and "the detritus and chaos of the age was aligned (Ondaatje 1987, 151). Despite so, the comfort afforded by these patterns is overshadowed by their arbitrariness. Before the mentioned epiphanic moment, approaching a street-band, Patrick finds his footsteps unintentionally attuning to the music: "He walked on beyond the sound of the street musicians, aware once again of the silence between his individual steps, knowing how he could add music by simply providing the thread of a hum" (150-51). This reflection is reminiscent of Kermode's discussion of the clock's *tick-tock*: that we call the second sound *tock* shows that we use fictions to enable the end to structure chronicity, and "the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely

successive, disorganized time" (Kermode 1967, 45; original emphasis). On the one hand, Patrick's voluntary contribution to the street music by humming—together with other different sounds (cornet, saxophone and drum)—demonstrates his desire to impose structure on passing time. On the flip side, that he does it in such a haphazard way indicates the contingency and incompleteness of the pattern thus invented. This distrust of human-made mental structures is more explicitly shown in Small, the millionaire who tries hard to keep his life in clear compartments; in his final days, however, he "had imploded" (Ondaatje 1987, 226) and is left drown in the discontinuous moments of his past. Small's situation points to the ultimate futility of the human efforts to make sense of a fundamentally formless, meaningless, and chaotic reality. The caveat hinted here again admonishes us to take note of the restriction of using paradigm to grasp reality.

Conclusion

This article has offered a reading of *ISL* in the light of Kermode's theory of fiction; it specifically zoomed in on the text's form and explored how it demonstrates the dilemma between reality and fiction, between respecting the non-narrative contingencies of modern reality and telling a comfortable story. I first examined how the narrative challenges inherited forms to mimic the overwhelming variegation of life. To portray Toronto's past as discursively composed and allow different versions of that past to be heard, *ISL* refuses linear narrative order; the application of the cubist collage, metafictional techniques, and intertextual references lays bare the illusion of representing life through simple sequences and causalities, and foregrounds the limitation of using easy concords between beginning, middle, and end to give sense to reality. I then capitalized on Frank's discussion on spatial form and dissected the patterns that confer organization and form on Patrick's existence in time. Patrick's journey of self-discovery manifests two plot-relationships: In the discussed moments of intemporal significance we discern the role of his relationships with women in turning him into a political activist, and in the recurring insect images we perceive how Patrick, in his interaction with the disenfranchised, gradually finds his own voice in a culturally plural community. In his imaginative representation of Toronto, Ondaatje rejects a linear and unidimensional composition to underscore the insufficiency of mental structures in understanding reality; at the same time, he shows that it is of necessity to count on the expedient meaning-giving capacity of fictive concords to save the underprivileged from the unbearable time of mere chronicity. The novel thus illustrates Ondaatje's struggle between showing purely successive, disorganized time as it is and humanizing time.

Endnotes:

1. On how *ISL* crosses the boundary between fact and fiction, literature and history, see also Ajay Heble (1995, 251) and Glen Lowry (2005, 66).

2. The epigraph goes as follows: "The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have gone to the earth I will let me hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion" (Ondaatje 1987).
3. See Kermode (1978).
4. The discussed nonlinear structure also gives prominence to the spatial dimension of the narrative. In this article, to avoid confusion, I use *spatial form* strictly in Frank's sense.
5. Kermode himself rejects using the term "spatial" and he calls fictive concords "time-defeating" (1967, 52).

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The Poet as Partial Historian: Richard Murphy's 'The Battle of Aughrim'

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Abstract:

'The Battle of Aughrim' is a major achievement of modern Irish poetry but remains misrepresented in critical discourse. Written by Richard Murphy, the last poet of Ireland's Protestant aristocracy, it has been respected as an ideologically balanced, historically objective treatment of the decisive battle of the Williamite War in Ireland that secured Protestant political dominance on the island for more than two centuries. In the manner of a historian, the poet took pains to carefully research the event, and the finished work has long been considered a model of accuracy and impartiality. This article argues that common critical perceptions of the poem are mistaken, that in fact, 'The Battle of Aughrim' does not equitably deal with the Anglo and Irish traditions of Murphy's cultural identity but instead makes gestures of conciliation and sympathy towards the latter. This article conducts a parallel re-examination of the poem and historical record and calls for a greater consideration of the cultural climate in Ireland at the time of the poem's composition. Doing so will validate the further contention that 'The Battle of Aughrim' actually caters to nationalist conceptions of Irishness and serves to palliate the poet's insecurities regarding the notion of authentic Irish identity.

Keywords: Irish History, Irish Poetry, Anglo-Irish, Identity, Territory, Nationalism, Jacobite-Williamite War

I. Introduction

'The Battle of Aughrim' dramatises the decisive battle of the Williamite-Jacobite War that led to the establishment of Protestant hegemony over Ireland. At the time of the poem's composition, Richard Murphy's (1927-2018) sense of a divided identity was acute. He would come to be unreservedly labelled a "Poet of Two Traditions", those being the Anglo and Irish ones of his cultural background, and as Maurice Harmon asserts, "The key to much of Murphy's work comes from this need to bridge the gap between the two cultures and the two traditions, to achieve a balance between planted demesne and peasant holding" (Harmon 1978, 8). Yet Murphy wrote from an even further remove from the Irish mainstream in that he not only came from a Protestant family in an overwhelmingly Catholic country, but was a member of the

former aristocracy that had reigned pre-eminently over the Irish masses in the centuries prior to independence. Frequently termed the 'Ascendancy', Murphy's class of Protestants was in fact even more elevated, being that of the 'Big House' landowners whose large holdings served as a centre of wealth, power, and influence from the eighteenth century onwards (Mortimer 1991, 209) and who had traditionally thought of themselves as 'The English in Ireland' (Beckett 1976, 28-34). He had made overt statements of discomfort and dissociation from his privileged caste, describing himself as "a renegade from a family of Protestant imperialists" (Murphy 2002, 220) and his poetry as "my forlorn attempt to shed my colonial past" (Murphy and O'Malley 2013), and these sentiments are manifested in 'The Battle of Aughrim' in ways that have long been overlooked or unnoticed in critical assessments of the poem.

In contrast to the large critical consensus that the poet remains balanced, neutral and objective with regards to his treatment of the English and Irish traditions that the two armies of the battle represent, a re-examination of the poem will show that Murphy actually adopts the nationalist historical narrative and perspective. Dillon Johnston and Guinn Batten comment that the poems of the sequence "focus from a controlled distance" on the participants of Ireland's colonial history (Johnston and Batten 2006, 373). Julian Moynahan insists that "for Murphy Irish traditions are something of a balancing act" (Moynahan 1983, 108). J.G. Simms asserts that Murphy's "presentation is subjective, but subjectivity is balanced [...] with no obvious leaning to one side or the other" (Simms 1977, 50). Similarly, Gregory Schirmer states that 'The Battle of Aughrim' "resists the tendency to heroicize either side of the conflict" (Schirmer 1998, 344). Joseph Swann reads the poem as one of "non-identity" (Swann 1990, 41). And in a recent essay, Siobhán Campbell posits that the poem "shows Murphy attempting to upend the exceptionalism that permeates both nationalism and loyalism", emphasising the poet's "irony-seeking" and "cool detachment" (Campbell 2019, 118-120). This article's analysis will show that such readings have missed important details that significantly alter our understanding of the poem; through close analysis of the sequence's literary elements, set against the realities of the historical record, it will be evident that Murphy, influenced by the prevailing cultural nationalist principles of the time, writes with a discernible sense of affinity towards the side of the defeated and dispossessed.

The matter is not one of mere sympathy for the downtrodden. It is an illustration of a nationalist pressure to conform to its historical narrative and conditions for true "Irishness". While the poet's dissonance with the martial values of British imperialism, to which his ancestors had been exemplary adherents, are no secret, the nationalist dictates of Irish authenticity at the time of the poem's composition are a neglected aspect of previous critical evaluations. The defeated Catholics have been internalised as representatives of the truly Irish, and as a way of more closely affiliating with the Irish tradition, 'The Battle of Aughrim' makes gestures of conciliation, solidarity and sympathy towards them. It is crucial to contextualise not just the cultural climate in which the poem was composed, but the decades prior during the poet's

formative experiences in what would become the Irish Republic. Upon the establishment of the Free State, the national philosophy in government "laid heavy emphasis on the 'Gaelic' nature of the new state [...] Gaelicizing the new state was a preoccupation" (Foster 1988, 518-519), and the Catholic church "shaped the vision, goals, and policies of the state [...] a Catholic *habitus* pervaded all aspects of social life" (Inglis 2005, 60-69). Gaelicism and Catholicism, the two pillars of Irish Ireland, were born out of Daniel Corkery's conception of a 'Hidden Ireland', "hidden not only from the Ascendancy historians but from the heirs of those who inhabited it" (Maume 1996, 7). Corkery felt that the "first article in an Ascendancy's creed is, and has always been, that the natives are a lesser breed, and that anything that is theirs (except their land and their gold!) is therefore of little value" (Corkery 1925, x-xi), so Irish Ireland's hostility towards people of Murphy's ilk cannot be understated. A nationalist agenda of establishing the parameters of Irish authenticity dominated the field of Irish cultural debate well into the 1940s and 1950s, its ultimate goal being the realisation of a "pure and final essence [...] when the true nature of Irishness, so long 'hidden' and 'disguised', would be fully revealed in contradistinction to the colonial other" (Smyth 1998, 164-165). An insecurity of oneself as "colonial other" underlies much of Murphy's work, and yet, as Jacob Golomb explains, "To be authentic is to own one's self. But one cannot do so completely without also owning one's past and one's heritage" (Golomb 1995, 116). As Murphy has spoken of attempting to shed his colonial past, it might be argued that he is disqualified from both the Anglo and Irish conceptions of authenticity which he can so often be seen attempting to negotiate in his poetry.

Murphy stated his motivation for writing the sequence: "I wanted to look inward at the divisions and devastations in myself as well as in the country: the conflicts, legends, rituals, myths and histories arising from possession of the land – why we still had borders and bigotries" (Murphy 2002, 221). Yet as "the divisions and devastations in myself" have their origins in the Protestant victory, the poem, however subtly, spiritually aligns with the defeated Catholics. The poet's divided loyalties to Britain and Ireland echo the fact that his ancestors fought on both sides of the war. As Justin Quinn observes, "For all its historical accuracy and colour, the poem is, as Murphy makes clear at the outset, a kind of autobiography writ large" (Quinn 2008, 116). Thus, the stance taken in the poem is one which repudiates the British side of his sense of division whilst affirming loyalty to the Irish side. The poet's own stated "anti-triumphalist, anti-militarist" stance (Murphy 2013, 294) translates to an anti-imperialist, anti-Protestant viewpoint within the sequence. This is occasioned by an internalised understanding drawn from nationalism that to be pro-Catholic is to be pro-Irish, as he is at pains to reconcile an inauthentic self with an authenticity prescribed by the Southern state. However, as authenticity quite often cannot be imagined beyond the conditions set by nationalist ideology (Graham 2001, 136), the poet cannot shed his colonial past, so the poem makes great efforts towards making amends for it.

II. Now and Before

'The Battle of Aughrim' comprises four parts: Now, Before, During and After. It was originally commissioned for radio by the BBC and composed between 1962-1967. The acuity of Murphy's historical consciousness is evidenced in the following recollection:

> I remembered driving through the village of Aughrim, right in the centre of Ireland, and feeling a sense of desolation in the place. The battle fought there on Sunday 12 July 1691 was the last and bloodiest in a war that established the Protestant ownership of land in Ireland for almost the next two centuries. The famine of 1845-7, the partitioning of Ireland in 1922, and the long ebb tide of emigration that was, we hoped, about to turn, were remote consequences of the battle. And I recalled that one of my mother's ancestors, Robert Miller, had acquired from a dispossessed Catholic the land and house he called Milford. (Murphy 2002, 217)

The "remote consequences of the battle" underlie the sentiments of the poem; Murphy is self-conscious about the history of violence, oppression and tragedy that followed the Protestant Williamite victory at Aughrim. The poet was born in a house which was a prize of war given to his family. In an early elegy for his grandmother 'The Woman of the House', Murphy had written, "Through our inheritance all things have come". However, he is unforgiving towards the political and military corollaries of his inheritance as Aughrim's outcome "turned the screw of oppression even tighter [and] eventually became the focus of all that Murphy repudiates" (Longley 2000, 129). The central question of 'The Battle of Aughrim' which opens the poem – "who owns the land" – was answered over two centuries ago in an early episode of British imperialism, but the land has since, for the most part, changed hands. A necessity to answer this question again becomes more urgent following independence, Ascendancy decay and sectarian violence in Northern Ireland in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the poem delves into family history, and the national histories of Britain and Ireland intertwine, we detect regret about how these histories played out in the victors' favour at Aughrim, echoing the sentiments of Irish nationalist narratives.

As evidence, the poem frames the conflict as "Ireland's defence \ From the colonists' advance" ('Legend'), even as it recognises that it is a war "Of godly bigotry and pride of race". Murphy has been lauded for the careful research he undertook for the composition of the poem, yet in making the battle strictly reflect the poet's own sense of division between British and Irish traditions, an important political context is overlooked. As S.J. Connolly comments:

> But the fact remains that Jacobitism, concerned to set a Scottish dynasty on the united thrones of Great Britain and Ireland, was by definition a British political ideology. Like the earlier service of Irish Catholics in the armies of James II, it derived its whole rationale from an assumption that the three kingdoms of the British Isles would remain under one sovereign. (Connolly 1997, 52)

This is why the Williamite-Jacobite conflict in Ireland is often termed, "the war of the two kings". Murphy is well aware of this; 'Legend' also acknowledges the struggle as "a feud of absent kings \ Who used war like a basset table". However, the poem's sympathies lie with Ireland's Catholic "defenders" from the outset.

An early indication of nationalist sentiment appears in the opening poem, 'On Battle Hill'. 'Battle Hill' refers to Kilcommodan Hill, where the Jacobite forces were positioned. The speaker, in the first instance, literally assumes their viewpoint. The contemporary landscape inspires memories from the past:

> Who owns the land where musket-balls are buried
> In blackthorn roots on the esker, the drained bogs
> Where sheep browse, and credal war miscarried?
> Names in the rival churches are written on plaques.
> Behind the dog-rose ditch, defended with pikes,
> A tractor sprays a rood of flowering potatoes:
> Morning fog is lifting, and summer hikers
> Bathe in a stream passed by cavalry traitors.

The speaker is the only person for whom history is vital: sheep lazily browse, the place where the Jacobite infantry was positioned is now a potato farm through which a tractor passes, hikers have no idea they are retracing the path of Henry Luttrell's "cavalry traitors" who forsook the battle. Life in contemporary Aughrim appears unconcerned about "who owns the land". Elsewhere in the poem the speaker observes, "A Celtic cross by the road commemorates no battle \ But someone killed in a car… a farmer with a tinker woman… thinning turnips by hand… giant earth-movers \ Shovel and claw a highway over a rector's glebe". Schirmer notes:

> Murphy, like Yeats, laments a present so ready to ignore or dispense with the past, usually for self-interested, materialistic purposes, but he is even more concerned about the construction of present-day attitudes and prejudices on highly subjective readings, or misreadings, of history. (Schirmer 1998, 144)

Another poem from the first part of the sequence, 'Inheritance', criticises a "kinsman" who is eager to "dispense with the past" for "self-interested, materialistic purposes":

> Left a Cromwellian demesne.
> My kinsman has bulldozed three bronze age raths.
>
> No tree can survive his chainsaw:
> Hewing is part of the land reclamation scheme.

> He has auctioned grandfather's Gallipoli sword
> And bought a milking machine.
>
> Slate he stripped from a Church of Ireland steeple
> Has broadened his pigsty roof.

Murphy's poetry usually endorses the "shaping spirit". Numerous poems in his oeuvre witness the building and restoration of boats, homes, gardens and other structures. However, the actions of the speaker's "kinsman" in 'Inheritance' are seen to dislocate the present from the past. Heaney comments:

> The poet is affronted by a 'kinsman' – and how tactfully his use of that proud noun places him at a distance from the man himself and from the less dynastic consciousness of the 'truly Irish' – who violates both the indigenous and the colonial heritages. (Heaney 1978, 26)

The speaker's "kinsman" embodies a modernising, industrious Protestant ethic. As he is a descendant of the Protestant victors at Aughrim, his negative actions are one of the 'remote consequences' of the battle reverberating in the present-day. That the speaker distances himself from the "kinsman" is important; though he is not of the "truly Irish", he is of the Anglo-Irish, a heritage which the "kinsman" also disrespects by stripping an Anglican steeple and auctioning away ancestral memorabilia. Whereas the "kinsman" is neglectful of the past, the narrator of 'On Battle Hill' is mindful of the last words of Jacobite commanders, Patrick Sarsfield, 1st Earl of Lucan, 'Would to God…' ['… this were shed for Ireland'], and Charles Chalmont, Marquis de St. Ruth, '*Le jour est à nous, mes enfants*' ['The day is ours, my children']. As Murphy is the poem's implied speaker, the poet is seen to be more closely connected to the defeated Jacobites than to his own Protestant kin. 'On Battle Hill' ends with the speaker dismounting from his horse at the cairn of St. Ruth. St. Ruth's death is the catalyst of the legend that 'The Battle of Aughrim' is prepared to explore, "A cannonball beheaded him, and sowed a myth". Yet as the poem's sympathies lie with the "truly Irish", 'The Battle of Aughrim' cannot keep itself from advancing nationalist mythologies of the event.

Take for instance the strikingly different ways modern nationalist and unionist factions are depicted in 'Green Martyrs' and 'Orange March'. The former begins with an allusion to St. Ruth on horseback, "I dream of a headless man \ sitting on a charger, chiselled stone", then lists the lamentations of a woman "reading from an old lesson":

> '… who died in the famine.
>
> 'Royal bulls on my land,
> I starved to feed the absentee with rent.

> ‘Aughrim’s great disaster
> Made him two hundred years my penal master.
>
> ‘Rapparees, whiteboys, volunteers, ribbonmen,
> Where have they gone?
>
> ‘Coerced into exile, scattered
> Leaving a burnt gable and a field of ragwort.’

While the “old lesson” is recognised as a received historical narrative of nationalism, the narrative itself is not disputed. If, as John Wilson Foster asserts, the “historic landscape of *The Battle of Aughrim*” is “a venue of defeat” (Foster 1991, 162-163) for Murphy, this suggests an affinity felt by the narrator for the defeated. The grievances listed by the woman are a near echo of what the poet deemed in his memoir to be “remote consequences of the battle”, consequences from which he had hoped the country was “about to turn”. The end of ‘Green Martyrs’ transforms the identity of the headless man, “She brings me from Knock shrine \ John Kennedy’s head on a china dish”. Swann notes:

> For St. Ruth, the French general who led the Irish into the battle they lost, is, in the poem, transmuted into, or rather completed by, the Kennedy whose deeds and status might have redeemed that loss. The temptation to interpret the poem in this way is, however, rudely reversed when one observes that both figures have become items in a collection of souvenirs, and indeed of imaginary souvenirs, for there is no record anywhere of a statue of St. Ruth. (Swann 1990, 40)

However, the poem memorialises St. Ruth by casting him as a martyr. The change from the forgotten French general to the revered American president (at the time, the first and only one from a Catholic Irish background), whose assassination occurred early on in Murphy’s composition of the sequence, makes a nationalist sense of loss and victimisation more immediate, powerful and affecting. A notion of martyrdom is reinforced in the religious imagery of the poem’s final line which recalls the presentation of John the Baptist’s head to Salome on a platter.

In stark contrast is the characterisation of Northern Protestants in ‘Orange March’. The poem observes the triumphalist celebration of Protestant history that regularly takes place in Northern Ireland:

> In bowler hats and Sunday suits,
> Orange sashes, polished boots,
> Atavistic trainbands come
> to blow the fife and beat the drum.
>
> Apprentices uplift their banner

> True blue dyed with 'No Surrender!'
> Claiming Aughrim as if they'd won
> Last year, not 1691.

There is a noticeable, if not overt, tone of criticism and ridicule. The unionist tradition is marked by militarism and belligerence. Where republican historical memory is one of tribute, unionist historical memory is one of atavism. The Orange marchers are identified as a subset within the wider history of British imperialism in the third stanza:

> On Belfast silk, Victoria gives
> bibles to kneeling Zulu chiefs.
> Read the moral, note the date:
> 'The secret that made Britain great.'

The poem satirises the patronising tradition that the Orangemen celebrate. The grotesque aspects of unionism are magnified by ties to "the Ulster cloth trade, missionary imperialism, and that unpleasant bust of Queen Victoria hard by Belfast City Hall, glowering westward" (Moynahan 1983, 105). Ironically, the poet of imperial heritage is unable to identify with "the unionist grand narrative" that "celebrates Irish unionists' role in British imperialism and colonialism, and as agents, beneficiaries, advocates and privileged clients of the British monarch and state in Ireland" (O'Dowd 2005, 82). The last stanza transfers the poem's setting from Belfast to another one of the country's focal points of sectarianism:

> Derry, oakwood of bright angels,
> Londonderry, dingy walls
> Chalked at night with 'Fuck the Queen!'
> Bygone canon, bygone spleen.

The traditional name of the city, Derry, from the Irish word for oakwood, *doire*, is associated with "bright angels", a reminder of the city's ancient ties with Colum Cille, the sixth-century saint and evangelist. The prefix, 'London', was granted by royal charter during the reign of James I, in which the controversial Plantation of Ulster was launched; Londonderry is associated with sectarian "spleen" that is anything but "bygone". If "for Murphy, history is the ground upon which Ireland's two traditions meet", 'Orange March' suggests that the tradition that glorifies British imperialism is more "vulnerable to dangerous interpretations that justify and motivate prejudice" (Schirmer 1998, 343). The contrasting way in which the poetry treats contemporary republican and unionist sides reflects the way it perceives the historic Catholic and Protestant sides of the Aughrim battlefield.

Where the sequence is most even-handed is in its treatment of the religious context of the war. Simms notes, "For both Catholics and Protestants the war had something of the character of a

crusade" (Simms 1977, 41). The clash of religious sects is symbolised in 'Dragoon', wherein its Catholic narrator describes how a "Soft west wind carries our friary bells \ Against the tide of psalms flooding the plain" from the Protestants. With regards to religiosity, both Williamite and Jacobite are shown to be brutal and fanatical. The comrade of the narrator of 'Dragoon' "boasts he'll hack \ From a shorn heretic a pair of testicles \ To hang above St Brigid's well for luck". The narrator of 'Planter' prays, "May the God of battle \ Give us this day our land \ and the papists be trampled". St. Ruth, in his address to the Jacobite army, revels in the "Glory I have acquired, and how Successful and Fortunate I have been in Suppressing Heresie in France, and propagating the Holy Catholick Faith... great numbers of those incourigable Hereticks have perished both Soul and Body by their obstinacy". Swann notes that the poem, 'God's Dilemma', "by not obviously interpreting, but simply stating, both (or all three) sides of the religious divide, makes a powerful plea for its absurdity" (Swann 1990, 40). A balanced perspective is registered by the structure of the poem, composed of three, three-lined stanzas. In the first, the Catholic "God was eaten in secret places among rocks... And the priests were whipped or hunted like stags". In the second, the Protestant "God was spoken to at a table with wine and bread... And heretics were burnt at stakes for what they said". The third stanza asserts that senseless religious violence has left "God... fallen into ruins on the shores of lakes" as figures from both sides of the divide continue with mundane tasks of their everyday lives, "Peasants went on milking cows or delving dikes \ And landlords corresponded with landlords across bogs". A close association of religion with warfare was instilled in Murphy at a young age, and this had much to do with the imperial tradition of his background. As Harmon notes, "To die for religion and country was one of the strongest sentiments in his upbringing", but it is a sentiment against which the poet had fiercely revolted while attending Wellington College, a school in Berkshire with a strong military tradition (Harmon 1978 *Biographical*, 12).

When the poet turns to describing the battle, the perspective once more becomes less balanced. It is important to note the side on which the sequence is primarily focused. Swann asserts that "the writing of history has to do with a duality, or plurality, of contexts" (Swann 1990, 42). Parts of 'The Battle of Aughrim' do make an effort to maintain a balanced structure equally representative of both sides: a poem narrated by Williamite mercenaries is followed by one narrated by a Jacobite dragoon, the monologue of a landlord in 'Planter' is followed by a poem about the Irish guerrillas who resist him ('Rapparees'), and 'God's Dilemma' was witnessed to have been critical of both Catholic and Protestant zealotry. Although Moynahan argues that "the poet views the ancient struggle at Aughrim in an essentially non-partisan spirit" (Moynahan 1983, 103), the poem's primary focus on the story of one side of "the ancient struggle" makes 'The Battle of Aughrim' partisan in terms of perspective. The sequence emphasises a theme of betrayal, specifically the betrayal of "the Irish cause". In 'The Sheepfold', a farmer named Kelly and a shepherd named Mullen offer to point St. Ruth out to the Williamite gunners on the day of the battle after the French general seized their flock, "armed with spite, two traitors limp":

> So fetch them to a grey house, where the Dutch
> Commander who serves England's Orange king
> Shakes hands, and gives them each a purse to clutch.

In 'Planter', an Ulster clan leader, Red-mouthed O'Donnell, is induced by "Quiet music and claret cups" to "keep far from battle" his contingent of "a thousand troops". The narrator, an ancestor of the poet, gloats, "I bought him: the traitor sleeps". Later in the sequence, Murphy will write contemptuously of Luttrell, the cavalry commander who withdrew his forces from the battlefield during a critical point in the fighting. The poetry laments that if only these misfortunes had not befallen the Jacobites, Ireland would have surely triumphed over the scheming Protestant colonisers that day at Aughrim. Yet, as J.W. Foster notes, "the traitor looms so large in *The Battle of Aughrim* that one senses an over-compensation" (Foster 1991, 163).

III. During and After

A great many narrative elements of the sequence hold to nationalist accounts of the battle. The first two poems of the third section '3. During', 'St. Ruth' and 'The Winning Shot', are, respectively, a portrait of the French general and a dramatisation of his death. After 'His head is shot off' at the close of 'St. Ruth', 'The Winning Shot' recounts:

> The victory charge was halted. Life Guards stooped down
> And wrapped the dripping head in a blue cloak,
> Then wheeled and galloped towards the setting sun.
> Chance, skill and treachery all hit the mark
> Just when the sun's rod tipped the altar hill:
> The soldiers panicked, thinking God has struck.

Simms asserts that "a modern historian, versed in the weakness of seventeenth-century artillery, has discounted all but chance" (Simms 1977, 48). Yet Murphy adds "skill and treachery" to confirm that the prior betrayal of 'The Sheepfold' has led to a disastrous blow for the unfortunate Irish army. Reality proved less dramatic. As Richard Doherty explains, although the "Life Guards were demoralized to see their general killed before their eyes", the Irish army continued fighting until the Williamite cavalry overtook them from their flank (Doherty 1998, 179). Murphy's poem seems to insist that the battle was a "forsaken" cause for an ill-fated Irishry. Furthermore, a number of poems emphasise Protestant cruelty. The most explicit act of violence performed by Catholics occurs in "Rapparees"; a "noble family" is "gutted... charred in its sleep". Violent acts by Protestants are disproportionately represented. In 'Martial Law', Williamite soldiers "decide to deal \ Justly" with a country couple that they suspect will poison a spring, "So they hang them on a tree by the well". In 'Prisoner', English troopers taunt a captured wounded boy with threats of sexual violence, "Castrate the fucker... Let the papist kiss

my flute… Shove a sword up his hole"; this continues until their "tipsy officer" casually orders, "I want no prisoners, d'you hear me? Shoot \\ The crowd we took". In 'Wolfhound', a dog, notably of a breed native to Ireland, grieves over its owner's body, "She lifts her head to cry \ As a woman keens in a famine for her son", until "A redcoat, stalking, cocks \ His flintlock… he fires his gun".

In terms of the battle itself, the extent of Protestant brutality reached its pinnacle during the retreat of the Jacobite infantry. As Piers Wauchope notes, "It was this final stage of the battle that made Aughrim the bloodiest in Irish history" (Wauchope 1992, 232). An eyewitness account of a Danish mercenary recalled, "the infantry […] threw down their arms, left their colours and ran. Terrible scenes followed as the English fell on the rear of the fugitives […] The blood from the dead so covered the ground that one could hardly take a step without slipping" (Ellis 2004, 126-127). Yet this was not atypical of how war was conducted at the time. Within the poem, only 'Prisoner' is set during the retreat and it is a scene crafted by the poet; Murphy narrows the focus of the poem creating a more intense sense of brutalisation. The scene in 'Martial Law' appears to also be of the poet's imagination. 'Wolfhound' is a dramatisation of an eyewitness anecdote by Reverend George Story (Williams 1977, 90). The sequence's emphasis on Protestant acts of violence may be said to foreshadow the oppressiveness with which Ireland will be subdued and administered as a colony. However, it also accentuates a sense of Catholic victimisation, another indication of where the poet's affinities lie.

To further prove the sequence's nationalist bias we can compare the way Murphy writes about the two key figures of the Jacobite leadership in 'The Battle of Aughrim', Luttrell and Sarsfield. The poem is unequivocal about characterising Luttrell as a traitor. From 'Luttrell':

> When he hears the word spread
> Along the line, 'St Ruth is dead.'
> He retreats at a trot:
> Leading his priding cavalry
> To betray the humble foot:
> Ten miles to a dinner, laid
> In a mansion then to dead.

Luttrell's forces saw limited action at Aughrim. When he faced the English cavalry and saw that enemy numbers were increasing, his dragoons were being outnumbered and there was no prospect of support, he ordered his men to disengage and is said to have simply rode away from the battlefield (Doherty 1998, 179). Moynahan notes, "Perhaps the worst thing known about Luttrell is that he prospered through his treachery, enjoying a fine property at Lucan and a Dublin town house during the early years of the ensuing Penal Era" (Moynahan 1983, 108). 'Luttrell's Death' reveals that he was later assassinated, "a shadow cocked a gun". His killing is prefaced by a series of unflattering depictions, "A poor smell of ordure \ Seeped

through his embroidered chair… 'Let the traitor pass'… his pocket full of pebbles \ Which he used… To lob at little girls." Following Luttrell's death:

> No one betrayed his assassin
> Although the Duke of Bolton
> Offered three hundred pounds' reward.
> The crowd spat on Henry Luttrell's coffin.
> Eighty years after his murder
> Masked men, inspired by Wolfe Tone,
> Burst open his tomb's locks,
> Lit a stub of wax
> And smashed the skull with a pickaxe.

The popular perception of Luttrell as a traitor and the cause of the Jacobite loss at Aughrim persisted for at least a century after his assassination (Wauchope 1992, 302). An 1809 article published in *The Irish Magazine and Monthly Asylum for Neglected Biography* asserts:

> Neither time nor artifice has been ever able to remove the infamous stigma from the name of Luttrell [...] we have no doubt that every rational and religious mind will admit this interposition of divine providence, in allowing the chastisement of an infamous man who betrayed his sovereign [...] who betrayed his religion and his country, and by laying both at the feet of an enemy to one, and a stranger to the other, perpetuated those miseries which Ireland feels to the present day. (Cox ed. 1809, 289-291)

While animus against Luttrell existed during and after the man's lifetime, Murphy's poem gives the wrong impression that his murder was a heroic act of patriotic retribution. In fact, he was shot for a more mundane reason; "his assassin was thought to be either a jealous husband, a debtor or a poor and distant relation who hoped to inherit his estate" (Wauchope 1992, 302). Peter McDonald has commented on how 'The Battle of Aughrim' "treats its historical record with real respect" (McDonald 1989, 95), and others like Schirmer and Simms have commended Murphy for an equitable handling of history. Yet the poem's treatment of Luttrell parrots a politicised historical narrative; Luttrell is nationalist Ireland's treacherous scapegoat and the poem is certain in its condemnation that "He'd sold his country to preserve his class." This is despite there being no contemporary accounts that speak of the man's treachery (Doherty 182) and his acquittal by a tribunal of Jacobite officers (by a vote of 19-4) at a trial regarding suspicion of collusion (Wauchope 1992, 244-245). We cannot say that Murphy is merely retelling the nationalist "myth" of Aughrim; his poem perpetuates it. As a way of appeasing a sense of guilt about the historical foundation on which the poet's caste was established, 'The Battle of Aughrim' makes an overture beyond sympathy to affiliation, catering to a nationalist notion of having been undercut and betrayed.

Unlike Luttrell's, Sarsfield's legacy is revered in nationalist memory. During the war he commanded respect even from his adversaries and was a galvanising figure for the Irish:

> The English held him in awe. To them he was the most dangerous and gallant of the Irish; he was the one gentleman amongst a race of savages, the one heroic figure amongst a nation of cowards. To the Irish he was the 'Father of the Nation' [...] Sarsfield's followers were to be found in all classes of Irishmen [...] not generally confined to either the English or the Gaelic speaker. He was neither Anglo-Norman nor Gaelic. He was both, and as such he was the seventeenth century representative of the new Ireland. (Wauchope 1992, 1)

Famous for conducting daring raids, Sarsfield distinguished himself at Ballyneety, where his cavalry ambushed and destroyed a Williamite siege train on its way to Limerick, "He smashed the Dutch usurper's \ Waggon-train of cannon." The poem 'Sarsfield' depicts him astride "a chestnut horse \ At the head of his regiment, \ His mountainous green shoulders \ Tufted with gold braid." Simms notes:

> A historian, if indeed he mentioned the shoulders, would have made them red. Sarsfield was in a British army and held his commission from King James. But in another sense the shoulders were green; they belonged to an Irish hero, the darling of an army that took little account of Seamus a' Chaca, James the Shit. (Simms 1997, 48)

Murphy makes a point to portray Sarsfield as one of Ireland's "green martyrs". Sarsfield stands alone as "the one heroic figure" in Murphy's poem. St. Ruth was a capable military tactician, but his portrayal, with 'Green Martyrs' being an exception, mostly focuses on him as a vain, arrogant "wife-tormentor" and religious fanatic. Some accounts insist that St. Ruth had deliberately marginalized Sarsfield's role at Aughrim, and there is debate among historians as to where the earl was actually positioned in the battle. The poem that bears his name adopts a version that places Sarsfield in charge of the reserve:

> Patrick Sarsfield, Earl of Lucan
> Commands the reserve today.
>
> The saviour of Limerick knows
> Nothing of St Ruth's plan,
> Not even that the battle
> Of Aughrim has begun.
> He has obeyed since dawn
> The order to wait for further
> Orders behind the hill.

Nationalist historian Edward Alfred D'Alton criticises Sarsfield's relegation:

> Instead of being second in command, he was thus relegated to a subordinate position; and on that eventful day the greatest soldier of the Irish race was thus condemned to inactivity. His services to Ireland ought to have saved him from such a humiliation; but St. Ruth was jealous of him, and would give him no share in the victory he expected to gain. (D'Alton 1920, 448)

However, St. Ruth failed to inform any of his senior officers about his battle plan, not just Sarsfield. In addition, different historians place Sarsfield in command of the Jacobite right flank (Hayes-McCoy 1969, 268), an area that Doherty posits was "probably the army's most vulnerable." (Doherty 1998, 172) The poem follows a nationalist narrative that witnesses Sarsfield "condemned to inactivity", despite "Sarsfield and his men [being] the first to begin the fighting at Aughrim, and the last to stop" (Wauchope 1992, 232).

Sarsfield is then given a lengthy tribute in 'Patrick Sarsfield's Portrait'. Murphy claims descent from Sarsfield through his mother's side. Murphy has said of this poem, "I address Patrick Sarsfield, who fought on the losing Catholic Irish side, as my 'great uncle,' [...] precisely talking to the portrait of a man who was an uncle of mine ten generations removed" (Murphy 1975). With this in mind, we may read the poem as a sincere and direct dedication from the speaker. The "great-uncle in the portrait's grime" is a "Landlord who never racked, you gave your rent \ To travel with your mounted regiment". Following the opening stanza, there are six more that catalogue and praise the earl's military exploits, "Hotly you duelled for our name abroad...to prove \ Your Celtic passion and our Lady's love...Gallant at Sedgemoor, cutting down for James...To breathe our Irish winter into spring...Your ashwood lance covered the Boyne retreat... You kindled Ireland... At Limerick besieged, you led the dance... You saved the city, lost your own estate". Murphy states that as he was writing 'The Battle of Aughrim' he was "trying to come to terms with my own army heritage, and with not having served in the war that was brought to an end by the bomb on Hiroshima", adding, "That heritage accounts for the coolness of tone and the demythologizing ironies of the poem" (Murphy 2002, 220). Yet the tone in 'Patrick Sarsfield's Portrait' is clearly admiring, "through plague and shelling you held out", and affectionate, "You were their hazel nut and speckled fish". It is difficult to locate any "demythologising ironies" regarding Sarsfield. As Heaney remarks, "[The] darling of the defeated Irish side, is plangently celebrated [...] and the buoyancy and melody of this section of the poem touch racial stops" (Heaney 1978, 25).

Murphy is self-conscious of Irish racial identity; "my father was Irish by race, as our name declares" (Murphy 1975). Yet in modern Ireland "there is plenty of evidence that Catholics who became Protestants [...] are still remembered today and despised as 'turncoats'" (Inglis 2005, 70). It is from this questionable notion of Irish "race consciousness" that the poet may claim kinship with what Heaney had earlier termed in his analysis of 'Inheritance', "the truly Irish". The conversation between poets F.R. Higgins and Louis MacNeice that was reprinted as the prologue in *The Faber*

Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry comes to mind. Higgins' asserted that MacNeice, "as an Irishman, cannot escape from your blood, nor from our blood-music that brings the racial character to mind" (Higgins and MacNeice 1986, 18). In "touching racial stops" in his dedication to Sarsfield, Murphy communes with the Irish tradition in the best way that he, as an Anglo-Irish Protestant with Gaelic blood, feels himself capable. The narrator's voice joins with that of the Irish people in heroicising Sarsfield:

> Only to come home stronger had you sailed;
> Successes held you, and the French prevailed.
> Coolly you triumphed where you wanted least,
> On Flemish cornfield or at Versailles feast.
>
> We loved you, horseman of the white cockade,
> Above all, for your last words, 'Would to God
> This wound had been for Ireland.' Cavalier,
> You feathered with the wild geese our despair.

The patriotic tenor of Sarsfield's dying words on a foreign battlefield deepens a sense of affection for the earl. Doherty comments, "In his passing [...] can be seen something of that perverse misfortune that seemed to strike the Irish at every turn throughout that war" (Doherty 1998, 201). Throughout 'The Battle of Aughrim', Murphy nimbly writes with an underlying sense of sorrow about the Jacobites' "perverse misfortunes" that cost them the conflict. By the end of the sequence, we witness a sense of solidarity with the 'Wild Geese', the fleeing Jacobite army under Sarsfield's command. The poet's victorious forbears, from whom "The good of being alive was given through them" ('The Woman of the House'), are offered no such type of extended tribute. Thus, far from the common mischaracterisation of the poem as a balanced, distanced, and impartial meditation, 'The Battle of Aughrim' largely complies with the nationalist narrative of the battle and likewise casts the consequences of its outcome as little other than regrettable.

IV. Conclusion

What is to account for the poem's uneven tendencies, and how did they go unnoticed for so long in critical discourse? Through a close reading of the text alongside various historical resources, we have dissected the poem to discover that the long-held belief that the sequence is an accurate, balanced and non-partisan dramatisation of history is false. It is not just a meditation on the sense of division felt by Murphy, it is a narrative which places the poet on one side of that divide. 'The Battle of Aughrim' is emblematic of how deeply ingrained the cultural and political principles of Irish nationalism came to be within even an aristocratic Protestant's poetic psyche. As "memory, nationalism and violence mesh together" in a spatial framework that serves "to exacerbate identity politics and reify competing territorial ideologies" (McDowell and Braniff

2014, 12), Murphy's attempt to be inclusive of all sides of the conflict in his retelling is indeed admirable. However, in the period of the poem's composition, notions of identity and territory in Ireland were firmly under the auspices of the Republic's nationalist arbiters.

Since "the restoration of an independent Ireland was inextricably linked with restoring the land to native ownership" and "conquest and colonization were associated with the confiscation of Irish land and the resettlement of intruders" (Daly 2006, 24), Murphy must carefully negotiate his status as a member of the landed Protestant gentry. 'The Battle of Aughrim' witnesses the Ascendancy poet writing out of guilt, insecurity and sympathy from within a nationalist framework of history. This is done in order to appease the sense of a coloniser's illegitimacy and appeal to the colonised in solidarity. The Jacobites are portrayed as Ireland's "defenders" against Protestant "usurpers" from whom the poet's privileged status was inherited. Rather than bridging a gap between two traditions, the Anglo and the Irish, 'The Battle of Aughrim' sacrifices the former for the sake of the latter as would be expected from the nationalist perspective. While this does nothing to detract from the artistic quality and literary importance of the poem, it does much in the way of enhancing our understanding of its execution and refining future analyses of this great work.

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Cultivating Consciousness and Battling Baobabs: Enduring Biophilic Allegory in Saint- Exupéry's *The Little Prince*

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Abstract:

From J.J. Rousseau's eighteenth-century instruction on 'cultivating' the child, to the emergence from the mid-twentieth century of the forest school, there has long existed a strong sense of affiliation between nature and the child. This particular biophilia has gained impetus in recent years with the rise of green youth movements and the figure of the 'eco-child', an ecologically focused reimagining of modernism's potent 'wise child.' Reflecting on his childhood, experiences of adult life, and the complex world around him, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's fervour for allegory manifested itself variously in *The Little Prince* (1943), but perhaps most richly in his engagement with plant life and nature, oftentimes reflecting a desperation to retain the lush pastures of childhood when faced with the arid, thorn-monster-ridden plains of modern adulthood. This paper explores the ways in which Saint-Exupéry uses metaphorical interpretations of plant life and the natural world to present allegorical readings of the wrongs of man and the modern world, and in turn the wisdom and integrity of children. Moreover, the paper acknowledges the pervasive longevity of such notions and issues, addressing their applicability both to Saint- Exupéry's era and to the contemporary world some eighty years later.

Keywords: childhood, biophilia, Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince, eco child, wise child.

Introduction: The 'Wise Child' and the 'Eco Child'

From Jean-Jacques Rousseau's pedagogic directions during the eighteenth century on 'cultivating' the child, to the emerging popularity during the mid-twentieth century of the forest school and resulting nature-based learning, a strong sense of accord between nature and the child appears not only long-established, but it manifests itself diversely. This affinity, a very particular sort of biophilism, has enjoyed further diversification and resurgence in recent years as it has gained global impetus alongside the twenty-first century rise of green youth movements and the emergence of the warrior-like figure of the 'eco-child'. In a growing sea of these environmentally minded young people, it is arguably Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, through her blunt and emotionally charged speechmaking, who has become the world-renowned face of the impassioned eco-youth movement. In amongst her numerous widely reported calls to action, it is

perhaps her fierce address to the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit which captured global attention, when she unreservedly chastised world leaders for what she perceived to be their poorly judged emphasis on greed-driven economic growth instead of impactfully addressing the snowballing climate crisis. The conviction with which Thunberg projected her generation's foresightedness, combined with the largely celebratory response she garnered from those she placed in the crosshairs, elevated her and many of those she represents to the modern embodiment of the 'wise child', representing a contemporary re-emergence scaffolded by powerful biophilic roots of a concept which pervaded intellectual and creative discourse in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

This notion of the biophilic 'wise child' permeated *Le Petit Prince (The Little Prince)* (1943), the best-remembered novella of French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944). Reflecting on his own childhood, experiences of adult life, and the complex world around him, Saint-Exupéry's fervour for allegory manifested itself variously in this heavily symbolic story, but perhaps most richly in his engagement with plant life and nature as a means of reflecting his celebration and critique of children and adults respectively. From his own childhood nostalgia for fairy-tale gardens looking out to the Jura mountains, to his characters' frustrations with the spread of the baobab trees and apparently needy capriciousness of the rose, Saint-Exupéry, his characters, and his story reflect a desperation to retain, protect, and cultivate the lush pastures of childhood when faced with the promise of arid, thorn-monster-ridden plains of modern adulthood. When Thunberg exclaimed of the loss of her childhood, the collapse of ecosystems, and the adult obsession with "fairy tales of eternal economic growth" (Thunberg 2019), it chimed somewhat with both Saint-Exupéry's symbolic representation through hapless kings and the overwhelming baobabs of humanity's selfish greed, and his lamentation at having to grow up at all.

This essay explores the ways in which Saint-Exupéry uses metaphorical interpretations of plant life and the natural world, both negative and favourable, in order to present allegorical readings of the wrongs of man and the modern world, and in turn the wisdom and integrity of children. The weariness felt by the narrator at having to negotiate the inadequacies of adults and educate them is not only mirrored by Thunberg's sentiments and those of her peers, but their striking similarity underlines the pervasive longevity of such notions and issues, cementing the enduring significance of this message and role of the child.

Context: Situating the Child in Nature

The term 'biophilia' (from Greek and Latin roots to mean 'life-fondness'), was formally conceptualised in 1984 by biologist E.O. Wilson as "an innate human desire to affiliate with life and life-like processes" (Rice & Torquati 2013, 79). For many, the manifestation thereof as the "idea of children and nature is an abstraction with little meaning until located in the lives of specific children in specific places at specific times" (Mergen 2003, 643); there is little clear-cut evidence to explain this link that we fairly inexplicably recognise yet often enthusiastically

champion. It is an affiliation that has perhaps become legitimised on a more general scale by virtue of its application in a variety of circumstances and settings. From palaeontologist S.S. Buckman's belief, based on Hyatt's law of acceleration, in the recapitulatory link between children and tree-dwelling apes and contemporary links to the childhood popularity of the jungle-gym (Gould 1977, 137), to "nineteenth-century ideas about childhood as the most 'natural' time in a person's life [during which] children were seen as preserving a pre-industrial heritage in their play in fields and forests" (Mergen, 2003, 646-648), there emerges a widespread belief in what Edith Cobb called "the child's ecological sense of continuity with nature" (Mergen 2003, 655).

This then extends into the arena of lived experience and knowledge-acquisition, where a garden, often the host of a child's initial encounter with the natural world, becomes not only the environment in which children first experience the freedom to wander, explore, and indulge curiosity, but also a space which facilitates "gardening as a valuable means of developing practical life skills and inculcating a sense of civic responsibility, national pride, and moral probity in children" (Crone 2003, 4-6). Early years practitioners such as Dr Deborah Schein (2014) have written on the extensive literature testifying to the significance of a nature-based formal education in producing a more socially and spiritually well-rounded child. Moreover, others have more generally identified that it is only through direct contact with nature's diversity that children are able to develop a meaningful relationship to the Earth, whose constantly changing and challenging environments offer an unparalleled stimulus that garners adaptive and problem-solving responses within the child that (Mergen 2003, 650-651).

In this sense, it follows that nature's capacity to nurture children's emotional and affective development engenders a sense of affinity: "experiences with nature play a critical role in shaping [...] patterns of behaviour toward natural environments [and so] as children learn that they are part of our natural world, they gain respect and appreciation for the environment and other living things" (Woyke 2004, 82-84). This, coupled with the tendency for children to feel happy and freer in the undeveloped landscape of nature, unentangled in the structures of the man-made world whose pervasive expansion persists in the governing of playground behaviours, would suggest that if "the fundamental truth of a child's experience of nature is that it comes with autonomy" (Mergen 2003, 644), then it is unsurprising that it is with an increasing sense of poignancy and drive in the contemporary era that we see so many children, equally impassioned and encumbered, who "grow to become the caretakers of our world" (Humphreys 2000, 20).

In more recent years, by virtue of the highly publicised and outspoken urgency of green youth movements, it seems to be a sense of exasperated responsibility by which the relationship between youth and nature is characterised. Critics have argued that it is the apparent trendy opportunity for "dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent" (O'Brien, Selboe & Hayward 2018) that green youth movements present to angsty teens which is of most appeal, buttressed by further suggestions that indicate that although young people more audibly voice their interest in and concerns about climate change, this is rarely matched with a more sustainable

lifestyle, a positive outlook about the potential for change, or useful prospective remedies (Ojala 2018, 11). However, whilst some evidence suggests the positive correlation between believing in anthropogenic climate change and intent to enact change is offset by the negative correlation between climate change belief and actual behaviour (Armstrong, Krasny & Schuldt 2018, 21), other theories would place greater weight on this particularly modern sort of biophilism having sprouted from young people both responsibly engaging in "an active process of increasingly organising the relationship of the self to the environment" (Kegan 1982,113) and frustratedly reacting to "an age-old political problem where marginalised citizens [...] are materially and existentially threatened by the decisions and actions of other individuals [which] may be perceived as opportunities for action and leadership" (O'Brien, Selboe & Hayward 2018).

Saint-Exupéry, Modernity, and Childhood

Such feelings of frustration and responsibility surrounding the more general and unifying issue of the ills of modernity and the adult human's wilful perpetuation thereof are shared by both Saint-Exupéry and the characters through whom he channels his thoughts. *The Little Prince* is a novella which tells the story of a pilot (the narrator) who has crash-landed in the desert when he is greeted by a mysterious but charming boy: the little prince. Having fallen from the sky, the little prince explains that he is from another planet and proceeds to recount his life story to the pilot over the course of eight days as the latter attempts to repair his aeroplane, telling him of his home asteroid and of all the other planets and their strange inhabitants to which he has paid a visit before arriving on Earth. Although ostensibly aimed at children, *The Little Prince* "is more than a children's story; it is an allegory" (Quinn 1946, 118) which frequently makes philosophical observations and criticisms of human nature, in particular the absurdity of the modern adult world in the eyes of the wise child.

Given that for Saint-Exupéry, "adulthood [...] was an exile" (Schiff 1996, 43), his draw backwards through the medium of literature intuitively written from the child's perspective stemmed from the great joy he associated with his younger years, and as a result of the immense fin-de-siècle-inspired grief he suffered upon the realisation that adulthood had shut him out of the magical garden of childhood games forever. In many ways courtesy of the extensive research afforded to the topic, whilst it is perhaps easy to understand how the repercussions of a childhood of unresolved trauma may make their mark in later years, it is important as well to appreciate that "a happy childhood, too, takes its hostages" (Schiff 1996, 43). Saint-Exupéry's nostalgic anguish for the loss of "the child we once were, but shall never be again" (Higgins 1960, 515) was what drove his own form of literary regression. Biographer Paul Webster discusses at length the ardent attachment Saint-Exupéry felt for his childhood home at Saint Maurice, whose combination of enormous walled gardens, splendid views towards the Bugey and Jura mountains and endless passages to explore and conquer, offered an adult-free playground of childhood dreams (Webster 1994, 15).

On the one hand, *The Little Prince* is a very personal tale for the author, written during a period plagued by deep melancholy and self-deprecation in response to his failing marriage. Moreover, Saint-Exupéry's personal struggles with fears of civil war, pro-Pétainism, and a steadfast German threat is reflected more generally in the novella's allegorical commentary on France's particular political and social precariousness. Whilst Saint-Exupéry's childlike novella could be read as a cowardly, regressive receding away from the harsh reality of the world's responsibilities, its eloquent criticism of modernity is indiscriminate and unrelenting in its challenging of the ills of adulthood as a whole, serving as an exposé of "the fundamental types of modern man in all his stupidity, [offering] so many occasions for an examination of conscience" (Quinn 1946, 118) by which "he proceeds to prove his theory that adults have no monopoly on wisdom" (Higgins 1960, 515).

Saint-Exupéry and Plant Allegory

Whilst Saint-Exupéry chiefly delivers his message through satire, namely that which mocks the misplaced self-aggrandisation of the adult in tandem with the denigration of the child in its perceived stupidity, it also offers a powerful warning through allegory, and especially that of a botanical nature. Saint-Exupéry's engagement with plant-based metaphors is by no means a field untraversed by scholars. Popular consensus has prominently arrived, for example, at the notion of the prince's capricious rose as representative of the author's estranged wife, Consuela, (Webster 1994, 248-251) and interpretation of the notorious baobab tree as a visual metaphor for Nazism running riot across Earth (Reif 1993).

However, considering Saint-Exupéry's consistent and unabashed veneration of the child over the adult throughout the novella, is there not a broader and more pervasive plant allegory in operation? Scholars have traditionally, and understandably, focused on Saint-Exupéry's often comedic depictions of the adults who inhabit the various planets previously visited by the little prince. This includes: the conceited man, who lives only for compliments, regardless of their genuineness; the businessman, who believes he owns the stars because he thought of counting them first; and the king, whose enormous ermine robe almost engulfs his otherwise uninhabited planet, but for whom everyone is a subject, "for kings, the world is extremely simplified: all men are subjects" (Saint-Exupéry 2013). In essence, Saint-Exupéry's collection of adults presents a consolidated criticism of the vital components of adulthood: superiority, ownership and materialism. This is further reflected in Saint-Exupéry's denunciation of reason, and the professing thereof, which he considers integral to the falsehood of adulthood. Notice how "it is the children in *Le Petit Prince* who speak the language of truth, not comprehended by their logical elders [and] it is the language of the prince, that used in expressing the most significant truths, which is 'defective'" by modern standards (Milligan 1955, 249-250). The author exposes the perceived imbecility of adults by both presenting their utterances as nonsensical and their inability to comprehend the unfettered wisdom of the child as evidence of their blind pretension.

In many ways, through his contrasting of the wisdom of children with the ineptitude of adults, his own nostalgic yearning for former years, and the dualistic combination of the insightful prince and the jaded and lost pilot narrator, Saint-Exupéry appeals to his adult audience to re-evaluate their opinions of children, instead inviting them to adopt his attitude to the world. Instead of viewing the maturing process as a positive and necessary pathway to the sense and success of the adult world, the author saw it quite conversely. Whilst lamenting the fact that "the infinite perspectives he had seen as a boy had narrowed" (Webster 1994, 7), he is simultaneously reproaching the adult reader for their hasty dismissal of the truth spoken by the child. And so, it was through this literary exposé of "the false gods of our civilisation" (Triebel 1951, 100) that Saint-Exupéry sought to powerfully describe "a process of dehumanisation of lives and landscapes" (Bunkse 1900, 100). Saint-Exupéry's reconciliation of these issues of reform and responsibility with themes of the natural environment and indeed the prevalence of botanical resonance in his life and in his thinking is clarified by the recurrence of related metaphors not just in *The Little Prince*, but also other works such as 'The Wisdom of the Sands' (1948) in which the author demonstrated "the keenest sense of his responsibility to comrades and fellow-men, a responsibility he expressed indirectly and several times in the lovely image of the gardener" (Triebel 1951, 102).

Botanical analysis of *The Little Prince* is naturally drawn to that of the baobabs. But it is a far more comprehensive exploration of this complex metaphor specifically within the context of juvenile biophilia and commentaries on modernity and the modern man to which this paper is dedicated. Although a genuine tree existing in the real world, and interestingly steeped in the mystery and magic of various folktales local to their African origins (Burton 2013, 452), Saint-Exupéry's baobabs refer to the monstrous and unruly plants native to the little prince's home planet, and to which he must dutifully attend:

> There were terrible seeds on the little prince's planet... baobab seeds. The planet's soil was infested with them. Now if you attend to a baobab too late, you can never get rid of it again. It overgrows the whole planet. Its roots pierce right through. And if the planet is too small, and if there are too many baobabs, they make it burst into pieces (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 14-15).

It is remarked in the novella that "they (adults) consider themselves as important as the baobabs" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 49), offering a humorous though darkly meaningful comparison of adults with baobabs which forebodingly suggests a sort of augury for the future should adults' modernity continue to run unchecked. The unwavering attention and constant tending required by the baobabs is something one might traditionally associate with a needy child, but Saint-Exupéry turns this on its head, instead highlighting not only the adult propensity for self-importance, but also the burden upon children, as the author sees it, to constantly explain the real significances of the world to adults. In much the same way that the little prince explains of man's duty to keep the raging baobabs at bay, Saint-Exupéry, in his

comparison of the monstrous trees to adults, provides a symbolic depiction of the ways in which the world could succumb to the overwhelming greed and self-interest of the modern man, taking over as the world as the baobab's greedy roots engulf the planet, should people not take responsibility in managing a sustainable, supportive and caring outlook on life. As with the novella as a whole, the idea and image of the baobab is far more emblematic than its whimsical appearance may first suggest, instead promoting "a philosophy of giving rather than of getting, of sharing rather than of keeping" (Fay 1947, 95) of which modern man seems blindly or deliberately bereft. The little prince himself consolidates this with both the comment that "people start out on express trains, but they no longer know what they're looking for" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 69), making reference with industrial-themed comparisons of the impatience and blind speed by which the modern man approaches life, and his remarks about the physical coarseness of earth. His complaints about the dryness, sharpness, and hardness of the planet geographically represent the emotional sense of emptiness and hostility with which he associates Earth. Atop a particularly lofty peak, the little prince gazes out across a harsh, jagged landscape bereft of colour and life. The barrenness of his surroundings is reinforced in Saint-Exupéry's accompanying illustration, poignantly fashioned, in contrast to his usual fervour for bright and playful colour, in unsaturated monochrome as if to reflect the empty and shallow mundanity now attached to modern, human life. Through the combination of a planet depicted as both depressingly arid and asphyxiated by wildly greedy plants, Saint-Exupéry impactfully "alludes to the consequences of human control over nature and science" (Munakata 2005, 41) by rendering the human and environmental costs chillingly inextricable.

However, the allegory of the baobab and its botanical nature can be unpacked still further to reveal a complex yet powerful reading. In his discussion of the baobabs, the narrator explains the existence of good plants and bad plants:

> The good plants come from good seeds, and the bad plants from bad seeds. But the seeds are invisible. They sleep in the secrecy of the ground until one of them decides to wake up. Then it stretches and begins to sprout, quite timidly at first, a charming, harmless little twig reaching toward the sun. If it's a radish seed, or a rosebush seed, you can let it sprout all it likes. But if it's the seed of a bad plant, you must pull the plant up right away, as soon as you can recognise it (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 14).

This, considered alongside the attestation from the narrator that baobabs resemble rosebushes when young (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 15), gives rise to the notion that there is perhaps a symbolic link between children and such young flowering plants, and adults and the established baobabs. This is further evidenced by the explanation that these unassuming little plants, which "took up no room at all and got in no one's way [and] would appear one morning in the grass, and would fade by nightfall" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 22), seem in their delicacy and youth to require the sort of urgent care and protection required by a child in order for them to grow properly into 'good plants.' Like childhood, "plants are ephemeral" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 46),

whose goodness without cultivation and care will wither. Aspects of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers' botanical metaphors introduced as a means of explaining his understanding of the counselling process in his 1980 work 'A Way of Being' can be applied to such a reading of Saint-Exupéry's allegory: "a plant has within it the potential for growth, but needs nourishment from the environments for that growth to occur. It needs water, nutrients, and sun. Lacking the sun, it grows into a pale, spindly caricature of its potential" (Cowles 1997, 58). This, alongside the wise words of Saint-Exupéry's fox, who, in explaining that the 'taming' of individuals and the sharing of important rites in life are too often neglected, declares that "it's the time you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 64). Essentially, establishing not only a connection between plants and children, but also between *nature* and *a person's nature*, this allegory articulates that as children, like plants, we appreciate and require careful cultivation, lest *(our) nature* is left to wilt and turn bad, for children and childhood is ephemeral, just like plants and the state of the Earth. Furthermore, in the same way that baobabs start off like rosebushes – good, but with the potential to turn bad – so too do children, for if they appear as rosebushes but are left uncared for and uncultivated, their *nature* decays and they become baobabs, or adults, after which it is too late to save the planet. The tangible darkness of this very real sort of horror by which such a concept is characterised is perhaps influenced or at least reinforced by folkloric tales, recounted by Burton (2013), such as that of the "young man seeking honey [who] once fell into a baobab's hollow centre, never to re-emerge" and the connected belief that "baobabs could walk around at night, that spirits lived in their flowers". There is something to be said in this imagery for a symbolic link to modern man's traits; his greedy determination in seeking out the honey for himself, the ruthless opportunism of his fellow man (baobab) in swallowing him up, the vacuity of humanity and personhood reflected in the hollowness of the tree, and the notion of the spirits of children once here but now gone forever residing in the ephemeral flowers they embodied.

Considering the belief that "childhood is a brief and ephemeral period of human life" (Mergen 2003, 660-661) alongside pervasive and "unresolved anxieties over the future of both children and nature" (Mergen 2003, 645) for both Saint-Exupéry and his contemporaries, it is little wonder that the former felt and sought to share his pressing preoccupation: "when I drew the baobabs, I was inspired by a sense of urgency" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 16). Concerns over the futurity of mankind of course ultimately tumble into the hands and fates of both children and the planet. When Saint-Exupéry's character of the lamplighter poignantly complains "That's just the trouble! Year by year the planet is turning faster and faster, and orders haven't changed" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 42), it resonates not only with the sense of frustrated responsibility to which children feel abandoned by adults, but also the notion that "children have a different sense of time than adults [meaning that] the past, the present, and the future often merge in their lives, creating a sense of timelessness" (Cowles 1997, 59) which both informs and impassions their foresightedness and sense of urgent duty.

Accordingly, whilst Saint-Exupéry "offers no infallible solution to humanity's great problems" (Triebel 1951, 101), in the same way that "younger generations [...] are not a homogenous group" (Ojala 2018, 11) always unanimously in possession of incontrovertible wisdom, it is nevertheless the case that it was with a heart full of genuine anxiety and care that "he so often pleaded, vicariously, for the preservation of man" (Triebel 1951, 103) and by extension his environment. The novella begins with a dedication that features the statement that "all grown-ups were children first (but few of them remember it)" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 'Dedication'), which, supported later by evaluating Earth as "all dry and sharp and hard [where] people [...] have no imagination [and] repeat whatever you say to them" (Saint-Exupéry 2013, 54), suggests that not only does one forever lose the insight and vision possessed and professed as a child once they reach adulthood, but this youthful sagaciousness is so long forgotten that it is mocked and scorned by those who no longer harbour it. It is similar, perhaps, to the ironically immature ridicule endured by prominent members of contemporary green youth movements by certain adults whose power feels threatened by the seemingly illegitimate challenge.

Crucially for Saint-Exupéry, he had not completely forgotten the powers he possessed as a child. After declaring to his mother at the age of thirty that "this world of childhood memories will always seem to me hopelessly more real than the other" (Schiff 1996, 43), he endeavoured to persuade children to cling on tightly and for as long as possible to the lush green pastures of their youthful perspicacity, and to implore adults to help in this practice of preservation, before it is too late and all is lost to arid wasteland. It is in this way that Saint-Exupéry seems to both envisage and promote the child as the gardener of future Earth. For many readers of the novella, child or adult, contemporaneous or recent, it both "best embodies and safeguards the magic [...] felt and believed in as a child" (Strongheart 2001, 498), whilst simultaneously offering a very real and timeless reflection on human loss. This sentimental yet poignant lesson for grown-ups is as much provident and sagacious as it is warm and nostalgic. As Higgins declares, "I cannot help to but write of it in the present tense. Surely, this book lives today; so too does its author" (Higgins 1960, 572), pointing not only to the pervasiveness of issues relating to the care and attention afforded to children and the natural world, but also a sense of hope that even when faced with such desperate aridity, there remains some promise in the form of proverbial green shoots which continue to push through.

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The Divine Thread: Social Minds, Community, and Race in *The Underground Railroad*

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Abstract:

In opposition to individualist readings of the novel, this essay explores the roles of collective psychology and narrative method in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad*. Beginning with a survey of the critical claim that Whitehead's text fails to explore the texture of enslaved life under white supremacy, it proceeds into an analysis of *TUR*'s place within Whitehead's oeuvre and in terms of the neo-slave narrative and speculative realist genres. Having unpacked the differences and continuities between the style of *TUR* and the author's earlier works, the essay then advances its larger claim that Whitehead's attention to group psychology and intermental focalization creates a narrative style to match the "racial logic" of the American slave system. With the ideological and social valences of that "logic" among the novel's white characters in place, the essay then tracks the counterpart representations among the black communities of *The Underground Railroad* and provides an account of how Whitehead employs various forms of irony to anatomize individual and collective life under a white-supremacist system. The piece concludes with a discussion of how this mode of reading bears on the wider genre of speculative realism overall.

Keywords: Colson Whitehead, social minds, cognitive narratology, neo-slave narrative, African American novel, African American literature, speculative realism, race

Introduction

In the years since its publication, Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* has garnered widespread popular and critical acclaim for its imaginative deployment of speculative elements to engage with American history. However, a recent essay by the critic Stephanie Li has leveled an important charge against the novel. Comparing *The Underground Railroad* unfavorably to Morrison's *Beloved*, Li takes Whitehead to task for his novel's generic inconsistency and flatness of character. Over-relying on its anachronisms and lacking a rigidly controlled speculative element, such as Morrison's titular ghost, to elucidate "the traumas of history in multiple ways," *The Underground Railroad*, Li contends, "muddies the critical realism that might elucidate the workings of white supremacy" (Li 2019, 10-11). Citing Jacqueline Rose, Li buttresses this claim

by adding that the novel's fantastic elements erect "walls" around the "inner and outer, psychic and historical...selves" the novel aims to represent (Li 2019, 10). In short, the argument goes, Whitehead, unlike other contemporary writers working in the same narrative mode, fails to represent psychic life under white supremacy in a manner either realistic or fantastic enough to afford critique. Now if this is taken to mean that Whitehead's railroad lacks the condensed gothic power of Morrison's titular revenant, then Li is, of course, correct – and her other readings of the novel's characters rightly point out an individual flatness. But to judge *The Underground Railroad* solely by these criteria would mean overlooking its narrative strategies and how they allow Whitehead to represent those "psychic and historical...selves" in novel ways.

This essay will argue that Whitehead's text does "elucidate the workings of white supremacy," and contains a trenchant realism attentive to the mental lives of those who suffer under that system. But that elucidative realism cannot be unearthed solely from the book's speculative set-pieces or historical intertexts, on which most of the extant criticism has focused.[1] Whitehead's social optic, like his titular railroad, simply covers too much ground. To understand how Whitehead limns life under white supremacy, we must thus adopt an alternative lens for reading character psychology and pay closer attention to narrative voice. This approach will attend less to the depths of individual characters and more to shared attitudes, feelings, and experiences that cascade across groups and shape their decisions. Further, once these group psychologies are laid out, a social minds approach can reveal how they shape not only individual actions central to the plot, but also the novel's overlying dynamics of race—what one character terms its "racial logic." It is this attention to collective experience and narrative voice, I will argue, that makes *The Underground Railroad* distinctive in terms of both Whitehead's oeuvre and two genres within which the novel operates, post-race speculative realism and neo-slave narrative.[2] But before an account of the novel's innovations can be given, some definitions are in order.

Genre: Speculative Realism

Following the work of Ramon Saldívar, I understand *The Underground Railroad* as falling within the emergent genre of postrace speculative realism. The benefits of this dipartite term become clearer when its components are separated. First, "post-race": This refers not to the popular sense (lampooned by Whitehead) that American racism, following the election of Barack Obama, vanished (Whitehead 2009). Rather, it refers to the post-civil rights era understanding that "the notion of race should not be understood as an attribute of personal identity but rather as a complex set of personal and social actions, a structure of *doing*, by which race is enacted and racial injustice perpetuated" (Saldivar 2013, 2). Adopting this more recent understanding of race, as a set of social actions that translate into institutional reality, helps set Whitehead and his cohort aside from earlier generations of Black American writers, whose writing was, as Warren argues, oriented in response to racism as a legal regime (Warren 2011, 42). "Post-race" thus resembles Mark Anthony Neal's term "post-soul," which refers to the disjunction of racial

experience between writers who lived through Jim Crow and civil rights and subsequent generations who wrestle with a different understanding of race (qtd. in Maus 2014, 12). On this account, "post-race" refers to a conception in which race shifts from a fact of biology, individual attitude, or *de jure* system of discrimination to a more subtle, distributed set of institutions and actions.

The second component, "speculative realism," refers here not to the recent philosophical movement, but rather an emergent genre of fiction, characterized by a "hybrid crossing of the fictional modes of the speculative genres, naturalism, social realism, surrealism, magic realism, 'dirty' realism, and metaphysical realism" (Saldivar 2013, 5). This flexible generic category extends beyond varieties of realism to include elements of metafiction, fantasy, and borrowings from paraliterary genres and media such as film, video games, and comic books (Saldivar 2011, 587). As a result, speculative realism describes fittingly Whitehead's genre–hopping output, which adopts a new mode in each novel – noir, folklore, satire, bildungsroman, post-apocalyptic fantasy, slave narrative, and others. Yet Whitehead is not unique in this respect; instead, his eclectic methods and social concerns place him alongside other writers including Percival Everett, Charles Yu, Salvador Plascencia, Junot Diaz, and Michael Chabon – all of whom draw upon metafictional and speculative tropes to explore contemporary issues of race and identity in their fiction (Saldivar 2013, 3).[3] For Saldivar, these novels' distinct combination of fantastic and realist elements has a utopian bent – aiming to create "forms of representation that will validate our utopian desires for...social belonging" (Saldivar 2013, 15) – that is, creating representations of community and identity that look forward (or even carve out space for) a more socially just future.

While I cannot endorse his depiction of speculative realism as utopian in its ambitions, at least as it applies to Whitehead (it is difficult, for instance, to see *Zone One* as anything but damningly pessimistic), Saldivar's emphasis on community – and how low-level social phenomena such as norms or judgments harden into institutional facts – captures a key aspect of Whitehead's project in *The Underground Railroad*, a concern with social mental life largely neglected by the existing criticism of the novel. To understand how this novel represents race as an active, non-individual phenomenon, we must examine how it evokes the collective experience of that social fact – how race is (collectively) lived and understood under a system of white supremacy. To do that, it is necessary to pay closer attention to Whitehead's narrative technique.

Whitehead's Plural Voices

Whitehead has long been noted for his stylistic virtuosity, but *The Underground Railroad* departs from the longer, verbally pyrotechnic sentences of works such as *John Henry Days* or sections of *Sag Harbor*. Whitehead attributes this change to the requirements of his chosen period and genre: "shaping metaphors out of life from the 1850s made...the similes and analogies simpler" (Kachka 2016). Yet the novel's surface simplicity (along with the author's deflecting modesty about technique) masks an innovation on Whitehead's part. The sentences may not be

as long, the metaphors not as complex, but the novel possesses a feature largely absent from the earlier work – a narrative mode for capturing shared thought and experience.

This approach is easy to overlook. Unlike the long, rhythmic sentences of Whitehead's earlier novels, with their complex comparisons and ironic distances, these observations tend to work as punctuation, arriving as blunt statements at the beginning or end of a paragraph or thought. As an example, consider this description of a newly purchased slave on Terrance Randall's half of the family plantation:

> Blake was a big oak, a double-ration man who quickly proved a testament to Terrance Randall's investment acumen. *The price they'd get for the offspring of such a stud alone.* Blake wrassled his buddies, and any other comers in a frequent spectacle, kicking up the dust, inevitably emerging the conqueror. His voice boomed through the rows as he worked and even those who despised him couldn't help but sing along. (Whitehead 2016, 17 [emphasis mine])

The collective voice sneaks in, a sentence fragment crouching between two independent clauses in the novel's general third-person mode. Whose perspective is this? The pronoun is a key: to whom does "they" refer? Not Terrance Randall - the plural number ("they") excises that possibility. Perhaps to the Randall family, though it is unclear whether this event occurs before or after the death of their patriarch, after which the farm was divided into independent units by the sons (Whitehead 2016, 23), and the notion of "them" profiting would make no sense. We are left with three possibilities: this perspective belongs to either the Randall family itself (father and sons), to outside observers who share their concerns, or to the entire plantation, including its enslaved population, many of whom "despise" Blake and who have imbibed the Randalls' white supremacist values. And vocal identity aside – indeterminate as it may be – those shared values matter. To borrow Katz's description of a similar technique in *The Colossus of New York*, the narrator in this passage, "demands the reader's participation – to recognize and thus confirm the typicality of the [people] he invokes, and to witness the ephemeral moments of shared community that this…culture establishes" (Katz 2010, 824). The focal voice of this fragment sees Blake as a "stud," or breeding animal, whose "offspring" might produce profit. This sentence fragment, along with many others scattered throughout the text, offers a glimpse into the collective psychologies that govern *The Underground Railroad*, structuring both its narration and Cora's central actions.

But to elucidate fully the complexity of these narrative sentences, more precise conceptual tools are required, this time from cognitive narratology. Most criticism and narrative theory adopt what the philosopher Brian Cantwell Smith terms the "internalist" or "classical" model of mind, in which mental activity is viewed as private, interior, introspective, and individual (Palmer 2010, 8, 39). By contrast, more recent work in cognitive narratology has adopted an "externalist" approach, which emphasizes those aspects of mind that are "outer, active, public, social" and shared (Palmer 2010, 39). My analysis will follow the externalist "social minds"

approach pioneered by Palmer, with particular attention to what he terms "intermental units." Although cognition, on this approach, may be shared across groups as small as two people, intermental units may spread their shared dispositions, attitudes, and actions across larger collectives: a family, a workplace, or even a much wider social group such as the "society" of Austen's Bath (Palmer 2010, 48). A key indicator of such shared mental activity is the technique of "intermental focalization," in which a writer focuses narration around the thought of a group, rather than an individual (Palmer 2010, 84). Others have pointed out the importance of collectives in *TUR*. Lucas compares the experience of reading it to the experience of reading *Middlemarch* "if in every other chapter a character were lynched" (Lucas 2016). This essay, however, will examine in greater detail just how Whitehead's novel represents mental activity that extends across (and between) pairs and larger groups, even scaling up to the nation itself.

At this point, one might reasonably object: is collective narration so new for Whitehead? Haven't many of his novels employed a flexible and "wildly freestyle indirect discourse" (Berlant 2008, 848) that would include the effect described here? The answer to both is: somewhat. From *The Intuitionist* onward, Whitehead has included free indirect discourse, and his other books (*John Henry Days* and *Zone One*) involve moments of collective focalization. Yet the minor differences present in *The Underground Railroad*'s method are instructive, and significant. Compare, for instance, this moment from *Zone One*:

> The suicides accepted, finally, what the world had become and acted logically. Buffalo was not enamored of the statistics, and ordered Dr. Herkhimer to add a longer Prevention/Understanding Ideation unit to the PASD seminars. Killing yourself in the interregnum was understandable. Killing yourself in the age of the American Phoenix was a rebuke to its principles. "We Make Tomorrow!" – *if we can get that far, Mark Spitz thought*.... (Whitehead 2011, 202-3; emphasis in the original)

Intermental focalization appears, describing the thoughts ("not enamored") and response of the new American government, for which "Buffalo" stands in metonymically. However, the protagonist's viewpoint quickly reasserts itself ("if we can..."), undercutting the collective voice. Such intrusions are typical in Whitehead's earlier novels, where narration of group experience is either generalized, disconnected from the main narrating voice or any plot (*John Henry Days*, much of *The Colossus of New York*) or filtered through an individual perspective, as in *Zone One*. The focalization of other prominent neo-slave narratives takes a similarly restricted scope.[4] The previous example from *The Underground Railroad*, by contrast, demonstrates both a distinct collective viewpoint and the free-indirect discourse usually reserved for individual protagonists, thus implicating the reader within a community's collective cognition, values, and sensibilities.

Building A "Racial Logic"

That collective viewpoint allows the novel to unpack its central ideological concern, white supremacy, in a way not available to an individual focalizer or narrator. The sociologist Crystal

Fleming defines white supremacy as a "racial order" that encompasses the "social, political, and economic dominance of people socially defined as 'white'" (Fleming 2019, 13). Following the coalescence of a stable sense of white identity in eighteenth-century Europe, "the intertwined forces of capitalist oppression, European imperialism, gave rise to a systemic way of structuring society across the globe, as European elites and pseudo-scientists spread the pernicious idea that human groups can be ranked according to made-up 'racial' categories, with Northern Europeans on the top, Sub-Saharan Africans on the bottom" (Fleming 2019, 13). Crucially, this "racial order" shapes the operations of capitalism, colonialism, and the value given to individual lives (Fleming 2019, 14). That *The Underground Railroad* describes the mechanisms of white supremacy is plain – yet how the description operates is less obvious.

The brutal slave-catcher Ridgeway, who hunts Cora across several states, serves as an avatar for the white-supremacist system. One critic describes Ridgeway as "less a character than the grim embodiment of what he calls the 'American imperative'" (Lucas 2016), a combination of white supremacist and imperialist ideals that he also glosses as the "unstoppable racial logic" of white settlement (Whitehead 2016, 80). Yet to focus solely on Ridgeway and his counterpart, Cora, or even on individual characters, would be to miss an important dimension of the novel's treatment of white supremacist ideology. If we widen our aperture to include the collective dimension, then we see that *The Underground Railroad* is a story about how white supremacy operates not just at the individual level, or between individuals and a wider society (i.e., between whites and enslaved blacks), but also between and within different groups (white and black) and the individuals who comprise (and/or are in tension) with them, shaping racial divisions and individual actions. Taken together with the individual cases, these representations of collective experience track how an ideology such as white supremacy ramifies throughout a given society and hardens into what Gramsci terms "common sense," the "heterogeneous beliefs people arrive at not through critical reflection, but encounter as already existing, self-evident truths" (Crehan 2016, x). Put another way, this social-minds focus will allow us to track how ordinary racism congeals into Ridgeway's "racial logic." In the section that follows, I will trace this process as it surfaces among novel's main characters and collectives, along with its entanglement in Whitehead's other narrative techniques.

Narrating Racial Logic

"I actually didn't research the slave catcher's point of view. I think the slave catcher's point of view is probably the default setting on American history." – Whitehead (NPR)

As noted above, the "default setting" of white supremacist ideology to which Whitehead refers is closely identified with Ridgeway's voice. A representative scene occurs when the slavecatcher recalls watching European immigrants disembark on his first visit to New York City:

> They'd never seen the likes of this, but they'd leave their mark on this land, as surely as those famous

> souls at Jamestown, making it theirs through unstoppable racial logic. If niggers were supposed to have their freedom, they wouldn't be in chains. If the red man was supposed to keep hold of his land, it'd still be his. If the white man wasn't destined to take this new world, he wouldn't own it now. Here was the true Great Spirit, the divine thread connecting all human endeavor – if you can keep it, it is yours. Your property, slave or continent. The American imperative. (Whitehead 2016, 79-80)

Kelly identifies Ridgeway's viewpoint as a "Nietzschean might-makes-right philosophy" parallel to McCarthy's Judge Holden (Kelly 2018, 26). But more historical sources are also evident. Ridgeway's moral code of ownership and references to race, "Jamestown," providence, and capital ownership read like a checklist of antebellum Manifest Destiny rhetoric.[5] Though Ridgeway serves as focal character for only one chapter, his reflection here provides the overall contours of the novel's white supremacist ideology, shared to some degree by each of the main white societies voiced in the text.

Chronologically, this central white viewpoint appears first on the Randall plantation in Georgia. The perspective varies across time and space, with the South and North Carolinian versions more attuned to the brutalities of their respective states. As Dischinger writes, "Each of these states makes a claim about the real history of the US, in which the novel leverages its speculative satire to move in and out of reality… reminding [readers] that eugenics, lynching, and terror are a part of US racism that extended long beyond slavery" (Dischinger 2017, 92). While I largely endorse his analysis of the novel's historical and political satire, a closer examination reveals an additional layer to the representation of that racism, a layer that "distance" approaches to the novel overlook. The recounting of James Randall's funeral is a useful example: "Longtime residents of the Randall plantation couldn't help but compare the funerals of father and son. The elder Randall had been a revered member of planter society. The western riders commanded all the attention now but it was Randall and his brethren who were the true pioneers, carving out a life in this humid Georgia hell all those years ago" (Whitehead 2016, 43). The attitudes expressed here are clear enough: cotton planters are "true pioneers" over and above colonial white settlers acting out Manifest Destiny in the American West. This same perspective earlier saw Blake as a "stud" promising profitable "offspring" (Whitehead 2016, 17). Yet the certitude of that claim falters from the opening sentence: the "longtime residents" must include those enslaved, which renders the "planter society" viewpoint less univocal, or at least adds a note of irony. The sense is no longer just of collective certainties shared by the Georgia planter class, but also of something dissonant – potentially resistance from those forced to listen.

On the other portions of the Randall plantation, Whitehead provides glimpses of small black communities that serve as intermental counterparts to the majority white voice. Where the totalizing intermental unit of the "Georgia" sections arrogates black and white into its ideological assertions about race and profit (Whitehead 2016, 13, 17, 43), the absorption of black voices within that perspective is, at best, incomplete. Whitehead includes several moments – interspersed throughout the Georgia section – of intermental focalization around smaller social

units of Randall's enslaved population, moments that reveal the complexity of collective psychology under the slave system. The earliest occurs at the start of the "Georgia" chapter, describing reactions to the informal holiday of Jockey's birthday: "Even if you were inclined to forego the extra wages – and no one was so inclined – impossible was the slave impudent enough to tell a white man he couldn't work because it was a slave's birthday. Everybody knew niggers didn't have birthdays" (Whitehead 2016, 11). This excerpt shows the alignment between the enslaved perspective and that of the Georgia planter "society" (Whitehead 2016, 43) whose perspective dominates the narration of the elder Randall's funeral, a filiation signaled using "Everybody" together with "niggers," a conjunction that yokes all perspectives into a single voice while simultaneously invoking racial hierarchy. The examples then become more detached and narrowly focused. Describing two young men wrestling during the party, Whitehead includes the line, "Take it out on each other if you cannot take it out on the ones who deserve it" (Whitehead 2016, 27). This moment glimpses collective slave thought under the Georgia system, at once resigned and violent, displacing aggression from white owners and overseers – so proscribed by the racial hierarchy that the thought of open rebellion can't even be fully articulated ("the ones") – and onto one another. While the next generation watches, indirectly quoted cheers intimate their fated entanglement in this same system: "Get him, get that boy, teach him what he needs to learn" (Whitehead 2016, 27). The "learn[ing]" here refers both to victory in the wrestling match and a lesson of one's place in the social hierarchy of the plantation.

While these ordinary moments of small-to-medium-scale intermental focalization seem a far cry from the novel's more extravagant speculative elements, they nevertheless share an important feature with them. As Saldívar writes, recent theorists of race have defined racism less as an individual attribute and more as a "complex set of personal and social actions, a structure of *doing*," and postrace speculative realist texts such as *The Underground Railroad* can help reveal the "mechanisms" for the "doing of race" (Saldívar 2013, 2). Some of the novel's most acute imaginative moments occur, unusually, at the collective level - in the dynamics of small groups.

One example occurs during Cora's escape. While rushing into the swamp outside Randall, Cora and her companions find that "Their speed made them giddy. The impossibility of it" (Whitehead 2016, 55). While the first sentence is likely focalized around the narrator's perspective, the second, a fragment, voices a shared thought that neither runaway feels safe articulating, the sense of running against the limits of their shared world. This shared sensibility, structured by the slave experience, runs deeper than thoughts of escape logistics. Cora is surprised by the timid Lovey's escape from Randall, but not by the motives underlying it: "[E]very slave thinks about it. In the morning and in the afternoon and in the night. Dreaming of it. Every dream a dream of escape even when it didn't look like it. When it was a dream of new shoes" (Whitehead 2016, 56). These narratorial pronouncements appear at first to be written in the gnomic present tense, which Dorrit Cohn notes is used when "authorial rhetoric addresses itself to the mysteries and verities of the human condition" (Cohn 1984, 28). And yet these

discrete, almost breathless thoughts seem too short to sustain the Olympian pronouncements characteristic of gnomic present. Instead, the syntax stutters, then breaks, one shared fragment after another: "Dreaming of it. Every dream a dream of escape even when it didn't look like it" (Whitehead 2016, 56). As in the collectively focalized descriptions on Randall farm, the sentence fragments mark the presence of intermental focalization, but this time on a minute scale, as the narrating voice shifts into the service of a more particular viewpoint, the collected interiority of these three characters. Beyond showing the flexibility of Whitehead's fragment-mediated interior technique, this line reveals another central aspect of the novel's "racial logic" – that the experience of enslavement is so internalized as to compress and circumscribe their dreams.

As Cora and Caesar's thoughts suggest while running away, the psychic reach of the slave system obtrudes beyond its physical borders. So, when Cora arrives at the Valentine Farm, a community of former slaves living in Indiana, it comes as little surprise that the influence of the plantation follows. Valentine farm holds a distinct position in the neo-slave narrative genre. As Julian Lucas argues in *The New York Review of Books*, Whitehead's "quietly radical gesture in *The Underground Railroad* is his replacement of the fugitive individual—wrestling with herself and nature in search of an abstract freedom—with the fugitive community, fighting for an inch of free soil in enemy terrain" (Lucas 2016). While Lucas reads Valentine primarily in terms of the novel's plot (Cora's series of escapes to successive black communities and their ensuing destruction by surrounding white mobs), his basic insight can be extended to the farm's collective psychology.

Much as he does for Cora and the slave community of Randall plantation, Whitehead employs intermental focalization to adumbrate the thoughts, dispositions, and anxieties of Valentine. At first, these display optimism about newfound independence. The farm's residents marvel at their changed circumstances and the different social arrangements they afford: "Social calls stretched into the evening now that so many colored settlers had put down roots, the advance guard of a great migration" (Whitehead 2016, 247). Whitehead's proleptic evocation of the twentieth century black exodus from the South suggests a tantalizing possibility. And why not? Surely such mass movement would be less than improbable in a fictional world featuring subterranean railways and skyscrapers in the mid-1800s? Yet this forward-looking sentiment is counterbalanced by a recognition of the social realities of white supremacy: "Even if the adults were free of the shackles that had held them fast, bondage had stolen too much of their time. Only the children could take full advantage of their dreaming. If white men let them" (Whitehead 2016, 247). The speculative technologies of the novel's diegesis may not obey laws of physics or chronology, but the social milieu, with its constant threat of white violence, is straightforwardly realist.

At its grimmest, the intermental unit of the Valentine farm approaches a bleak fatalism, as when residents imagine the white communities that surround them: "After all, the specter of colored rebellion, all those angry dark faces surrounding them, had stirred white settlers to leave the south. They had come to Indiana, and right next door is a black nation rising. It always ended

in violence" (Whitehead 2016, 249). This moment is illuminating for two reasons. First, the intermentally focalized free-indirect thought of the farm's residents demonstrates their political and historical viewpoints in greater granularity than the political debate that takes place prior to Ridgeway's arrival – containing a gradation of perspectives, rather than the simple leave/remain issue debated by Lander and Mingo. And second, that Ridgeway's "predations" do not merely structure the novel, as Lucas claims – but also that his viewpoint is, in a central way, shared by the Valentine residents. This is not to say that Cora and her community hold Ridgeway's convictions about whites' superiority, but that after a lifetime circumscribed by it, they cannot see or imagine beyond that viewpoint. As Bakhtin writes, "When there is no access to one's own personal 'ultimate' word, then every thought, feeling, experience must be refracted through someone else's discourse, someone else's style, someone else's manner, with which it cannot be merged without reservation, without distance, without refraction" (Bakhtin 1984, 202). The narrator's focalized pronouncement that "It always ended in violence" has the gnomic echo of Ridgeway's "racial logic," refracted affectively through the prism of the Valentine residents' positions as victims of men like him and the white supremacist slave-system they enforce.

This psychic limitation, with its suggestion that the Valentine residents are somehow entrapped by Ridgeway's Hobbesian logic, bears further examination. In one sense, this moment is evidence for Saldívar's claim that speculative realist texts such as *The Underground Railroad* "help define the historical contradictions in the justification of racial injustice, discrimination, and oppression in terms that...describe the processes of racialization in the contemporary American social world" (Saldivar 2013, 14). With its paradoxical suggestions of escape and entrapment, as well as an intermentally focalized form that can only exist within fictional narrative, Whitehead's technique here distills such "contradictions." However, a more telling explication becomes available through the philosopher Charles W. Mills' work on white supremacy. For Mills, the "pervasive racialization of the social world that means that one's race, in effect, puts one into a certain relationship with social reality, tendentially determining one's being and consciousness" (Mills 2003, 42). On Mills' definition, the Valentine residents are habituated not only to the "politico-juridical" dimensions of white supremacy (seeing white violence as inevitable and legally authorized), but also its cultural and epistemic aspects, as when they collectively (and accurately) imagine the white viewpoint ("After all, the specter of colored rebellion, all those angry dark faces surrounding them, had stirred white settlers to leave the south"). Mills' dimensions of white supremacy are valuable not as evidence for how neatly Whitehead's text corresponds to his theory, but for the layers they reveal in this single moment of intermental focalization.

Whitehead not only gives voice to the varied and contradictory thoughts of an entire freed community, but also provides those thoughts with intersubjective depth by adding what Lisa Zunshine (borrowing from Daniel Dennett) terms "levels of intentionality" (Zunshine 2006, 28) – representations of the farm's residents as they imagine the thought processes of the hostile white community that surrounds them, all while doing so from within a set of social assumptions

determined by that wider community. The sheer complexity of this collective-psychological portrait, then, makes Li's assertion that Whitehead is uninterested in "mining the mental and emotional traumas of the formerly enslaved" (Li 2019, 9), seem mistaken. Or at least too narrow – the product of a set of psychological and narrative assumptions geared to the individual alone. Once we widen our optic to take account of Whitehead's social psychology, the "internal workings" that Li desires are visible at the collective level. And more importantly, these intermental units saturate the novel's central thematic conflict, which plays out not in the museum or on the rails, but at the level of narration.

Three Moments of Metalepsis

In plot terms, *The Underground Railroad* is structured as an extended chase. Cora escapes from one black community to another, that community is shattered by Ridgeway's metronomic arrival, and pursuit begins again. But the novel's more important, though less overt, conflict occurs at the level of voice or narrating perspective – which pits Ridgeway's "American Imperative" (with its various avatars) against Cora's growing self-awareness, itself mediated by her encounters with different black collectives. At key moments, the clash between these two perspectives grows so intense that it overtakes narration itself, via the trope of metalepsis.

Gérard Genette defines metalepsis as a "transgression" of narrative boundaries, an "intrusion of a narrator or character into a frame in which they do not belong" (Genette 1980, 235). Elsewhere he elaborates that metaleptic effects take various forms, all of which produce a sense of "strangeness" that may occasionally be comic, yet which also signals a deeper anxiety, with the suggestion that "the extradiegetic is perhaps always diegetic and that the narrator and his narratees—you and I—perhaps belong to some narrative" (qtd. in Pier 2016). Whitehead's selective use of metalepsis in *The Underground Railroad* often plays upon this ontological anxiety, though not in the directions Genette identifies. In Whitehead's hands, metalepsis works less to induce existential anxiety in the reader than to trace the power of a given perspective.

The most visceral and arresting example of this technique occurs during Cora's period in North Carolina. In the novel, the North Carolinian government has banned black people from its territories, and so Cora must hide, Harriet-Jacobs like, in a secret attic compartment owned by the reluctant station agent, Martin. One night, while Martin tells Cora the story of the state's unusual and genocidal laws, the narrative ruptures:

> ...A financial reckoning was inevitable, but come the approaching conflict over the race question, North Carolina would emerge in the most advantageous position of all the slave states.
> In effect, they abolished slavery. On the contrary, Oney Garrison said in response. We abolished niggers. (Whitehead 2016, 165)

At first, Martin's embedded narration, in explaining the logic behind the state government's plan, adopts something of its perspective, narrating in a sympathetic third-person voice. But then the

voice of Oney Garrison, the judge whose story is being narrated, punctures the embedding, stepping up to equal footing with Martin, his ostensible narrator ("On the contrary"). That Martin would be able to quote directly from an event at which he was not present seems unlikely, and so the only explanation can be that Oney Garrison's voice and perspective have taken control of the embedding narration, displaying a greater degree of narrative (and social) power.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the paragraph that follows, where the narrating voice (nominally Martin's embedded narration) elaborates on the future, as imagined by the North Carolinian government:

> A short tour of Bourbon Street forecast the result to any observer: a repulsive mongrel state in which the white race is, through amalgamation with negro blood, made stained, obscured, confused. Let them pollute their European bloodlines with Egyptian darkness, produce a river of half-breeds, quadroons, and miscellaneous dingy yellow bastards – they forge the very blades that will be used to cut their throats. (Whitehead 2016, 165)

Though Garrison's voice fails to achieve the level of a direct speech report, as in the earlier example, what happens here is more insidious. The narrating voice starts off from the neutral, third-person past-tense perspective of Martin's narration ("A short tour...any observer"), but then shifts to present tense ("in which the white race is") and takes on a starkly different tone and set of values. The personalized imperative mood ("Let them pollute") and floridly racist language ("through amalgamation with Negro blood made stained, obscured, confused") cannot belong to the mild-mannered and verbally limited Martin. Instead, here we see the perspective of Oney Garrison and the intermental unit to which he belongs (half of the "North Carolina government...which crowded into Garrison's dining room that night" [Whitehead 2016, 165]) jumping not just to the level of narration but leaching out into the narrating voice itself – coloring its perceptions, values, and perspective.

This uncanny narrative shift induces, as Genette says, a feeling of strangeness – the sense that some narrative boundary has been transgressed. Such self-referential moments are, as Linda Hutcheon notes, commonplace in historiographic metafiction such as the novels of E.L. Doctorow or Ishmael Reed – yet Whitehead's metaleptic paragraph lacks the "parodic" quality Hutcheon sees as essential to that earlier genre (Hutcheon 1989, 4). This moment of narrative frame-grabbing serves not to remind the reader of the contingency of historical narration, but to index social power. At this moment, in the genocidal regime of North Carolina, the state government's perspective dominates every discourse that matters - history, law, decisions about life and death. The effect, for Cora (Martin's interlocutor), and by extension for Whitehead's reader (placed in Cora's position by the embedded narration), is chilling. Though Ridgeway's "racial logic" surfaces more violently elsewhere in the novel, this moment marks its narrative apex – when the social force of this white supremacist perspective nearly overwhelms the novel's form.

And yet that narrative power is limited in scope, counterbalanced by other forces within the

text that give *The Underground Railroad* a dialectical structure: Cora, too, has her moments of frame-breaking textual force, and these serve as a structural counterweight to the metalepses of the North Carolina chapter. The first occurs during her time in South Carolina, when a white boarding house proctor encourages Cora to overlook the state's practice of isolating and removing mentally ill and disabled black residents from the boarding houses:

> "I can decide for myself," Cora said. "Why can't they? On the plantation, master decided everything for us. I thought we were done with that here."
> Miss Lucy recoiled from the comparison. "If you can't see the difference between good, upstanding people and the mentally disturbed, with criminals and imbeciles, you're not the person I thought you were."
> I'm not the person you thought I was. (Whitehead 2016, 127-8)

This conversation marks a shift for Cora. Until this moment, she has lived either as an oppressed outcast or as a fugitive. In South Carolina, however, Cora has acquired a paid position as a maid, along with the earnings and personal possessions that position affords ("It was the softest bed she had ever lain in. But then, it was the only bed she had ever lain in" [Whitehead 2016, 94]). Adding to these material tokens, her nascent literacy gives Cora the confidence not just to disagree with a white superior, but to compare her present circumstances and community to past ones, thereby questioning governmental decisions and pointing out their coercive analogy with slave plantation practices ("On the plantation..."). As a result, when the metaleptic reported thought arrives ("I'm not..."), it carries a multivalent force. On one hand, this thought-report shows Cora building on the assertions of self she has made earlier in the conversation, reminding (though metalepsis' uncanny level-breaking effect) the reader, and herself, of her agency. On the other, Cora never says this aloud – although the thought reports at the level of narration (and without attribution), the spoken conversation stops after the proctor's remark. While Cora has made progress in her new setting, that growth remains circumscribed by the white society around her.

Cora's second moment of narrative rupture occurs near the novel's conclusion. Having dispatched Ridgeway, she escapes down an Indiana tunnel, uncertain of its terminus. While traveling through the tunnel, Cora marvels at its construction:

> She never got Royal to tell her about the men and women who made the underground railroad. The ones who excavated a million tons of rock and dirt, toiled in the belly of the earth for the deliverance of slaves like her. Who stood with all those other souls who took runaways into their homes, fed them, carried them north on their backs, died for them. The station masters and conductors and sympathizers. Who are you after you finish something this magnificent – in constructing it you have also journeyed through it, to the other side. On the one end there was who you were before you went underground, and on the other end a new person steps out into the light. The up-top world must be so ordinary compared to the miracle beneath, the miracle you had made with your sweat and blood. The secret triumph you keep in your heart. (Whitehead 2016, 303-4)

The passage begins with Cora's reminiscence on the recently murdered Royal ("She never got"), yet as her mind wanders back to the railroad's origins (a cognitive move afforded by the structure of the tunnel itself), she recalls and imagines another community with which she has had contact - the builders and operators of the railroad ("the ones who excavated...slaves like her...station masters and conductors and sympathizers"). Sparked by the thought of the physical structure through which she has passed, and the collectives who operate it (with which she, at various points, has connected), Cora's narration slides into metalepsis, taking control of the narration, with the vocative "you" addressing the imagined builders of the tunnel ("Who are you after you finish something this magnificent"), and shifting (pronominally) into a lived identification with them. As she proceeds, the object of Cora's second-person statement takes on an additional valence, reflecting on her situation ("On the one end there was who you were before you went underground"), seeing herself changed by her experiences with the railroad, by the labor she has completed in her own journey ("a new person steps out"). Cora's voice and power of self-definition, glimpsed once in South Carolina, return as she re-writes her story. And yet, liberatory as it may sound, this scene is merely a moment of racial fantasy, a vision of a black community (unlike Valentine Farm) unconstrained by Ridgeway's hegemonic racial ideology. Cora's imaginative identification with the unseen creators of the railway may give her the strength to go on, but she does so alone.

Undoing Racial Logic

If Cora's final, though qualified, victory over Ridgeway is predictable, the psychic path she takes to arrive there is less so, and deeply tied into the ideological competition that plays out between the two characters. Throughout the novel, when Ridgeway pursues Cora relentlessly with physical force and legal authority on his side, the slavecatcher holds the upper hand. And yet when Ridgeway finally captures Cora in the "Tennessee" chapter, the balance begins to shift. At one point, while Cora sits in an outhouse, Ridgeway again lays out his white supremacist cosmology, "American imperative," for which he (as slavecatcher) serves as a "notion of order" (Whitehead 2016, 223). As Kelly notes, this scene invokes and revises Judge Holden's triumphal rant at the end of *Blood Meridian* (Kelly 2018, 26). However, where Holden's performance emphasizes "the victory of his philosophy" over that of his murdered opponent (Kelly 2018, 26), Ridgeway's triumph is, for several reasons, less certain. For one, Cora still lives. And for another, she begins to apply the literacy and critical perspective gained from her time in the Carolinas and on Valentine to her captor's speeches. In doing so, she draws a distinction between true intersubjective communication and Ridgeway's empty soliloquizing, "Couples coming together to hold each other, to sway and twist. That was real conversation...not all these words" (Whitehead 2016, 223). More importantly, though, she also becomes skeptical of Ridgeway's racist ideology: "Maybe everything the slave catcher said was true....And maybe he was just a man talking to an outhouse door, waiting for someone to wipe her ass" (Whitehead 2016, 223). For

Kelly, this moment shows Whitehead declining to "identify the white man's power with any metaphysical thesis about the workings of the universe" (Kelly 2018, 26). Though accurate, this reading undersells Cora's contribution: by reinscribing the slavecatcher's victory-rant through the ironic image of a man yelling at an outhouse door, Cora levers open the possibility of resisting Ridgeway, rather than simply running from him.

Whitehead builds on this resistance at the novel's climax. At this point, months after their encounter in Tennessee, Ridgeway and his helper Homer have razed Valentine Farm and forced Cora to reveal the railroad. As she descends into the underground station, Cora feels guilt:

> He would not be the first white man to see the underground railroad, but the first enemy. After all that had befallen her, the shame of betraying those who made possible her escape. She hesitated on the top step. On Randall, on Valentine, Cora had never joined the dancing circles. She shrank from the spinning bodies, afraid of another person so close, so uncontrolled. Men had put a fear in her, all those years ago. Tonight, she told herself. Tonight I will hold him close, as if in a slow dance. As if it were just the two of them in the lonesome world, bound to each other until the end of the song....She locked her arms around him like a chain of iron....she held him close like a lover and the pair tumbled down the stone steps into the darkness. (Whitehead 2016, 301-2)

At first glance, this moment reads as merely a personal triumph for Cora, who puts aside her longstanding fear of physical contact to counter Ridgeway's violence with her own. Yet on closer examination, intimations of the social abound. Cora feels impelled by a social emotion ("shame") because of her connection to a collective ("those who had made possible her escape"). In justifying her choice, she thinks of other communities to which she has been linked ("On Randall, on Valentine"). Most tellingly, Whitehead's choice of an intersubjective metaphor (paired dancing for physical attack) invokes, only to revise, Cora's earlier figuration upon Ridgeway's "American imperative" soliloquy: "Couples coming together to hold each other…" (Whitehead 2016, 223). Taking this metaphor as her organizing scheme, Cora thus answers the reiterations of Ridgeway's "racial logic," converting her silent audition into a dyadic "conversation." Whitehead's protagonist converts the ironic perspective (symbolic action) she displayed in the "Tennessee" chapter into concrete personal action – but she does so only after invoking the intermental units to which she once belonged, and which have shaped her.

Yet Cora's victory here is a qualified one. True, by invoking the memories of black communities to which she has belonged – which have helped shape and develop her subjectivity – Cora draws on wells of knowledge, determination, and skill which permit her to defeat Ridgeway and escape. But the utopian power of those groups ends there. Cora may have the capacity to move on, but the collectives that have shaped her cannot. The black groups that Cora has encountered in Georgia, the Carolinas, and Indiana remain either bound by the slave system or destroyed by white supremacist violence. For all the optimism implied by Cora's escape at the novel's end, *The Underground Railroad*'s vision of black collective life in America remains fundamentally

negative. If, as Dubey writes, speculative neo-slave narratives use their fantastic elements to force readers to confront parallels between their present and the slave past (Dubey 2001, 791), then Whitehead's darkest and most clear-eyed message comes through in his treatment of political life. Exceptional individuals – those with the right talents or in the right circumstances – may thrive under white supremacy, but larger social collectives cannot.

Conclusion

Existing criticism of *The Underground Railroad* has, for good reason, focused on the novel's overt features: its speculative elements (Dischinger 2017), engagement with historiography (Dubey 2020; Li 2019), or structural irony (Kelly 2018). However, little attention has been paid to the novel's collective dimension or narrative style. This group focalization – as revealed by the social minds lens – provides a telescoping model of the social to match the physical and temporal compressions made by the novel's fantastic railroad. So, an increased focus on narrative technique has two hermeneutic benefits: First, it uncovers a new layer of the novel's depiction of collective mental life under white supremacy, one largely absent from other neo-slave narratives, and which belies the individualistic reading of the protagonist as underdeveloped. Whitehead provides not only sketches of isolated individuals, but also a global overview of communities striated throughout an entire society as they shape, internalize, and ultimately fail to escape a racial ideology. Second, attending to the role of social minds helps explain Cora's actions, which are inscribed by communities that have formed her. Thus, an attention to the novel's depiction of social minds does not negate readings that focus on individuals so much as augment them, adding another dimension that overlays and inflects character psychology.

Looking beyond exegesis of the novel itself, in terms of genre, much critical attention has been paid to speculative realist texts' deployment of speculative or fantasy tropes – borrowing from contemporary popular genres such as comics and video games (Gantz 2015; Saldívar 2011). But as this reading of *The Underground Railroad* suggests, greater attention to these novels' voice and prose style, particularly their modes of evoking collectivity, may prove a rich vein for future critical work. Among other speculative realist authors, the writing of Karen Tei Yamashita, with its focus on the shared experiences of social groups, seems particularly ripe for such analysis. If the political purpose of post-race such writing is, as Saldívar argues, to help us imagine new "kinds of social belonging," (Saldivar 2013, 15), then we ought to pay closer attention to how these texts imagine communal mental life.

Endnotes:

1. Li, Heneks, and Dischinger focus on the novel's use of genre tropes and satire, while Dubey fixes on its relationship to history and historiography. Manshel and Konstantinou read *TUR* with respect to recent debates in literary criticism and theory, whereas Kelly emphasizes the novel's use of irony and relation to neoliberalism.

2. In using this term, partly for reasons of brevity, I am loosely following Bernard W. Bell's original coinage, in *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*, which defines "neoslave narratives" as "modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom" (Bell 1987, 289). Rushdy has a more restricted use of the term, referring only to "those novels that assume the voice of the fugitive slave and employ while deviating from the conventions of the antebellum slave narrative" (Rushdy 2004, 92-3). Arlene Keizer's term, "contemporary fictions of slavery," would apply equally well to the texts I have selected (Keizer 2004).
3. While the genre might also be described as "post-racial post-postmodernism," I hew to Saldivar's coinage to emphasize the speculative elements common across these texts.
4. The few examples of collective-focused narration in Jones' *The Known World*, for instance, reach toward either universal generalization ("It was said by many a slave that a servant's feeling about a master could be discerned on any given day by whether the slave called him 'Master', 'Marse,' or 'Massa' [Jones 2003, 58]) or the narrowly focused thought of an individual character. In *Beloved*, collective focalization does appear, though its use is restricted to one group, the free black community of Cincinnati that surrounds Sethe. Other canonical examples of the neo-slave narrative form tend to involve a more individualist, often first-person, perspective: Gaines' *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, Reed's *Flight to Canada*, Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*, Johnson's *Middle Passage*, and Butler's *Kindred*. Even Jones' *Corregidora*, which focuses on one woman's relationship to her family's generational trauma, has few moments of such collective focalization in the way outlined here.
5. Amy S. Greenberg provides a helpful summation: "In short, virtually everything about the young nation – from its admirable origins in New England religious settlements through its astounding population growth, miraculous victory over the great British Empire, racial and religious superiority over other residents of the continent, and novel form of government – proved to American that their nation, above all others, was unique and marked by God for a special destiny. This shared belief in American exceptionalism lay at the heart of the ideology of Manifest Destiny" (Greenberg 2012, 5).

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"To Forget their Concrete Reality": Deconstruction, Abjection, and Ethics in *Perdido Street Station*

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Abstract:

This paper explores the monstrous slake-moths in *Perdido Street Station* as an abject threat, destabilizing the modes of categorization by which society is organized but also by which a meaningful subjectivity is maintained. Reconsidering the novel's critical treatment with regard to Miéville's Marxism, I ask what psychological and ethical valences the first of the Bas-Lag trilogy asks of the possibilities of radical deconstructionism which is frequently deployed as the discursive precursor to collectivist politics. I suggest that the text stages a critique of existing modes of rigid categorization, including a particularly troubling mind/body dualism, via the slake-moths' abject destruction in society. However, I show how the text registers a dissatisfaction with poststructuralism as an endpoint or even as an unchecked tool, maintain the need for internal systems of discrimination, crucial to subjectivity, which must be preserved.

Keywords: Abject, deconstruction, ethics, poststructuralism, subjectivity, heroism

I. Subjectivity and Collectivism

In Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* the protagonist discovers his dreams alter the nature of reality. When his therapist discovers this and uses hypnotism to induce a dream that brings about a utopia without racial oppression, the protagonist awakens to a grey world devoid of racial difference but populated instead with flavorless food and undifferentiated ideas. *The Lathe of Heaven* joins a long list of texts which worry that the process by which society might dissolve those distinctions which determine first difference and then, all too frequently, power dynamics, might also eliminate the keys to individual subjectivity itself. Dystopias like Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" make this critique explicit, imagining a future in which enforced equality destroys everything from human excellence to artistic expression. Frequently, this critique is leveled by reactionary narratives which juxtapose a cold-war communist collectivism against what gets characterized as a capitalist individualism. But as both Le Guin's and Vonnegut's politics can attest, these concerns are hardly relegated to reactionaries across a

tidy Left/Right divide. Indeed, China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* should be considered among these texts, registering a pointed critique of the voracious political impulse to disturb the boundary lines of social and cultural systems, despite the promising political potential of doing so.

The kraken's share of Miéville scholarship has been animated by the author's avowed Marxist sympathies and the various, elusive, and sometimes contradictory ways they emerge in the worlds he depicts. Likewise, much notice has been paid to Miéville's formal and genre play—a play, it has been argued, itself motivated by an interest in both the realist denunciations of capitalist excesses and fantasies of alternative systems, always so difficult to imagine. But the central metaphors of the first novel in Miéville's celebrated Bas-Lag trilogy, *Perdido Street Station*, asks questions of a psychological dimension that exist in tension with the novel's political concerns. In this paper, I argue that the implications of the novel's primary narrative device, the slake-moths' attack, moves forward the cause of social disruption necessary to radical political revolution but by the same methods abjectly threatens the interiorities of the characters for whom the reader roots and with whom they sympathize. With this device, Miéville structures a critique of a possible endpoint of the tools of deconstructivism towards utopianist ends, depicting a destabilization evacuated of referent, the implications of which sees the dismantling of oppressive social structures but also threaten the subjectivity of individuals. The text's dual ending—the defeat of the monstrous threat external to the protagonists and the reveal of a monstrous element internal to their group—help delimit those deconstructive methods which undermine subjectivity in dissolving the apparatus of social and political hegemony.

The characterization of the Bas-Lag trilogy carefully negotiating the promises of political revolution alongside its dangers and cognitive elusiveness has already been critically established, and unsurprisingly so, given Miéville's refreshing depictions. The gritty "realism" of the novels extends beyond rounded characters and convincing world-building into nuanced and multifaceted depiction of the trilogy's political aspirations. Sherryl Vint writes of the second novel that its "dissatisfaction with the present and longing for a better world can be articulated in repressive as well as liberatory ways. The power of Miéville's *The Scar* derives precisely from its appreciation of this tension" (Vint 2009, 277-278). Likewise, Nicholas Birns suggests of the third, that "*Iron Council* suspends the coming of a new era, without deferring it. It sees what obstacles lie in the way of revolution, but does not relapse into defeatist cynicism. The novel's ending admits a realistic inadequacy, while keeping faith with the fantastic hope for transformation" (Bint 2009, 210). My reading of the first novel in the trilogy suggests a similar, cautious optimism. But instead of revolutionary aspirations tempered with a concern for repressive practices, I see the abject force of the slake-moths representing a psychological danger inherent to the method of social destabilization that the text's politics relies on. Echoing Emile Durkheim's concept of anomie, a normlessness associated with the increasing dissolution of social and cultural norms in modernity, Miéville registers a concern for the destructive dangers of deconstructivism, that frequent implementation toward Marxist aims in cultural discourses.

Miéville's novel introduces the neo-Victorian world of Bas-Lag and the major metropolis of New Crobuzon, where humans and nonhumans, as well as a ruthless mercantile class and a brutalized lower class, live in uneasy cohabitation. This world is powered by a bizarre mixture of steampunk technologies, and magical processes conducted by thaumaturges. The protagonist, Isaac, a university professor and scientific researcher, accepts a private project from a disgraced and disfigured member of winged nonhumans called Garuda, asking Isaac to create new wings to replace those his tribe saw fit to cut away. Isaac's subsequent employment of petty criminals and street urchins to acquire all manner of flighted species for study produces a strange larva which turns out to be an unborn slake-moth, the soon-to-be monster of the plot. After a short incubation period in Isaac's lab the young slake-moth escapes and frees its kindred from an illegal drug operation which harvests slake-moth fecal matter for its psychedelic properties. Over the next days the slake-moths prey on the New Crobuzon populous and nearly topple the drug empire, the University, and the city government. Isaac leads a small group, including the disgraced, wingless Garuda, a pro-labor journalist, and an emerging artificial intelligence called The Construct Council against the slake-moths; their ultimate success relying on a new technology called the Crisis Engine.

The conventional nature of the plot—hero opens a can of worms (almost literally), hero battles the consequences, hero succeeds—belies the refusal of other narrative conventions. One such refusal lies in the depiction of slake-moths as abject disruptions of oppressive social and political status quos. The slake-moth's function in the text showcases the power of dismantling the categories and systems of order by which hegemony is preserved. Their disruption of binary systems and this disruption's political promise comprise section two of this paper. But another refusal of convention emerges in the novel's uncomfortable ending in which the reader learns with Isaac that the hitherto ally and sympathetic Garuda, Yagharek, whom Isaac is helping to reshape for flight, had his wings stripped according to cultural custom as punishment for a brutal rape, a crime is categorized by his people a "choice theft." The phrasing anticipates Isaac's own crucial choice regarding his contract with Yagherek, on which he recants his commitment. The final section of this essay examines this moment of crucial subjective choice as a counterpoint to the deconstructionist impulses represented in the slake-moths, whose attacks would have rendered Isaac unable to make such a choice, even as the attacks dismantle other forms of oppressive constraints.

This reading, focused on the ethical and psychological subjectivity of the individual, necessarily requires some defense, as it flows against the more obvious tenor of the Marxist interpretations illustrated of Vint, Birns, and Steve Shaviro, who reads the slake-moths as "just capitalism with an (appropriately) inhuman face" (Shaviro 2002, 288). Miéville's work thoroughly resists classical models of "heroic" fantasy and science fiction, indeed, has spoken in interviews of his suspicions of "high fantasy," characterized by savior-like heroes and what has been criticized as consolatory nostalgic politics. Despite his vocal (though, perhaps rhetorically

motivated dismissal of Tolkien and his followers), Miéville's fiction is not without an individualist impulse as well. Christopher Palmer has shown Miéville's own heroic fellowships to be comprised of both a diversely democratic group working toward collectivist goals but also a few key solitary figures. Palmer writes that "Miéville repeatedly dramatizes group solidarity and achievement [...] Yet Miéville is equally preoccupied with the loner, the private or secretive individual, or the irresponsible individualist" (Palmer 2009, 277). This model, apparent in Isaac's relation to the fomenting collectivist revolution in the text, evinces a concurrent concern for individual questions of subjectivity as well as for broader political and social advancements. What is more, toward these jockeying concerns, the slake-moth's dually abject role both promises liberation from the limiting structures supporting capitalism and threatens the individual which might be liberated from them.

In using the term "subjectivity," I rely on the most fundamental definition: the "quality or condition of being based on subjective consciousness, experience, etc." according to the OED. I am particularly interested in the way subjectivity is made manifest in the text as an individual's capacity to make meaningful, ethical choices. But it is worth noting that Miéville's is hardly a naïve or idealistic representation of it as an autonomous, pure, or individual concept. In keeping with the author's socially conscious work, the text shows subjectivity itself to be always inter-subjective, contextualized by social frameworks, produced in part by economic forces. And this is exactly why the slake-moths almost must function both promisingly *and* threateningly—the systems which constrain economic and social freedom which the moths disrupt are also markers which provide crucial references for making choices. That the novel sustains a politically subversive side-plot, with Derkhan (whose name is tantalizingly close to Durkheim's), Jack Half-a-Prayer, and the fReemade, also seeking to dismantle codified systems toward their collectivist aims, cannot help but fuse with the similar slake-moth disruption of such systems and illustrate the interconnected concerns of collectivism and subjectivity.

Miéville is not alone in asking these questions, admitting that he is exploring "models of consciousness that [...] explain social agency" (Gordon Int. 2003), nor is he alone in imagining the role of the individual hero in collectivist struggles. In his disquisition on heroism in literature, Mikhail Bakhtin writes:

> From within himself, a living human being positions himself in the world actively; his consciously lived life is a process of performing actions at every moment of it. I act through deed, word, thought, and feeling; I live, I come-to-be through my acts. However, I neither express myself nor determine myself through my acts; I actualize through them something that has validity with respect to objects and meaning... (Bakhtin 1990, 138)

I turn to Bakhtin who helps, in the words of his translator, Michael Holquist, "provide what has often felt to be lacking in Marx: a more complex theory of the individual subject in such otherwise collectivist phenomena as class struggle" (Holquist 1990, XLI), "inscribing a

Marxist emphasis on politics, economics, and social theory into dialogism's obsession with the personhood of individuals" (Holquist XLV). This Bakhtinian sense of the hero and of meaningful choice helps to measure the limitations of the abstract, pluralizing forces of deconstruction represented by the slake-moths in the novel.

II. Binaries and Abjection

One of the primary targets of abject deconstruction which the slake-moths affect, and one with specific contributions to hegemony, is the social construct of mind-body dualism as it is used as an organizing principle of society. *Perdido Street Station*'s setting of New Crobuzon evinces mind-body distinctions in its very structure, which contributes to its gentrification and racial demarcation. The city is semi-segregated into racial neighborhoods for the vodyanoi, the khepri, the cactacae, and "stratified," "divided spatially [...] in terms of economics and social privilege" (Langer 2010, 178). The lower class and the racially marginalized, however, are forced to contend with their body in ways from which the upper class appear exempt. For instance, the poor are often victims of cruel practices of "remaking," a process of bio-grafting used to alter individuals for specific jobs or punishment. "There's so much contempt, prejudice against them" (Miéville 2001, 93), Derkhan, the novel's altruistic journalist, laments before relating the story of a poor women punished for smothering her baby by having its arms grafted to her forehead. Individuals are remade to serve as soldiers, gladiators, even fetishized sex objects. Rich Paul Cooper situates the remade in terms of social order: "Remade in New Crobuzon, as a created race, serve to splinter and subdivide the social field [...] Certain fragmented groups are designated 'abnormal,' a designation that allows 'normality' to flourish in contradiction to the abnormal other" (Cooper 2010, 217). Like gothic monsters of the past, whose expulsion as other unifies the community in normality, the distinction of racial difference is a means of preserving hegemony. Even those not remade but just inhuman are *defined* by their bodies, specifically, the ways their bodies differ from humans. For instance, the reader learns of the cactacae's limited sovereignty in their city sector due to a reformed "Sapience Bill" which finally gave the "cacatae something approaching citizenship" (Miéville 2001, 512). That a "sapience bill" grants citizenship demonstrates how inclusion within the society is determined by the capacity of the mind, just as exclusion is predicated on differences of the body.

Following the same logic as the deep embodiedness of New Crobuzon's poor, the notion of the mind solidifying citizenship and separating the powerful from the powerless is reinforced by the description of the city's governmental figures and the academic community, who enjoy patronage from high-ranking officials. The most striking aspect of these figures, given the novel's almost obsessive description of the grime in the street, is that most of the upper class are not described at all. The mayor, his cronies, the professors with whom Isaac works, are all simply... human. Their bodies are not factored into their existence, instead they occupy their bodies as mere vessels to pursue their work of intellectual pursuits and control. What is more, their *method*

of control is bodiless, just as the method of punishing the poor is completely bodily. The secretive "militia," the police state enforcers, "didn't like to be seen" but relied on, "a vast network of informers" (Miéville 2001, 267). Rather than employ the frightening presence of imposing bodies like the warrior cacatae, the "invisible" militia opted to "blend in" (Miéville 2001, 268) before striking out at subversive elements of society. All this is to say that, like the university, the powerful military police are defined not by their bodies but by the unimportance of their bodies. Another example of this divide are the handlingers, a race of "parasitic" (Miéville 2001, 441) and "psychic" (Miéville 2001, 467) beings who latch on to other bodies to use and control with their thoughts. It is no surprise that these beings of primarily mental capacity seem to be the highest ranking nonhumans the city of New Crobuzon has to offer, often working with the government at the highest levels.

These descriptions of New Crobuzon replicate binary distinction between mind and body which the slake-moth event dissolves, abjectly disrupting the ordering structures of the city, the very process of categorization. The creatures function in a manner similar to what Barbara Creed defines in the landmark essay, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," whose source material, the film *Alien*, Miéville has cited as specifically influential to his own work (Gordon Int. 2003). Creed's theoretical framework of abject monstrosity, and Kristeva's psychological research from which Creed draws, help define the abject as precisely this mode of disturbance whereby Miéville calls into question systems of organization, particularly those set up as binary oppositions and those set up to police the populous of New Crobuzon. Kristeva's most cogent articulations of the abject insist on the instability of the abject in relation to the law and order and with which the ego contends and defines itself.

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite . . . Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law (Kristeva 1982, 2)

Creed uses the term in tandem with a modern sf/horror film and shows Kristeva's abject as a fecund space for thinking through monstrosity in relation to the divisions and systems which organize the social structures in imagined worlds such as Miéville's. The slake-moth's dissolving power in New Crobuzon mirror Creed's insistence that, "abject things are those which highlight the 'fragility of the law' and which exist on the other side of the border which separates out the living subject from that which threatens its extinction" (Creed 1986, 48). This construction of a threat wholly opposed to me without being other (rather, being un-me) and threatening the laws by which the self and otherness are organized describes the unsettling and intriguing crisis of *Perdido Street Station*, a crisis first made manifest in its disruption of the "systems and order" of the city's most persistent categorizations.

The moths' disruptive act is in part the arbitrariness of its feeding, ignoring the categorizations and order of the city. Derkhan writes in her subversive pamphlet that the militia do not protect the

poor as they do the wealthy: "*it's one law for the rich, another for the poor!*" (Miéville 2001, 127). The slake-moth's equal opportunity attacks, however, throw into an uproar the ruling powers by ignoring the unspoken, or perhaps too loudly spoken, boundary between rich and poor neighborhoods—it does not respect borders. "We're all *food,*" (Miéville 2001, 275) the Mayor points out to his defense committee, more concerned with the collapsing distinction between his constituency and the poverty stricken streets then with the danger of the slake-moth itself. It is this equalizing quality of the moth attacks which so demands attention, not just because the upper class were vulnerable but because the equality of vulnerability questions the logic of the city's organization. The epidemic which increases in magnitude throughout the text makes these terms perfectly clear. "The plague of mindlessness" which the slake-moths cause, "was not discriminating. Whole and Remade were taken. Human [victims] were found, and khepri and vodyanoi" (Miéville 2001, 435). In this fashion the moths operate abjectly, destroying the structures that operate, as Creed writes, "as a means of separating the human from the non-human and the fully constituted subject from the partially formed subject" (Creed 1986, 45). The first victim of the moths' attack is precisely this organizing structure and the possibility of cleanly separating the human from the non, or, the more-sentient from the more-bodily as the two are figured in New Crobuzon. And it comes as no surprise that this disruption is used by the fReemade movement to further their rebellion against the oppressive system (Miéville 2001, 642).

I should take a moment here to address one of the major theorizations of the slake-moths, in both Shaviro's and Carl Freedman's work. Echoing Shaviro's claim that the slake-moths represent the unslakable, voracious hunger of capitalism, Freedman agrees that their vampiric nature literalizes Marx's theory of capitalism, "sucking the creative powers and life out of the wage-earning proletariat" (Freedman 2015, 33). In a lovely and moving turn, Freedman argues that the dominating nature of the "slake-moths must be understood as something like the precise opposite of the lovemaking" (Freedman 2015, 31), which he examines in the inter-species relationship of Isaac and Lin. Freedman writes that a "utopian figure for the species and class politics [lies in an] Adornian peace—the interinanimation of distinct entities without domination—that is figured in the lovemaking of Lin and Isaac is the principle that guides the revolutionary movement" (Freedman 2015, 28-29). Against this, and "[a]ntithetical to the peaceful love" lies the "voraciousness of these monsters [...] who stand for utter domination and the crushing of all distinctness" (Freedman 2015, 31). Freedman, notes that the process of the slake-moth's attack, causes "utter leveling of all distinctness among the various intelligent species" such that "[i]ndividuals who have their minds stolen become [...] interchangeable with one another" (Freedman 2015, 31). My reading is predicated on the same view of the effect of the moths' attack but argues a different sense of what the moths may represent. While it is certainly possible to interpret the slake-moths as a cypher for capitalist rapacity, there is also evidence (provided already and to come) for reading them as the literalization of the deconstructivist impulse of postmodernity. This impulse, unchecked, can likewise destroy

categorization and, as Miéville argues, has its own rapacity for "colonizing lots of techniques and implying that anything like those techniques is therefore 'postmodernist.'" (Gordon Int. 2003). And like Freedman, I see a crucial counterpoint to the dominating and flattening effect of the slake-moths, not in Isaac and Lin's relationship, but in Isaac's relationship to his own interior system of ethics.

To discern how we might see the slake-moths manifesting the cataclysmic destruction of distinctions represented by the instincts of postmodern deconstructionism, we must look beyond the equal opportunist nature of the slake-moths that abjectly calls into question binary systems, to the manner of the slake-moth attack and the ambiguity of the moths' biology which challenge such demarcation. Just as the slake-moths collapse the social distinctions of the city, so too does its attack abjectly disrupt conceptions by being both mentally and physically monstrous, sublime and grotesque as the two are formally figured. Early on Isaac makes the distinction that "[w]hatever energy" the slake-moths get from feeding "it's not physical" (Miéville 2001, 188). Indeed, similar to the Weaver, they are beings of "unstable dimensions [...] various planes" (Miéville 2001, 374) and are not limited to "regular space" (Miéville 2001, 543). Like their slipping forms, their attacks come ambiguously, a mixture of their licking, "ambiguous tongues," (Miéville 2001, 469) and some extra-physical syphoning. This strange combination of images and ideas doesn't just leave the reader unsure, questioning what precisely has taken place, even the scientist who harvests the moths for the government concedes that the "*manner* of [the victim's] death is not specified" (Miéville 2001, 378). Even after the fact, the text suggests, the irresolvability of the creatures' disturbance defies categorization.

At first glance it may appear that the slake-moth's feeding on the *mind* and leaving behind the empty *body* would again reinforce the idea of the mind and body as separate, justifying the city's organization and impulse to hierarchize its races. To this question, Langer reads into the porous terminology of the minds in Miéville's New Crobuzon novels, registering, "a tension between embodiedness and disembodiedness of minds, the idea that minds can become disembodied when their bodily boundaries are crossed" (Miéville 2001, 182). But Langer's account still falls back on too easy a distinction of the moths "eating minds" only to "leave the rest—bodies" (Miéville 2001, 184). The distinction is complicated when one reads the subtle details of exactly what the slake-moths feed upon. The slake-moth's diet is specifically *not* just thoughts or minds but the space of contradiction that minds can create. The resident slake-moth expert in the novel insists that they "did *not* eat anyone's brain" nor their consciousness (Miéville 2001, 374-5). Instead, we are told that it is the hidden crannies of minds, the "guilty thoughts [...] self-reflexive thought" and, most crucially, the "subconscious" with its ability for contradictory emotions which is the moth's "peculiar brew" of choice (Miéville 2001, 374-5). In this way, the moths feed on precisely what they are: things which conflate, which sustain contradictions and paradoxes. Locating their nutrients only in the subconscious and guilty self-reflective desires, we see that they seek the simultaneous desire and guilt-for-that-desire which occupies the deepest

recesses of dreams and nightmares. Just as they are creatures of dissolving binaries, so too do they grow and subsist off, not a mind as opposed to a body, but a being's deep investment in contradictions. What is more, the leavings of their feast in the seeming-lifeless body is the primary symbol of the abject. Creed writes, that the "ultimate in abjection is the corpse" (Creed 1986, 47), calling it the thing which destroys the very differentiation between life and death—the more so in this case, as the catatonic victims are even less distinct with regard to the boundary between death and life. In these ways, the slake-moths continually function abjectly, transgressing against the existing codes and categorizations of society by disrupting their boundary markers.

Another way we see how the abject disruption of fixed binaries initially destabilizes social order, is with attention to the peculiar sexualization which the slake-moths' attacks elicit. Like the xenomorph from *Alien,* the confusing and compounding imagery of slake-moth feeding invokes both the trope of a masculine rape, complete with phallic penetration, and the trope of a feminine seduction, creating the desire for the very danger it threatens. The moth encounters of the novel usually occur as a strange balance of the ultra-violent penetration of the moth's many dangerous devices and the entrancing dance of colors and shapes which are irresistible to the onlooker. Despite the fear evoked by an almost absurd array of phallic appendages: "monstrous [...] enormous tongue" (Miéville 2001, 466), the "tentacles," "massive teeth" (Miéville 2001, 465), and "tail-harpoon" (Miéville 2001, 471), the victims are first entranced by "something extraordinary" (Miéville 2001, 667) which the slake-moth's wings offer, their "color and light and shadow, by the interplay of shapes and lines, negative and positive spaces" (Miéville 2001, 667). The attacks disrupt both the mind/body distinctions of the sublime and grotesque as well as gender binaries by the stubborn and insistent irresolvabilty. And like their previous disruptions, this act carries with it a distinctly liberatory quality in dismantling gender roles.

The gendered associations of the slake-moths themselves, like those of their method of attack, disrupt concretized binary gendering. Initially, a scientist claims that they "are hermaphrodites" (Miéville 2001, 379) but later a more complex relation to gender is revealed. Similar to Le Guin's androgyne Gethenians from *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the slake-moths enter into a mating ritual in which one assumes the role of the soon-to-be mother. In the novel's only mating scene the creatures fight viciously in the air above New Crobuzon, they "became suddenly fertile and aggressively aroused [... and] bickered lecherously to be female," until all but one "accepting defeat and masculinity" (Miéville 2001, 499-500). With this final clause, and in a manner not dissimilar to Le Guin's playfully self-conscious line, "The king was pregnant" (Miéville 2001, 100), Miéville makes us privy to the slake-moth mating ritual and toys with our perceptions about dominant sexuality roles and gender binaries. And yet, even these eventually identifiable roles the moths embody are not permanent. Later in the story one of the moths refers to its companions as "sisterbrother" (Miéville 2001, 648) and suggests that next time another might assume the role of female, ensuring that even the biological necessity of roles in the mating process is subject to change in future mating cycles.

Several of these examples carry with them potent political possibilities—challenging mind-body dualism, racial and class categories, and the gender binary. But Miéville hints that the dangers in the moths lay in the ways that the deconstructive process begins to undo even the systems of language which form the core of meaning-making. Like many of the deconstructive ur-texts, including Jacques Derrida's and Jean Baudrillard's, the slake-moth's dissolution of structure functions linguistically as well, or rather, in the failure of language to properly signify. As extra-dimensional creatures, the slake-moths are called "utterly alien" (Miéville 2001, 331) and seem nearly impossible to comprehend, predict, or describe. But more important than this abstract incomprehensibility is the specific language used to describe crucial aspects of the moths. During an attack the protagonists witness, it is the "unspeakable tongue" (Miéville 2001, 365) which threatens physically but also abjectly as it threatens both unspeakable tongues and unspeaking tongues, the sublime fear of being inarticulatable and the grotesque, castrating fear of being made unable to articulate. Moreover, the slake-moth is called an "unthinkable creature" (Miéville 2001, 543), whose hypnotic appendages extend as "unthinkable wings" (Miéville 2001, 665). Even more disruptive than the possibility of being unspeakable and making one incapable of speech, is the slake-moths' being impossible to think and making their victims incapable of thinking. This frightening disturbance of systems of ontology and signification contributes to the moth's overwhelming abjection, their tsunami-like overturning of the most fundamental system of categorization in language.

The Construct Council, a foil for the moths narratively, helps contextualize the moth's irreconcilability with a similar combination of sublimity and grotesqueness. The Council is an AI born in a scrap-heap which collects society's cast-off machines into itself in search of greater knowledge. In a scene where the Council kills a moth, it is the remarkable, unspoken similarities between them which stand out. The "complex unity" of the slake-moth is praised just after we are told of the awe-inspiring unity with which the Council's varied parts operate together (Miéville 2001, 472). Likewise, the slake-moth's "intricate flesh," "rapacious totality" and "unthinkable, inhuman symmetry, cells multiplying like obscure and imaginary numbers" (Miéville 2001, 473) could almost describe the Council which surrounds it, which is growing exponentially and geometrically. It is not just sublimity which the monstrosities share but a grotesqueness as well. The first slake-moth attack begins when the moth's "terrible shape squeezed and folded [...] to push its organic folds and spines and bulk through the window [...] contracting in invisible, impossible directions" (Miéville 2001, 361). Miéville writes that the "impression was of an impossible birth" (Miéville 2001, 361), arousing the death/life conflation of the abject but also the abject disruption of language with the repetition of impossibility. Similarly, the Construct Council extends its own tendrils through the city. We watch as one of its worshipers "grabbed the rough end of the cable and tried to thrust it between the bars" until he eventually "shoved the cable hard into the ragged hole," (Miéville 2001, 611) mirroring the strange movements and entrance of the slake-moth. And of course, the text describes this too as

"some grotesque inversion of birth" (Miéville 2001, 611). The two figures, the slake-moths and the Construct Counsel, parallel each other's abject mockery of procreation, and it is the very difference of these two figures which likewise encourages the notion of deconstructed binaries. The abject horrors don't just dissolve the boundaries structuring systems of meaning, they likewise dissolve the very boundaries which distinguish themselves.

The slake-moths' abjectness and its embodiment of endless rapacity and procreation signals the dangers inherent to its deconstructionism: that it knows no ends. And in the novel's climax it is significantly the collapsing of binary distinctions which is the moth's undoing as well. The first suggestion that combined oppositions defeats the slake-moths comes in the form of the mirror. The characters and the scientists admit to not knowing why viewing the hypnotizing patterns through a mirror protects the viewer (Miéville 2001, 374), but it likely has something to do with the bringing together of reciprocals—in this case, it is combination of the thing with its mirrored reflection. That the combination of opposites deflects the slake-moths is reinforced by the finale in which Isaac uses the Crisis Engine to bridge together the disparate beings of the Weaver and the Construct Council. Isaac is in essence bridging two minds which we are told are at odds—the Weaver defined as driven *purely* by the desire to manipulate reality into an *aesthetic* "worldweave" (Miéville 2001, 334) and the Construct Council which is "a calculating machine [with] no neuroses, no hidden depths" (Miéville 2001, 477). Even more pronounced is the Crisis Engine, which connects the two powerful minds, and is itself predicated on opposites. Isaac describes the mathematics behind the engine as defying the most basic logic wherein "y and z were unified, bounded wholes" (Miéville 2001, 633). The explosive power of the engine requires the unstable, it needed the "paradoxical, unsustainable, the application of logic tearing itself apart" (Miéville 2001, 633). This is remarkably similar to the slake-moth's own power, described as projecting wing-images "random and inconstant as oil," yet having a "perfect reflection" (Miéville 2001, 362) on the opposing wing. The Crisis Engine which defeats the moths, like the moths themselves, combines the incalculable with perfect mathematical symmetry.

III. Politics and Ethics

But what is the significance of this combination and why does it eliminate the slake-moths? It may be that such fusion is merely another way of depicting the constructed nature of binary systems by showing their proclivity for collapse. That the two sides can merge suggests a sympathy between them belying their systematic disavowal. Christopher Palmer writes of Crisis energy, "that when opposite qualities or entities meet, this meeting exacerbates the energies in each, producing an unstable situation in which the opposites exist in a zone of interaction or overlap and are no longer opposites" (Palmer 2009, 226). The paradox defies the sorts of binary oppositions which this paper catalogues as the framework of hegemony. The moths, like the Crisis Engine, produce instability and interaction which disrupts the powers in place and their primacy as the only eventuality. There persists in *Perdido Street Station* a sense that the slake-

moth's threat to systems of order and the moth's sustenance on a being's deepest repressions describes a critique of such *internalized* categorizations and identifications. That mirrors inoculate would-be victims could indicate that reflecting on one's own inner inconsistencies makes one impervious to the threat of abjection—we are vulnerable to the abject only insofar as we grant power to the order it dissolves. Likewise, that bridging disparate consciousnesses through the equally disparate Crisis Engine evaporates the slake-moths entirely, suggests that society coming to grips with its plurality, paradoxes, and incalculability eliminates the threat, like a controlled burn does a ravaging fire. The abject's threat to subjectivity and order, preying on deep investments in constructions of ourselves and the world based on the rule of law, is stemmed should that subjectivity or that order itself embrace a fractured plurality.

Yet, the moths' attack on the order and distinctions of systems traditionally bound up in protocols of restriction and privilege *also* threaten any possibility of meaningful subjectivity. This occurs in a manner tellingly parallel to the political abstraction which offers only an indefinite waste in the place of capitalist hegemony. If we compare the power of the Crisis Engine to the similarly disruptive Possibility Sword in *The Scar,* it suggests these precise dangers. In discussing the Possibility Sword, Kendrick argues that "Miéville's Marxism expresses itself in [a protagonist's] dislike for the [...] 'vague, pluralist reality'" these devices promise (Kendrick 2009, 271). Vint too has registered this latent problem at the heart of these machines of change which destabilize concreteness, noting that, even with their power, "[i]t is difficult to walk this line between the risks of pluralist openness, which lacks any drive toward a better world, and those of utopia turned into constrained program, which attempts to impose a common vision" (Vint 2009, 288). I'd suggest that both the Crisis Engine's ultimately unfulfilling promise of radical openness and the slake-moth's erasure of the subconscious, structure a consistent concern for the limitations of abstract deconstruction without meaningful subjective, ethical distinctions. If the abject is that which troubles the ordering of the social, "[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules" then it is also "what disturbs identity" (Kristeva 1982, 4), troubles the productive tensions within the self. The radical openness enabled by the abject, deprived of immobile monuments of definition, is a boon to collective revolution but should be toward the ends that one may exercise a subjectivity these possibilities promise. The novel makes this clear and indicates the terms of this subjectivity in the final pages as meaningful ethical choices and communal values left undissolved by the moths.

In the novel's secondary ending, it is the moments of individual ethical choice that matter most, especially as they are shown to stand alternative to systems of politics and law. Isaac learns of Yagharek's choice-theft, what we would call a rape against a Garuda, who proudly describes herself as a "concrete individual" (Miéville 2001, 691). And Isaac likewise faces a difficult choice, whether to follow through on his own obligation to Yagharek or respect the tribal law handed down which left him earthbound. It is not the result of Isaac's choice which is so crucial in the end but the fact of it, the necessity of his subjective decision which must come at the expense of one system of social expectation. Kar'uchai, who Yagharek attacked, makes it clear that "[i]t is up

to [Isaac] to let justice be" (Miéville 2001, 691). "It is the only crime we *have*" Kar'uchai goes on, "[t]o take the choice of another... to forget their concrete reality, to abstract them, to forget that you are a node in the matrix, that actions have consequences. We must not take the choice of another being. What is community but a means to... for all we individuals to have... our *choices*" (Miéville 2001, 692). Though a new-comer to New Crobuzon, Kar'uchai immediately notes the opposite tendencies of the structures of the metropolis. "Your city institutions," she criticizes, "[t]alking and talking of individuals... but crushing them in layers and hierarchies... until their choices might be between three kinds of squalor" (Miéville 2001, 691). Kar'uchai recognizes both the dangers of hierarchy and institutions, those things threatened by the moths' abjection, but also clarifies the crucial need to sustain communal values as a means to preserve identities which must not become vague abstractions themselves. That the moths would destroy both suggests precisely the dangers of this sort of abject deconstruction.

It is crucial to note that Kar'uchai demands that Isaac *not* think of the crime in the terms of his world—it "cannot translate into your jurisprudence," she says. Her insistence arises precisely from the accumulated meanings that arise within a patriarchal society's "laws and morals" and she dismisses terms like "*violated," "ravaged," "abused," or "defiled*" (Miéville 2001, 694); instead she says it is purely choice-theft. And, fittingly, she leaves it to Isaac's own choice as to whether he will respect their justice. The terms in this closing episode of the novel like "individual," "action," "justice," and "choice" feature conspicuously and signal the ethical valence of this final meeting. And so does the Kar'uchai's insistence that their difference must be acknowledged—a reconstruction of a classical I/other event. But here, opposed to so much of the rest of the novel, difference, that between Isaac's assumptions and the Kar'uchai's, must be preserved and law, in terms of tribal law rather than Yagarek's economic contract, must be upheld.

Left to his own reasoning Isaac looks inward, sits and reflects. Unlike the moth-attacked and now vacuous Lin whom he sits beside, Isaac can and must confront the conflicting desires, hopes, and anxieties within him, those left untouched by the slake-moths. It is the fast structures there in his interiority which guide his ultimate decision—in "cold distaste and fury" he could not "imply that Yagharek's actions were *acceptable*" (Miéville 2001, 697). In the same manner that Miéville's Marxism announces in the slake-moths and Crisis Engine a critique of political abstraction deprived of positive political content, the novel's advocacy for individual subjectivity persists in Isaac's final ethical choice to honor the sovereignty of one "concrete individual" rather than to "abstract" her. Isaac must choose between two conflicting systems of law—the transactional one of his tribes, and the jurisprudence of the Garuda. "I neither express myself nor determine myself through my acts," Bakhtin wrote of heroic individual action, "I actualize through them something that has validity with respect to objects and meaning" (Bakhtin 1990, 138). These things both within the self and without the self against which we are able to enact meaningful choice, are those threatened by the abject, leading toward Durkheim's anomie or, more appropriately, the nihilism which Baudrillard sees as the endpoint

of deconstructionism, "which corresponds to the destruction of the order of meaning" (Baudrillard 1994, 160). Isaac asserts his subjectivity against these impulses not by the act itself, but by the act's relation to exterior referents not disrupted by the slake-moths, in this case the law of the Garuda. And in refusing to remake Yagharek, Isaac also helps to preserve the subjectivity, the concrete individuality, of Kar'uchai and of himself. Read in light of the slake-moths' threat to systems of law in New Crobuzon, which we have seen in all their failure, and their threat to the inner workings of subjectivity, the very place that Isaac must go to discern justice, the strange ending of *Perdido Street Station* is not the upending of a heroic narrative but the culmination of one.

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Crime Fiction and the Idea of the Normal Space: *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime*

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Abstract:

This article looks at what I call the 'normal space' in crime fiction—a normative vision of society in relation to which the criminal event forms an exception or a mystery. Illustrating this concept, I bring in Sean Penn's film adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's story *The Pledge* as well as Lars von Trier's *The Element of Crime*. Both films explore a normal space in dissolution or in the process of becoming a zone in which the lines between detective and criminal, as well as crime and its solution, become blurred. I employ the term 'katechon,' an ambiguous figure Carl Schmitt uses to describe a double movement—designating both the fight against the antichrist but at the same time the postponement of the kingdom of God—to capture this moment of blurring, which at the same time is a form of clarification; it reveals the fictionality of the normal space, its absence of absolute legitimacy, ironically at a time when this space seems to have reached its complete, immanent form, one that no longer recognizes an 'outside.' In both *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime*, what brings us back from the edge of destruction is the figure of the detective surrendering to madness, that is, to a self-enclosed and separate world, a gesture that thus restores the possibility of the normal space.

Keywords: Crime Fiction, the normal space, genre, Penn's *The Pledge*, von Trier's *The Element of Crime.*

Introduction

Genres are born out of and die in very specific contexts and periods, under very specific circumstances, often in connection with concrete events; some survive these originating circumstances, some disappear, and others again manage to adapt, develop, and spread in other historical contexts and societies far beyond their place of origin. Ever since crime fiction emerged during the 19th century, it has remained one of the most popular genres. Especially during the interwar years and post-war years, the genre developed and expanded remarkably. Today, the genre exists and thrives in virtually every society and culture around the world. Notably, the crime genre has shown remarkable geographical and historical adaptability and flexibility, seeming

to thrive through the constant development of new forms and variations, never exhausting its repertoire of inventive and ingenious crime techniques and solutions.[1] Yet, despite crime fiction's remarkably flexible, global adaptability and the dense web of different sub-species that exist today, its basic formal features have largely remained unchanged both historically and geographically.[2] These features are arguably more insistent and necessary than those of many other genres. Crime fiction is quite simply one of the most recognizable genres in the world, identifiable by a literary recipe that contains many if not most of the ingredients included in the texts that emerged in the mid-19th century. These include an astonishing, unsolved mystery that typically involves a criminal offense of some sort; a character actively seeking to solve this mystery; and finally an ending that usually unveils the mystery. In other words, the genre has managed to maintain its relevance and fascination across history and geographical spread, while also retaining its basic formal features. Tzvetan Todorov has given what is perhaps the most basic definition of crime fiction—a story that actually consists of two stories: the story of the crime ('what really happened') and the story of the investigation (how did we learn 'what really happened').[3] Generally, crime stories—insofar as they are 'pure' crime stories—have a sharp and narrow focus on these two narratives.

Significantly, this narrow focus involves an implicit exclusion of potentially subversive questions regarding the legitimacy and nature of the law, that is, questions concerning who has the right to define what crime is in the first place and whether a given act is illegal and punishable. The crime plot rarely questions whether something is a crime; it is. The definitional process is thus always already over when the crime plot begins.[4] In this sense, there is always a *predefined or pre-established moment* detectable in any work of crime fiction; every crime story defines itself as having come *after* this moment, that is, after the moment when this event, this act, is defined as a crime—even if the actual crime happens in the middle of the story.

This paper takes a closer look at this moment preceding the event of the crime story. It explores a central albeit largely implicit premise of the genre of crime fiction: a normative vision of society in relation to which the criminal event forms an exception or a mystery. Discussing Sean Penn's film adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's story *The Pledge* as well as Lars von Trier's *The Element of Crime*, I argue that both films explore a normal space in dissolution or in the process of becoming a zone in which the lines between detective and criminal, as well as crime and its solution, become blurred. I employ the term 'katechon,' an ambiguous figure Carl Schmitt uses to describe a double movement—designating both the fight against the antichrist but at the same time the postponement of the kingdom of God—to capture this moment of blurring, which at the same time is a form of clarification; it reveals the fictionality of the normal space, its absence of absolute legitimacy, ironically at a time when this space seems to have reached its complete, immanent form, one that no longer recognizes an 'outside.'[5] In both *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime*, what brings us back from the edge of destruction is the figure

of the detective surrendering to madness, that is, to a self-enclosed and separate world, a gesture that thus restores the possibility of the normal space.

The Normal Space

Although stories about crime go back to the earliest literary history, the modern crime genre emerges around the first half of the nineteenth century, a period that largely coincides with the consolidation of the modern, political space as a delimited territory ruled by a homogenous, legal-political, institutional framework.[6] This territory largely coincides with what I refer to as the normal space, which essentially involves the manifestation of the idea that violence, injustice, and transgressions constitute *exceptions* to the norm—and thus threats that must be marginalized, neutralized, and eventually expelled and eradicated. In this delimited territory, all individuals are at least in principle protected and bound by the regulations and workings of a modern legal framework. The latter embodies what the sociologist Hans Joas has called "the dream of a modernity without violence", i.e., a society freed from the forms of violence characterizing premodern societies.[7] As Norbert Elias observes in his book *The Civilizing Process*, violence in premodern societies—which included territorial wars, conquests, plunder, feuds, retributive acts, torture, duels, and violent sports—was integral to the balance of social life, the notion of justice, political questions, identity, and sometimes a source of joy and pleasure.[8] Accompanying this process of marginalizing violence we find the idea of a delimited territory in which all individuals at least in principle are protected and bound by the regulations and workings of a modern legal framework. My argument here is that one of the implicit premises of the genre of crime fiction is the existence of this normal space. Reflecting on the nature of this normal space, Carl Schmitt argues that

> The endeavor of a normal state consists above all in assuring total peace within the state and its territory. To create tranquility, security, and order and thereby establish the normal situation is the prerequisite for legal norms to be valid. Every norm presupposes a normal situation, and no norm can be valid in an entirely abnormal situation. (Schmitt, *Political Theology* 46)

One of the things that Schmitt points out is that at a very fundamental level, the normal space was only ever a fiction—but a fiction that so to speak forgot its own fictionality. As the consolidation of the normal space spreads to the extent that this space becomes synonymous with the way in which everyday life is experienced and lived, *as reality itself*—a certain paradox emerges: at no point before in history has the state been able to monopolize violence and control unsanctioned transgressions with such aggression, insistence, and force; yet ironically at no point before in history has the state ever felt more vulnerable and threatened by those acts, at least to the extent that they remain unaddressed or unpunished. The state becomes increasingly intolerant when it comes to violence perpetrated by others than itself.

Within the confines of this normal space I want to identify a vital context for understanding some of the socio-political premises and challenges underpinning the emergence of the crime genre. The delimited territory forming the contours of the normal space corresponds with a modern legal framework not only in the obvious sense that by crossing state borders one often encounters other forms of legalities, enforced by other sovereign orders—but perhaps especially in the sense that the normal space *as normative* presupposes an idea of delimitation, a demarcated space within which a notion of immanence can be created and in which it makes sense. The normal space embodies a particular fantasy about dealing with certain actions, perceived to be transgressive or problematic. It is here, in the wake of the emergence, formation, and consolidation of this space, that the crime genre gradually becomes one of the most purified cultural articulations of this fantasy; that is, at a time when the state's institutions of power have monopolized the right to use violence—as well as the right to define concepts in general—within a specific, delimited territory. The collective experience of the normal space manifests itself *implicitly* or *indirectly* in the sense that it is rarely addressed, reflected upon, or questioned in a direct sense. Its existence is largely taken for granted. As such, the normal space has no concrete, tangible, or positive content. It is a space defined in terms of what one might call a negative imagination, that is, the *inability* to imagine a point outside its limitations. It is in this sense that the normal space thus produces and reproduces a collective experience of reality that no longer possesses the ability to imagine an 'outside'.

The crime genre as such depends entirely on an idea of immanence, a space that in principle tolerates no outside legal order or normative reality. Once this self-enclosed reality becomes a distinct political possibility, the conditions for the modern crime genre likewise emerge—that is, roughly, around the first half of the nineteenth century and onwards. During this time, we begin to see the development of a literary genre narrowing its focus around what was earlier no mystery at all, but which in this secularly flattened, demarcated, and self-enclosed space becomes ever more marginalized, singularly crystallized, puzzling, impossible, enigmatic: the crime and its solution.[9]

It is in this sense that one could define the crime genre as a narrative fantasy made possible by incorporating another fiction as its main premise, namely the fiction of the normal space. The latter only becomes a normal space to the extent that it operates smoothly, at a level of self-evident seamlessness, so much so that it overlaps and eventually becomes identical with an objective-scientific concept of material reality. This self-evident seamlessness remains intact insofar as the implicit premise of the normal space is maintained, i.e., its implicit assumption of a space that is basically cleansed of illegal acts of violence. The normal space is thus characterized not only by the dream of a peaceful society, but just as much, and perhaps even more fundamentally, by the implicit and negative assumption of the *absence* of illegal acts of violence. From a historical perspective, the crime genre constitutes both a confirmation and consolidation of this negative assumption—*and* an exploration of exceptions to this fiction that the normal space constitutes,

that is, when something problematic occurs, something unacceptable and fundamentally incompatible with the modus vivendi of the normal space. The crime genre tests and stages these transgressive exceptions, while at the same time offering ingenious models of solution.

The unsolved, mysterious crime is a perennial challenge to the normal space in that it stands as a parenthesis or exception around everything that this space implicitly guarantees; it thus ultimately questions the validity, the *reality*, of the space. It is important to remember here that in crime fiction, the crime rarely involves the neighbor's son stealing a bike or another criminal activity that can be easily solved.[10] Quite the contrary, we are only ever encountering a particularly mysterious, malignant, or in other ways *exceptionally problematic* crime, whose apparent impossibility and resistance implicitly asks a fundamental question about the normal space, namely whether this space is in fact normative at all, that is, whether it is real. The very presence of this kind of crime questions the *normativity* of the normal space, typically enforced by the police or other state-affiliated institutions, and furthermore questions whether these institutions are sufficient; the transgressive, criminalized act thus constitutes a remnant of a kind, an exception that constantly challenges, problematizes, and ultimately threatens to undermine the normal space—or to turn this space into a zone of abnormality. I argue that the modern crime genre typically evolves around this mysterious remnant, around a particularly mysterious, malignant, or in other ways exceptionally problematic crime, whose apparent unsolvability implicitly asks whether what we assume to be a normal space is in fact normative at all or whether it is fiction.

Within the confines of the normal space, any violent act conducted by a non-state agent in principle poses a threat, not so much because a concrete-individual crime would constitute a real, existential threat—but simply because it threatens to reveal the *fiction* of the normal space, its unreality, that is, the fiction of a space whose very premise is the eradication of crime.[11] Incidentally, this is also why the concrete-individual crime as such—its nature, whatever it is, e.g., theft, murder etc.—is largely irrelevant. What we remember from an Agatha Christie story is less what the crime was all about, its nature, the motives, the people hurt, etc., but rather *how* the crime was committed and *how* it was solved.

Political Theology and Crime Fiction

This question leads us to consider the connections between crime fiction as a genre and some of the problems that political theology articulates, or more specifically whether the normal space really *is* normal or whether it is fiction, an illusion, a lie. Conceptualized by Carl Schmitt in the 1920s (but with a much older lineage),[12] political theology designates some of the problems of a transitional world becoming increasingly secular and immanent. It too addresses an unresolved remnant, a problematic, in secular societies—namely the legitimacy of political authority; in the absence of God, who has the right to monopolize the use of violence? and who possesses the definitional right—that is, the right to define something as legal and something else

as illegal—and on what basis?[13] The normal space results from this transition towards the immanent, de-transcendentalized world, a process that reached a preliminary culmination point in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The point that Schmitt makes and which he attempts to encapsulate through the notion of political theology is that in modern society, human laws replace the notion of absolute justice; rational knowledge replaces the notion of absolute truth. Secularization here means that humans become judges instead of God, while justice becomes a concept to be settled in the court. Or: in secular societies, we act as if we have become God. In such a secular society, the unsolved crime poses a profound problem, because it exposes our human limitations and potentially reveals that we live in a meaningless world without any higher moral authority, that is, a world in which evil people get away with their evil deeds, and are perhaps even rewarded, while the innocent are punished. The unsolved crime thus questions the very idea of a society, the meaning of a community.

The crime genre can be seen as a response to this development, plotting ingenious solutions to ever-more-challenging mysteries. It is when the police and the judiciary are unable to solve a particular case—when the mystery refuses to be revealed—that the detective in crime fiction is summoned. Ordinary cases require trivial, mechanical, automatic, non-original, and random solutions—all of which are taken care of by the police. The police represent the law in its generality, the generally applicable law (and hence perhaps also a mechanical and de-individualized application of justice). On the other hand, crime fiction revolves around the ambiguous, the extraordinary, the singular, the unique, the spectacular, *the particularly sinister and mysterious event*.

In some of the earliest modern crime stories, the main purpose of the detective—for example, Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste C. Dupin—typically coincides with efforts to respond to the problem of political theology; that is, the detective's incredible and exceptional rationality and deductive skills bring us yet again within the vicinity of the transcendent, albeit notably in a wholly secular world. Thus, despite the detective's surprising insights, everything can in the end always be explained rationally, immanently, that is, by virtue of this world's phenomena. The immanent social order of the normal space is precisely characterized by the impossibility of the transcendent, the metaphysical, the magical, the supernatural; everything must, in principle, be explained through the same methods and frameworks of understanding.

The detective in that sense saves us from the collapse of the known physical universe; that is, the discovery that our human and scientific explanations and categories are not sufficient—that causes sometimes are not followed by the same effects, that the laws of gravity no longer apply, that ghosts really exist, that the dead may rise again. What the detective gives us is typically an incredible but nonetheless *natural* explanation of something that would otherwise remain inexplicable and hence question the very foundation of the known world. The traditional detective is an ambiguous figure in the sense that he or she on the one hand pays homage to the possibility of transcendence, i.e., in the form of the detective's genius, the almost magical ability

to understand and decode a truth that appears mysterious and enigmatic to everyone else, and on the other hand an unambiguous tribute to the order of immanence, that is, an order of absolute rationality; hence the soothing and deeply materialist explanation once the crime has been solved. The traditional detective thus allows us to have it both ways; the ability to decode absolute truth as the legitimate basis of distributing absolute justice—without at the same time at any point seriously undermining the normal space.

The locked room mystery as an allegory of the normal space

It is against this background that we may understand one of the crime genre's most persistent and most classic tableaux, namely *the mystery of the locked room*, and more specifically the mysterious crime that happens, impossibly, within the confines of a space where such a possibility has been eliminated, at least in principle. I argue that the mystery of the locked room allegorically embodies the idea of a normal space in which the crime or the transgressive event should in principle have been eliminated and hence become impossible—*but which nevertheless occurs*.

Crime fiction was from the very beginning closely tied to the emergence of the normal space, i.e., the carefully defined, delimited territorial space of the state suffused by the idea of absolute order. It is precisely the delimitation of the normal space that enables the understanding of its transgression as an exception, i.e., as a unique and individualized event, which thus, implicitly, confirms the exact opposite, namely, the totally immanent and peaceful space as the *norm*.

To the modern, sovereign state it becomes imperative to move away from tautological forms of legitimacy, i.e., legitimizing the monopoly on violence simply by referring to more violence, or to a transcendent-theological principle. Within the normal space, violence no longer possesses a natural occurrence in society, let alone a positive-vitalist force. This is why no matter how violently the state punishes the perpetrator of violence, it is never enough: the criminal act must be explained and understood, its neutralization justified and legitimized according to the principles guaranteed by the normal space. Furthermore, the unsanctioned, free-floating, and detached act of violence—that is, a violent incident not connected to a specific subject—is especially dangerous and undesirable *because* it is inexplicable and mysterious, that is, an act that could have been committed by anyone, including the state. The task of the state is thus not only to eradicate the unsanctioned use of violence, but equally to explain it and to connect this act to a punishable individual. It is in this perspective— in the increasingly paranoid eyes of the state—that all citizens gradually become at least potential criminals, that is, individuals threatening to undermine the state's monopoly on violence and in a further sense question the legitimacy of the normal space. In the locked room mystery or whodunnit crime story, the idea is that everyone becomes a suspect, that anyone could have done it, *and* that someone really did commit the crime. In fact, one could go even further and say that the person who looks the *least* suspicious is often the one who turns out to be the culprit, and conversely the one who looks the most suspicious turns out to be innocent—a cliché in crime fiction, which underlines the notion

that in the eyes of the state, we are all potential criminals. Only the detective—with his or her solution—can redeem the community from this festering suspicion that threatens to turn every one of us into a criminal.

In crime fiction there is always a culprit, someone who really did it. Trivial as this might sound, the point here is that one of the functions of crime fiction is precisely to *produce* a subject in relation to an otherwise free-floating act, a bit like the Cheshire cat's smile in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Oftentimes evil comes in many complex shapes and forms, derived from many different sources, a series of unrelated events or accidents happening simultaneously, or perhaps from non-human forces, like a tsunami or a pandemic. Crime fiction humanizes evil in the sense of identifying a single source of evil, a site of agency, someone to blame, and whose arrest and punishment may serve as a restoration of the idea of a meaningful, just society—in other words, the normal space.

The Pledge and the Katechon

Here, I want to turn to two contemporary—and perhaps somewhat atypical—articulations of crime fiction around the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century, Penn's *The Pledge* (2001) and von Trier's *The Element of Crime* (1984). The former is a film adaptation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's story *Das Versprechen*. The plot begins a few hours before Jerry Black is about to retire as a police officer; a girl called Ginny Larsen, is found horribly murdered. When Jerry informs the grieving parents of the death of their child, the mother makes Jerry swear on his soul's salvation that he will find and arrest the murderer. The police arrest a man, but the details do not add up and the man commits suicide at the police station. The police decide to close the case, but Jerry is not convinced and starts re-investigating the case. He discovers several important clues—for example, a drawing by the murdered girl which contains hedgehogs, a black station wagon, and a huge man dressed in black—and also that the police have been unable to solve other cases involving missing or murdered children that are similar to the Ginny Larsen case. He buys an old gas station because he has figured out that the murderer might pass through the area—based on the murderer's previous movements. Here, he meets a woman named Lori and her little child Chrissy, and together they start a family life. Soon after, Chrissy starts to talk about a man she's met, who gives her chocolate pieces shaped like little hedgehogs, and who also happens to be driving in a black station wagon. Jerry immediately contacts his former colleagues and on the day Chrissy is supposed to meet the man at a remote location, the police are hiding in the background, ready to arrest the suspect. But no one arrives, and Jerry subsequently loses his mind. Driving back to the station, the police officers witness a terrible car accident, which happens to be a black station wagon. In other words, the film ends on an ambiguous note—with Jerry sitting alone at an abandoned and derelict gas station, drinking whisky, mumbling to himself, clearly in a state of mental and physical deterioration; while at the

same time suggesting that there really was someone out there, a man driving around in a black station wagon killing little girls.

Within the context of his argument about political theology, Carl Schmitt refers to the concept of the katechon, a biblical term, stemming from a passage in Second Thessalonians.[14] It refers to an agent of God seeking to prevent the coming of antichrist, the breakout of chaos and disorder, but also, at the same time, a temporal delay of the coming of the kingdom of God. It is a figure that fights against the evil, but in doing so also prolongs the fight, deepens it, and thus in fact prevents the final overcoming or defeat of evil. And one could go even further and say that it is a figure that fights the antichrist, but also keeps the antichrist ever-present and alive through that very fight, perhaps even *producing* the antichrist, or at some point during that fight *becoming* the antichrist. It is thus a fight that eventually eradicates the clear boundaries between the katechon and the antichrist. The point here is that *The Pledge* can be read as a work that explores the ambiguity of the figure of the katechon.

At the beginning of the film, Jerry is about to end his work as a detective, but nonetheless continues to work on the Ginny Larsen case after he has retired and after the case has been closed. Jerry becomes weighed down by the solemn pledge to Ginny Larsen's grieving parents. Perhaps because he *recognizes* that this pledge ultimately entails not only one murdered girl, or many, but something altogether more fundamental. That the pledge to find the child murderer becomes much more than an empty gesture intended to comfort the desperately grieving parents—i.e., the fact that it becomes *real*, to the extent that it comes to haunt Jerry—is possibly a testimony to the fact that it touches upon something essential, a crystallization of the struggle that defines Jerry, his being, the very meaning of his work as a police detective during all those years, and which—along the lines of our argument here in this paper—one could formulate as *the belief in the normal space as absolutely just and truthful*; that is, Jerry represents the guarantor, the one who pledges to the rest of us that the normal space—as a space of absolute justice and truth—is real and legitimate. In other words, it is the reality of that space that is at stake.

Believing too much in the normal space

Within the normal space, the detective in crime fiction as we have seen constitutes an exceptional figure, one that is precisely defined by the promise to discover the truth and identify the true killer, that is, as distinct from simply finding *a* possible killer who could have been present at the time of the murder and thus someone who could possibly have done it. Officer Krolak, Jerry's younger colleague and the one taking over Jerry's old office after the latter's retirement, here represents the ordinary police, satisfied with an arrest of any subject who could possibly have committed the murder. Krolak's objective is precisely *not* absolute justice and truth first and foremost, but rather the fact *that someone* is identified as the plausible killer, which thus allows for the case to be closed.

The premise of the plot in *The Pledge* involves a situation in which Jerry, as the possible guarantor of the legitimacy of the normal space, is about to retire prematurely, i.e., while the criminal—or the antichrist—is still potentially out there. Jerry is uncertain as to whether the police have caught the right person, and he eventually becomes convinced that the true child murderer is still out there, and moreover that this person has done it before and will do it again. Retiring at this moment in time means—at least to the extent that Jerry represents an *exceptional* detective—that the entire legitimacy and raison d'etre of the normal space is at stake. This insistence or doggedness is what makes Jerry transcend the status of the police; i.e., what makes him a *detective*, an exceptional figure, someone intent on finding the truth and not simply plugging a hole in the normal space.

It is in this perspective that one could argue that the detective as an exceptional figure occupies the position of the subject who believes a little too much in the fiction of the normal space, its perfection, its absolute nature, one that has replaced and thus eradicated the need for a transcendent dimension. Ironically, it is precisely the detective's stubbornness and persistence—what makes this figure exceptional—that eventually threatens to expose the fiction of the normal space, its limits, its underlying reality; that it is *not* absolute, transcendent, or semi-divine, but rather random and ultimately meaningless in terms of administering absolute justice and truth. The exceptional detective thus constitutes an ambiguous figure, or rather a figure embodying an ambiguity that is constitutive of the normal space itself. The exceptional detective is at one and the same time protecting the normal space from its enemies, but also, qua his or her exceptional status, a reminder of this space's limitations, its fictionality—a reminder of the fact that the normal space *needs* the exceptional detective to sustain its fiction. Incidentally, this is also why the police typically *dislike* the figure of the detective in crime fiction—another endearing cliché in crime fiction, one that we find in the earliest modern crime stories as well as in the latest versions on Netflix. It is in this sense that Jerry embodies the figure of the katechon, the one who prevents the coming of the antichrist, but at the same time prevents the normal space from transcending its limitations, its fictionality.

The absence of a redeeming moment in *The Pledge*

In the traditional detective story, there is typically a moment—however minimal—of disbelief, eccentricity, abnormality, or even madness during the detective's process of discovery, a process that often comes across as strange, at times offensive, even perverse or bizarre, but above all remains inexplicable and distinctly different from the police's methods. However, once the case has been truthfully solved, once the detective's explanation has fully satisfied our desire for the solution to the mystery—all this strangeness is redeemed and the detective is reincorporated into the normal space; the detective's temporary abnormality thus ends up reinforcing the normal space.

In *The Pledge*, this redeeming moment never occurs, and it is precisely because this moment is absent that the detective ends up threatening to reveal rather than reinforcing the normal space, that is, its fiction. Jerry's madness here signifies on the one hand the terrifying insight or awareness of the impossibility of keeping a sacred pledge in a secular realm—and on the other hand what one could see as the normal space's expulsion of Jerry, perhaps even a form of *revenge*; exposing Jerry as absolutely mad, fabulating, and untrustworthy.

The Pledge—much more than Friedrich Dürrenmatt's original story—constantly insists on retaining this ambiguity; on the one hand, it is evident that Jerry becomes more and more insane as the plot develops, and that the redemptive solution becomes ever more elusive and unrealistic, but on the other hand the film also clearly shows us that something mysterious is really happening; children *have* disappeared and been killed mysteriously, the police *have* been unable to solve these cases properly, the locations *do* form a strange and indicative pattern, the police *did* interrogate their man under highly problematic circumstances, Ginny's drawing *does* suggest something strange and suspicious, there *is* a black station wagon driving around, Chrissy *is* approached by a strange man, and she *does* receive chocolate pieces shaped like little hedgehogs from him, and, finally, a man in a black station wagon *is* in a car accident at the end of the film, perhaps on his way to meet Chrissy.

In other words, there *is* an objective reality that supports Jerry's theory. To everyone else, however, his theory seems like a crazy fantasy. That *The Pledge* throughout retains this ambiguity between on the one hand Jerry's gradually deterioriating psychological condition (i.e., that there was never a murderer other than the person who committed suicide in police custody) and a real child murderer out there (which thus at the same time implies Jerry's status as the exceptional figure pursuing truth and justice at all costs)—is precisely what brings to life the problem of political theology in the film.

The Element of Crime: to identify with and think like the criminal

Lars von Trier's early crime film *The Element of Crime*, like *The Pledge*, can be read as a story about the katechon's attempt to save the normal space from being revealed as fiction—by descending into a state of madness. The film's main character is the former police officer, Fisher, who has lived in Cairo for many years and is being called back to Europe to solve a mystery, the so-called Lotto murders, i.e., little girls selling lotto tickets who've been murdered in bestial ways.

The film begins with Fisher, now back in Cairo, going through a hypnosis session recalling what happened back in Europe. The main story of the film itself is thus placed within the frames of the hypnosis session. The Europe Fisher conjures up while being hypnotized is a dark and dystopian place shrouded in permanent darkness. As a detective, Fisher is heavily inspired by a textbook called *The Element of Crime*, written by Fisher's old mentor, Osborne. The basic thesis of the book is that in order to solve the exceptional crime, one must try to understand the criminal's mind and learn to think like this person. It is this method that gradually escalates into

insanity over the course of the film's story. In chasing the lotto killer, named Harry Grey, Fisher begins to behave more and more like him. He follows in his footsteps, imitates him, starts a relationship with Grey's former mistress, and finally inadvertently strangles a little girl he was supposed to have protected. That is to say, Fisher crosses the line of the identification and *becomes* the lotto murderer himself; a catastrophic coincidence of detective and criminal.

To imagine the exceptional crime outside the normal space

Why does this gradual identification take place? More specifically: why this ambiguity, to which Fisher is completely blind, i.e., the fact that he is increasingly being transformed into Harry Gray? In line with the argument I have pursued in this paper, one could say that Fisher's identification is a symptom of the gradual dissolution of the normal space. Within the dissolved normal space, crime and investigation are no longer clearly distinguishable—precisely because the ability to maintain a distance, and thus a distinction, erodes; everything flows together, the detective becomes the criminal, the investigation becomes the crime, or vice versa. The crucial point here is that in the dissolved normal space, it is no longer possible to tell the difference.

However, the film tries to hold on to this possibility of distinction—via the frame construction, Fisher's story being told within a hypnosis session. It is in this sense that one can say that the normal space paradoxically is saved from dissolution by the detective being declared insane. What the film thus attempts to envision is to imagine the exceptional crime outside the normal space. The film ends with Fisher desperately begging the therapist to wake him up—in other words, it concludes without the frame construction coming to an end; ambiguously, inconclusively. The point here is not simply that Fisher during the hypnosis session remembers the trauma of becoming the lotto murderer, Harry Grey, but more disturbingly that at some point it becomes unclear as to whether he really is Detective Fisher being hypnotized, or whether he is in fact Harry Grey, whether he was always Harry Grey from the very beginning, or whether Harry Grey *or* Detective Fisher ever existed in the first place.

The Element of Crime is thus a film that tries to imagine the impossible, namely the exceptional crime outside the framework of the normal space. This outside is not just a state of nature, lawlessness, or anarchy, but more specifically an amorphous space where distinctions can no longer be clearly drawn. In such an amorphous space, the act of solving a crime becomes impossible. Instead, what we witness is the collapse of the crime genre into something altogether different, e.g., a medical case story, a story about insanity.

Conclusion

Both *The Pledge* and *The Element of Crime* explore the limits of the implicit premise of the crime genre—the normal space—perhaps so radically that the only way the detective, as a figure of the katechon, can save this space, the credibility of this fictional space, is by surrendering to madness, that is, to a self-enclosed world separated—by way of madness—from the idea of a

space that remains uncontaminated by the unsolved crime. What both works explore is the inherent strangeness of the normal space, its inherent anomality, or what Carl Schmitt has called the miracle of the normal space, that is, the state's ability to pull us out of the swamp of the state of nature, out of civil war, permanent violence, and anarchy, and to create a fiction involving the idea that the political body is fundamentally rational and peaceful, and that the normal society can solve all the political and moral problems of the world *rationally and hence peacefully*—albeit sometimes only, grudgingly, in unique cases, with the help of the exceptional detective.

Endnotes:

1. See Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* (1991), Gosselin, *Multicultural Detective Fiction* (1999), Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire: The Colony in Nineteenth-Century Fictions* (2003), Reitz, *Detecting the Nation* (2004), Matzke et.al., *Postcolonial Postmortems* (2006), Miller, *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fiction* (2012), Pepper et. al., *Globalization and the State in Contemporary Crime Fiction* (2016), and Nilsson et. al. *Crime Fiction as World Literature* (2017).
2. As Cook argues the detective story "has possessed a recognizable and stable narrative ... an essential homogeneity, a unity of structure, theme and language which meets a deep desire in the reader" (X). Regarding the genre's homogeneity and conservatism, see also Moretti 11.
3. See Todorov 159-160.
4. As Dennis Porter observes, "in a detective story, the law is never brought to justice" (121).
5. See Hardt and Negri, Empire 3-21.
6. See Elden, *Birth of Territory* 2, 15; and Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors* 153-180.
7. See Joas, *War and Modernity* 53.
8. See Elias, *The Civilizing Process* 163.
9. As Newman writes, "In this flattened-out world there can be no place for hierarchy or genuine authority" (26).
10. As Boltanski argues, crime fiction embodies a reworking of the anxiety generated by the conception of a social reality based on an idea of absolute peace. See Boltanski 15.
11. From a political perspective, the real danger emerges when an isolated, exempt act is elevated into a general tendency, which would expose the fictionality of the normal space, and hence potentially throw the state into an existential struggle for survival.
12. See Newman 5.
13. See Schmitt, *Political Theology* 5.
14. See Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth* 59-62.

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The Rain in Spain:
Jewish Thought, Practices and Transmissions

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Abstract:

The link between rains, religion and prayer, as well as individual charisma, is ancient. This paper looks at some late medieval and early modern reverberations on this topic. They are of interest because of the intensity and prominence of the subject in the contemporary evidence. They also allow us to observe the rich coalescence of different areas of Jewish thought on the same subject: liturgical jurisprudence, poetry, calendar, family and other traditions. They also present us with the possibility of adding and comparing contemporary Christian perceptions to the Jewish ones. They raise the question of different Jewish perspectives on prayers and rains.

Keywords: Jews in Spain. medieval rain. medieval liturgy. oral traditions. textual transmissions

To achieve a sense of proportion on the subject's chronology and geography, it is necessary to bear in mind that the concern with droughts, rains, floods and so on is not privative of the transition from late medieval to early modern period nor to Spain, i.e. the focus of our attention. The relations of such natural phenomena to religion are in evidence very early on. One needs only recall Irit Ziffer's analyses of archeological discoveries in Biblical Tirzah. They relate to ancient Near Eastern representations of rain and their figurative language within the cult of the late 10th-early 9th century BCE. Rain plays a significant role in the archeological finds analyzed by her.[1] Manuel Antonio Marcos Casquero[2] sees the concern with rain in the frame of archaic aquatic cosmogonies which continue until the decline of the Middle Ages. Some threads of such ancient rain lore would reverberate in the Late Middle Ages. Our focus in the following lines is on the Jewish [and, occasionally, *judeo-converso*] responses to drought and rain in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period.

I

In the Temple, a notable ceremony was the water libation when the water was brought to the altar through the Water Gate.[3] After the destruction of the Temple, the focus is transferred

to liturgy. In the Talmud, prayers for rain are discussed [particularly in *bTa'anit*]. None other than N. Wieder[4] saw these pro-pluvial rogatives as the most impressive items in the whole Jewish Order of Prayers.

The prayers are linked to matters of individual charisma[5] and to a number of individuals. But the most prominent personality was Honi [Onias] the Circle maker.

> Once, most of the month of Adar had passed but rain had still not fallen. They sent this message to Ḥoni Ha-Me'agel: Pray, and rain will fall. He prayed, but no rain fell. He drew a circle in the dust and stood inside it, ...
> Ḥoni said before God: Master of the Universe, Your children have turned their faces toward me, as I am like a member of Your household. Therefore, I take an oath by Your great name that I will not move from here until you have mercy upon Your children and answer their prayers for rain. Rain began to trickle down, but only in small droplets. His students said to him: Rabbi, we have seen that you can perform great wonders, but this quantity of rain is not enough to ensure that we will not die. It appears to us that a small amount of rain is falling only to enable you to dissolve your oath, but it is not nearly enough to save us.
> Ḥoni continued: Nevertheless, bring me a bull. I will sacrifice it as a thanks-offering and pray at the same time. They brought him a bull for a thanks-offering. He placed his two hands on its head and said before God: Master of the Universe, Your nation Israel, whom You brought out of Egypt, cannot bear either an excess of good or an excess of punishment. You grew angry with them and withheld rain, and they are unable to bear it. You bestowed upon them too much good, and they were also unable to bear it. May it be Your will that the rain stop and that there be relief for the world. Immediately, the wind blew, the clouds dispersed, the sun shone, and everyone went out to the fields and gathered for themselves truffles and mushrooms that had sprouted in the strong rain. [*bTa'anit* 23a]

The archetype of Honi reverberates in the Middle Ages in a number of ways. His model continued the link between rain, religion and God. Honi's case emphasized the individual's role and charisma. That he was recognized as having a particular personal style of prayer is clear from the rabbinical reservations about his prayer. He underlines the notion of a certain "familiarity" with God in matters of rain, and a particular bond between God as rain maker and his people.

The Jewish prayer for rain consists of the petition for dew and rain in the ninth benediction (Birkat ha-Shanim). When, in fourteenth-century Seville, Abudarham wrote on liturgy, the Jews of Spain adhered to the Talmudic rule that "a man must not ask for his worldly necessities" in the first three benedictions; therefore Abudarham distinguishes the additional service for the Eighth of the Feast only by having the reader proclaim "He causeth the wind," before the silent prayer.[6] The question which arose was about the exact time of year when the prayer was to be recited.[7] The general practice amongst Jews of Europe was to follow the Babylonian procedure of starting this *tal u-matar* prayer on the sixtieth day from the autumnal equinox. Numerous legal/halakhic authorities from the eleventh to the fourteenth-century attest

to the concern with this issue, not only in France, Germany and Italy, but also in Spain. Thus, for example, Abraham ha-Yarhi settled in Toledo in 1204. His main work, *Sefer Ha-Manhig*, [ca 1204] witnesses several concerns of the Jews in Spain, including rain. Yom Tov ben Abraham Ishbili had been a disciple of Adret [d. 1310] in Barcelona and his *Novella* treat the question of rain. The Geronan Nahmanides' anonymous student refers to Catalonia in this frame in the thirteenth-century. Hayyim ben Samuel of Tudela, the 14th century disciple of Adret, is yet another rabbinical authority concerned with rain and so is Rabbi Nissim of Gerona [d.1376].[8]

Asher ben Yehiel of Toledo, [*Responsa* IV,10] is particularly interesting. His responsum was edited by a descendant. It dates the writing to Passover 5073=1313. At the time there was no rain and a fast was proclaimed. On the first night of Passover, he was sitting by the entrance to his house surrounded by his disciples. And he asked them: why not pray for rain till Pentecost? And, indeed, the precentor at the Great Synagogue [of Toledo] prayed but there was opposition. Asher says that he did not fight it because he wanted to avoid factionalism in the community. He compares the Franco-German territories of Ashkenaz – whose climate is generous – to his new home [Spain] where they need water more than anywhere.

The responsum, usually read for its halakhic arguments, is of moment in other ways too. The point of departure is the drought of Passover 1313 and the consequent prayers and fast. This is not formulated as if it were an unusual occurrence nor is the majority population involved by way of commands or by applying pressure. The question of dates of prayers was taken so seriously that Asher feared that it would lead to internal fights or factionalism in his community. Asher weaves his own experiences into the juridical argument. The liturgical question was conducive to establishing specific, concrete, physical geography and the region [i.e. not merely "Diaspora," but Cologne, Montpelier, Toledo] as concepts in Jewish legal thought on the topic.

II

As has been seen, the liturgical halakhic discussions were permeated by questions of dates and the calendar. Similarly, stories about bringing down rain frequently note the month of the drought or the rain. The liturgical focus is closely linked to the calendar. This barely requires comment in the case of a time bound liturgy such as the Jewish one, but it also applies to rains, which are season-bound. Recent research has emphasized that questions of calendar can be an index of the beliefs of a given society. In the case of the Jews, they can provide evidence for aspects such as the tenor of Jewish-Christian relations and Jewish attitudes to the Christians in a given place and period. Such questions are more complex and nuanced than might be thought. Thus, the use of Christian dates, frequently related to beliefs in saints, was looked upon unfavourably by some medieval rabbinic authorities who explicitly forbade even the mention of places with saints names. And yet, practice in real life, as revealed by archival documents, was another matter. We can find Hebrew character signatures agreeing to such

stipulations of time as the day of John the Baptist, in the famous accord of the Puebla de Alcocer in 1382.[9] We now know more about such Jewish practices because of the discovery of multiple manuscripts in Hebrew characters containing equivalences between Jewish and Christian calendars including days of saints, whose names are frequently – but not exclusively – mentioned in their Ibero-Romance form.[10]

Here we may note a small sample of some additional Hebrew MSS containing matters related to calendars and rain, culled – not from Cambridge but – from the Vatican collections.[11] The sample is primarily from the Mediterranean area. This would constitute an alternative to the repeated attention to liturgical law or to piyyut. The latter may have obscured other, perhaps more mondaine, evidence and perceptions. That is to say, we may pay attention to the less frequently observed evidence for scribal activities and reading: what does the scribal dissemination of texts tell us about the understanding of rains in the late medieval period? what were their practices of selection and contiguities?

Thus, for example, Vat. ebr. 80 is in a late 15th century hand with Italian and Sephardic semi-cursive scripts. It is interested in calendrical matters. It mentions the year [50]93=1332. The final extracts are omens predicting the annual rainfall. Vat. ebr. 167 is of 1467, in a Sephardic semi-cursive script includes portents of rains followed by portents predicting the wheat harvest. Vat. ebr. 286 is dated to mid-late 14th century and located in Byzantium. It contains rules for reciting the prayers for rain. Vat. ebr. 305 is of the late 13th century in Ashkenazic semi-cursive script. On f. 55v, it has commentaries on Hossana prayers for the festival of Sukkot or Tabernacles and the liturgical rain poem [*kerovah*] by Qallir on ff. 45r–50v. Vat. ebr. 320, is a 14th c Byzantine Hebrew MS. It includes liturgical poems for rain such as a *kerovah* by Abraham ibn Ezra (ff. 243r–245r), Vat. ebr. 329 is dated to the mid-13th century and is in Ashkenazic semi-square script. The third calendar includes the dates on which one begins to recite the prayer for rain. Vat. ebr. 509 is a collection of different manuscripts and parts of manuscripts from Italy, mainly in Italian semi-cursive scripts dated to the mid-14th century. It includes, inter alia, portents for predicting rain. Vat. ebr. 525 is a mid-16th century MS in Italian semi-cursive script highly concerned with calendar issues and how to tell whether a month will be hot or cold, rainy or dry. These scribal selections reveal something of the interests of the Hebrew reading public. Calendar and liturgy appertaining to rain are prime topics. We note the concern with omens and portents for rain.[12]

III

The presence of an early and rich tradition of liturgical poems for rain did not inhibit the creative compositions of poems for rain in late medieval Spain. An important example is the poetry of Shlomoh de Piera in the Crown of Aragon ca 1400. Bernstein, who studied him and his liturgical poetry in depth,[13] notes a difference in tone in the late fourteenth-century poetic compositions on rain. He locates it in a simplicity, sobriety or restraint which reflects the

aristocratic milieu of the poet's patrons, the Aragonese Cavalleria dynasty. He draws attention to the relative multiplicity of rain poems [seven] by this poet. He admires de Piera's evident mastery of the poetics and rules which govern that liturgical type. A minute sample of his multiple Prayers for Rain, in Cole's translation, reads: "the nation's king has asked the Lord/to set the table with food for the poor/may his words be pleasing for Him/so that the living waters pour"[14].

If de Piera's choice of the subject of his creativity echoes earlier famous poets e.g. Elazar Ha-Qalir[15] ibn Gabirol or Abraham ibn Ezra, other facets of the attitudes to rain also reveal continuities. The individual's prayers, the question of individual charisma – the individual's personal relation with God as crucial in prayer for rain, – as well as God's relation with His people are concepts reminiscent of Honi which reappear in 15th century Spain.

This reminds us that, while liturgical jurisprudence/law was the more visible site of attention to the subject of rain, there were other facets as well. In the late medieval responsa from Spain, rains are frequently mentioned in contexts which are not treated here, such as laws of damages to houses and laws of ritual baths which depended on rain water. But some are concerned with pro-pluvial solicitations and ceremonies. Examples could be provided by the more than eight hundred responsa of the Mallorcan R. Simeon b. Zemah Duran [d. 1444]. One of his letters concerns the case of a congregation who decided to fast because of lack of rain and then the rains came before the appointed date for the fast. The question is whether they need to perform the fasts they had agreed upon.[16] There is no sign of any non-Jewish involvement. Nor does it appear to be an unusual activity. Another responsum in Duran's collection refers to a case that transpired about twenty years earlier than the date of writing. A Jew [in Valencia], who later became a converso, dreamt that the congregation needed to perform three fasts and R. Isaac b Sheshet paid attention to that dream. The result was that the congregation ridiculed them to such an extent that they could barely find a quorum for afternoon prayers [ii, 128]. The impression is that special prayers and fasts for rain could be an internal matter with no pressure from the majority population and that they were not uncommon.

Baer seems to have accepted, or at least valued, the memories or traditions about Hasdai Crescas and his prayers for rain in the age of the above-mentioned Duran and de Piera, ca. 1400.[17] The source is Abraham Saba (1440–1508), who is known for his sermons. He had left Castile for Portugal before 1492 and had to leave Oporto in 1496, when King Manuel I ordered the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal. Further tragedy was the forcible abduction of his two sons. It is against this background that one must read his homiletic collection Bundle of Myrrh/*Tsror ha-mor.*[18]

According to Nahmanides, offering a sacrifice – in the Jerusalem Temple – produces nourishing rain. For Adret, God waters the Land of Israel himself as opposed to the rain elsewhere, which depends on astral influences. They both cite Talmudic and Midrashic dicta which shape their views on rain. D. Schwartz[19] has recently argued that there are elements of

theurgic magic in their interpretations. This is arguably the background to Saba's homily on Crescas' powers to bring down rain. In his sermon on the pericope beginning in Leviticus 26:3, Saba engages the traditional question on the link between the pericope of the previous week and that of the present one, both from Leviticus. The previous week's lesson concerned the sabbatical year, that is, it concerned the fields. The present one concerned the rain which is necessary for the fields. He focuses on the verse at the beginning of that week's pericope [Leviticus 26:3] "If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; 4 Then I will give you rain in due season" and particularly on the formulation "give *you* rain". In this homily on Leviticus 26, he wrote the following on the verse (in the passage of admonishment,) "and I will break your proud glory. I will make your skies like iron" (Leviticus 26:19):

> I have already noted that our pride and glory in the hands of those who took us captive was our having the power to bring the rain in its season, through all our prayers. This is well-known, for it was on this condition that we were received in the lands of other nations when we were exiled. It happened that in Aragon in a time of drought all the Jews were cast out of the city and the gates closed against them until they brought rain. Rabbi Hasdai Crescas explained this, saying at the outset of his words, "the water belongs to us" [quoting Genesis]. The Lord remembered His people and gave them rain. Later, due to our sins, we would cry and shout in a multitude, but there was no one who listened to us, since the words of Scripture, "and I will break your proud glory," were being fulfilled for us and them on account of our sins. For this is our pride and glory, our ability to bring rain in due season through our prayers. and this was the glory of our strength when the nations received us because we knew how to bring down the rain and this is what they say only this wise and intelligent people when they see the precentor enveloped in his prayer shawl when he mentions in his prayers, amongst the thirteen qualities that of "brings down the rain".[20]

Rabbi Hasdai's feat may be alluded to, somewhat obliquely – without mentioning rain explicitly – by yet another contemporary rabbi, Joseph ben Hayyim Yaavetz (1438-1539), also one of the rabbis exiled from Spain.[21] As is clear from their dates, these were not eye-witness reports but relied belatedly on oral tradition. They may, therefore, despite necessary qualifications, be juxtaposed with Sambari's *Divre Yosef*:

> R Isaac Aboab may his memory be blessed...at the time of the expulsion in those places the Jews and their descendants committed themselves to and engaged in time of drought in prayer and rogatives to bring down rains of good will and blessing and gift and on this condition the king allowed them into his land ...

The allusion is to Isaac Aboab II, the fifteenth-century Castilian rabbi and biblical commentator. He was held in esteem as a talmudist.[22]

Earlier than these authors, closer to the above-mentioned Crescas, Duran and De Piera, but in a different, philosophical vein, were the comments of Joseph Albo of Daroca in 1425. Albo is mainly remembered because of his philosophical work, the *Book of Principles*. The question of

general versus special Divine Providence was important in medieval philosophy. Albo produces positive arguments to prove the reality of individual Providence for humans. He sees in various natural and human phenomena, proof against the merely "natural" as treated by the principles of Aristotle's Physics or the laws of uniformity. This shows the presence of individual Providence. Thus, the existence of dry earth, the heaviest element, above water, cannot be accounted for by the laws of Physics. The phenomenon of rain cannot be reduced to natural law, therefore it shows will, purpose and Providence. As Husik wrote:

> Albo asserts in his *Principles* that outside of the prophets, the righteous and the pious have various degrees of power according to the degree of their union with God. Some can in this way influence the powers of nature to obey them, as a person can, by thinking of food, make his mouth water. *So they can by thought cause rain and storm.* Others can bring down fire from above and revive the dead.[23]

The above-mentioned stories about Hasdai Crescas or Isaac Aboab cohere with Albo's perspective to the effect that righteous and pious individuals can influence the powers of nature to obey them. They stand in the long line of beliefs in individual charisma modeled on Honi/Onias. The stories may be better understood by noticing how they contrast with or contradict the ethos of other views which focus, rather, on the whole congregation's petitions for rain. They contrast even more markedly with yet another trend. It is most clearly represented in the Jewish versions or oikotipe of religious tales [AT 827 or 752,] namely "Simpleton's prayer brings down rain" or "The prayer of the innocent brings down rain". These may be written or oral and their roots may be traced back to the Talmud if not the Bible and they continue into the modern era.[24] Schram, who has studied these traditions, underlines also the mythical connections between tears and rain. These are most clearly materialized in the tear-bottles [Ps.56:8] which accompany the buried. These motifs serve to bring into relief the character of the different fifteenth-century ideas mentioned above.

IV

The evidence for attention to and supplications for rain is not limited to Hebrew texts. Nor is it purely a matter of internal myths and ideas. A simple, apparently innocuous utterance might be enlightening and introduce us to the subject. It comes from Berlanga del Duero, the town of ca 500 inhabitants in central Castile, in the orbit of Soria.[25]

Gil Navarro said that sometimes he heard Juan say when it did not rain: "let us commend ourselves to God". The frame belongs to the papers of the Inquisition. That is to say that from the 1480s onwards utterances concerning rain were not restricted to the realm of thought but were of practical interest to the Inquisition. The witnesses in 1536 had been asked whether Juan Lopez de Vzeda, *vecino* of Berlanga, deceased, had, in moments of anxiety, commended himself to "Our Lord Jesus Christ his glorious mother and all the saints of the celestial court". Juan Lopez, according to the witness, had failed to do so, because when talking about rain he

entrusted himself only to God. This means that the Inquisition was interested in matters concerning Jews, judeoconversos and rain. This opens up a corpus of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century evidence for the historian.

More informative is a 1489 testimony before the Calatayud Inquisition.[26] The witness refers to the Jews who would take out the Torah scrolls into the streets to bring down the rain and about the Jews who were wailing and singing and blowing the ram's horn [Shofar] to bring down the rain. The testimony is worth citing in translation[27]

> When the Jews of Calatayud took out the Thoras to pray in the street, in Barranco Street, before the house of Ybrahim Pazagon [ancestor of Michel de Montaigne] about 13 or 15 years ago [in the 1470s] there was a great famine of bread because there was no rain the witness saw Simon of Sta Clara by a window of Pazagon's house and when the Jews performed that ceremony blowing the horn [i.e. the Shofar] singing and wailing so as to bring down the rain this witness saw how Sta Clara wept a great deal and moved his lips as if in prayer just as any Jew who was praying and weeping though not singing loudly and how the said Simon being by the window would look at the said Thoras and at the whole ceremony.

The witness does not seem to be overeducated. The witness loses the intervocalic /r/: *pa que lloviese.* The description makes it clear that the prayers for rain were recited outside the synagogue. This is not a local Calatayud custom or a folkloric trait. It follows rules laid down, before the year 200 CE, in the *Mishna Ta'anit,* II, which regulates the ceremonies to be observed in fasting, the prayers and the blowing of the Shofar in this connection:

> MISHNA: What is the order of procedure on the fast-days? The ark containing the Holy Scrolls is to be brought into an open place in the city... The eldest among them shall then address them in heart-moving terms, ... the tradition of the prophets is (as it is written): "Rend your hearts, and not your garments" [Joel, ii. 131].

The wailing mentioned by the witness would be the practical performance of the idea in the Book of Joel. The music mentioned by the witness in 1489 is not prefigured in *Mishna Ta'anit*. Musicologists have opined that:

> With the Sephardim the most representative melody of the "Geshem" and "Ṭal" is that reserved for the beautiful poem by Solomon ibn Gabirol commencing "Leshoni bonanta," which occurs in both services. This melody is of Spanish origin, and bears evidence of having been originally set to words of a different rhythm. It is probably one of those numerous folk-songs which, according to the repeated testimony of contemporaries, were constantly being adapted for synagogal use from the tenth to the fifteenth century.[28]

In the Inquisition testimony we have a contemporary's impression of the music/song as worthy of notice and as distinct from the wailing.

The Calatayud testimony gives us an idea of rain ceremonies in the Crown of Aragon. But they were also occurring in Castile. The relations between Jews, new and old Christians, the intellectual and economic tensions in la Puebla de Montalban – known then as originating in a "town of Jews"[29] – are complex. They are a part of the historical background of Juan de Lucena, printer of Hebrew books and of Fernando de Rojas, author of the fifteenth-century masterpiece known as *Celestina*.

The reconstruction of the *ambiente* of the Puebla de Montalban, near Toledo, in the late fifteenth century, by Stephen Gilman, affects also our understanding of other aspects and other – less famous – Jews and conversos.[30] Thus, the converso Pedro Serrano acted in accordance with the procedure of *tachos,* whereby the accused points to incidents and arguments which might have brought about his denunciation. The written result was a record of hatreds in the Puebla de Montalban around the 1480s:

> Abulafia, the physician, hates me and is my enemy; after quarreling with me because I said that I disapproved of the Jews' praying for rain one day and the Christians the next and that that was why no rain had fallen, he came to me in great fury and asked me if I meant what I said. He said he would complain to his Grace [don Alonso], because Kings and grandees had always sponsored such prayers. He told me I couldn't deny belonging to his lineage, and, while we were arguing in the kitchen, he picked up a stick and said he would beat me. Thus, the hatred began and the insults, for he called me another fat-tailed one [otro rabigordo]. I'll never speak to him again except when I have to. . .

The Hebrew printer Juan de Lucena's unmarried daughters, Leonor and Teresa lived in the Puebla in 1485 with their relative, Beatriz González, at a time when the latter confessed to the Inquisition: "When the Jews bring out their Torah in order to pray for rain, I remember I humbled myself before it sometimes, praising God with some words". The formulation in her testimony implies that to "bring out their Torah" from the Synagogue (in the Puebla) was a repeated custom rather than a single occurrence. The Jews leave the synagogue and go out into the street in something resembling a procession in front of which the observer can humble herself and praise God. It also shows that the custom of Castile was like that in Aragon, despite the differences.

V

The ancient links between religion and rain appear at this time in surprising associations of subjects. We find such links in brief sayings such as those of a converso who, in Segovia, in the early 1500s, asserted that after the conversos left for the Holy Land it would not rain for seven years.[31] This is the case also in the record of a conversation preserved in Inquisition papers. In Gilman's paraphrase we read:

> ...The people are dying of hunger. O, Saint Mary! What a great drought there is, because there's no rain. Gil replied, "How do you expect it to rain, when the king is going to take the Moors' home away, when

> they haven't done him any harm". Diego protested that the Catholic faith was being spread by the campaign, but the farmer responded, "How does anyone know which of the three laws God loves best?".

There is no indication that Gil had any connection with Judaism. The previously mentioned deposition by Pedro Serrano draws attention to the awareness of a certain commensurability between Jewish and Christian responses to drought.[32] The witnessing of both Christian and Jewish rituals for rain in one and the same city at almost the same time did not produce a sense of the affinities between religions. On the contrary, it stimulated polemics and skepticism. This is apparent in conversations of the period such as that of Serrano. Of course, these conversations, by their very nature (oral, dangerous) were not meant to survive in their totality. This makes the relatively few surviving testimonies more valuable and indicates a much wider reaction than noticed.

Around 1478-1480 in Calatayud, the Christians devised a procession for rain and ordered compulsory attendance under threat of fines. When the procession reached the Calatayud market, the judeoconverso Fernando Lopez, known as "El Mudo", asked Joseph Sarfati to stand in front of him so as to hide him and his absence from the compulsory procession. When the procession moved on, Lopez, the converso, referred to those taking part as five hundred drunkards who sing and believe that God will hear them. Further in the conversation Lopez asked Joseph Sarfati whether the Jews take out the Torah to bring down the rain. Joseph replied in the affirmative.[33]

There were also responses of a different kind. W. Christian[34] notes that in the sixteenth-century "lay professionals circulated through the Castilian countryside selling their services to individuals or communities to ward off ... hailstorms by magical methods. Known variously as necromancers, enpsalmers, or conjurers of clouds, they competed directly with the priests of the parishes." Similarly, the cloud chasers were hired by towns to conjure hail-storms.

This sixteen-century phenomenon is the frame for Diego Lopez activities. In the words of the prosecutor, Andrés González, "[Diego López] has stated to everyone in this area and its residents that he has a thorn from the crown of our savior and redeemer Jesus Christ, and as such he asks all those who see it to revere and respect it". A witness reported that "Also, when there were hailstones both Diego and his daughters placed the thorn in the window of his house so that these would be transformed into clear rain so as not to damage the crops".[35] Similar occurrences are reported from New Spain in 1544 when a witness asserted that the ceremonies related to the drought, to propitiate the god of rain, were performed in caves in the mounts of the Suchitepeque region, according to Maraver informants.[36]

VI

As has been seen in the cases of Saba, Yaavez and Sambari, all of whom write outside Spain, the Expulsion did not stop these musings and narrations about rain and drought. On the contrary, they seem to intensify after the Expulsion. This is when there appears the *Shevet*

Yehuda/Sceptre of Yehudah,[37] published in print around the mid sixteenth-century. It has been rated "l'ouvrage central de l'historiographie hébraïque lors de sa brève efflorescence au XVIe siècle" or "l'ouvrage sans conteste le plus significatif ..."[38] It is believed to reflect the mindset of the Iberian exiles, the culture and memories they took with them. It contains references to bringing down the rain. These are placed within dialogues at court between a King and a Jew retold in *oratio recta*. They must be read against the history outlined above.

The relevant dialogue [ch. 64] begins with a King asserting that as Jesus wrought miracles, he is divine. Ibn Yahia replies that the Jews who used to live in Toledo were asked by the Christians to bring down the rain and the Jews with their prayers brought down the rain. In one conversation, Thomas says that David had a peculiar gift for petitioning God (in tears). This seems to be in the line of ideas, since Honi, emphasizing individual charisma. The king avers that now he understands why the prayers of the Jews for rain are answered in times of drought. There is no awareness of the contradiction – present in other texts mentioned above – between ascribing the ability to one Jew and to the Jews as a whole or as a community. Elsewhere, the conversation is so unlikely that it cannot be other than humorous. The Christian Spanish king is turned into a Talmudist who polemizes with the Jew on prayers for rain, drawing on his knowledge not only of the Hebrew/Aramaic text of the Talmud but even on the medieval Talmudic exegesis by Rashi.

The short story in that chapter bears comparison with a fifteenth-century anonymous Christian work of brief tales: the *Ejemplos muy notables* edited recently by Silvia Iriso Ariz.[39] In it, there is a conversation between a *juglar* and a king. They discuss rain. The *juglar* says that he has just returned from paradise where he spoke to God and told Him off about rain.[40] God replied that the world is like the *juglar*'s orchard with its many trees: they do not all mature and give fruit at the same time. In both, the frame is a dialogue at court, in both there is a measure of humour, the subject is rain, there are elements of the supernatural – rain miracles in Toledo or a return voyage to paradise or a Spanish king who knows Aramaic. In both there are utterances of the Wisdom type. In both there is a king and a subordinate, but the tone is relatively "familiar", lacking in formality. There seems to be an echo of the motif of "too much or too little rain" reminiscent of the Honi story mentioned above. Noteworthy is the motif of weeping during pro-pluvial rogations, here attributed to King David and in the eyewitness accounts attributed to Jews and judeoconversos.

Also relevant to the traditions of the exiles is the chronicle *Qore Ha Dorot* found by Avivim in a MS text inside a printed book.[41] It had a complex history of transmission and seems to be late. Nevertheless, it is valuable, as it testifies to – and names – numerous learned personalities who arrived in Marakesh following the expulsion from Spain. In it, the story that is relevant here begins by noting that most of the listed exiled personalities came from Castile and that they and their wives and children had distinctive/different dress and were known locally as *al-flamingos*.[42] In addition, they refused to partake of the meat slaughtered by local rabbis.

Offended locals sent a delegation to the king, accusing the recent arrivals of being wealthy. The king called the Spanish exiles to court, where they said that they knew that he had been told they were rich. They said that if he wanted he could have money. But they said they were able to grant him something no other king possessed. That is the ability to bring down rain.

A tradition preserved in Vajda's "Recueil..."[43] [linked to Saadya ibn Danan II], narrates how in Morocco, in the year 5313-1553, the rain was slow to fall since the beginning of the year. The drought lasted four months. It was a great famine, so much so that the price of a *sahfa* of wheat reached six ounces. People were all distraught. The rabbi imposed three days of fasting on individuals. It still did not rain. He imposed a repeat performance and then it rained.

A document from the Portuguese Inquisition reveals that in the late sixteenth-century, António dos Reis shared with other new Christians a childhood memory. After a drought in Marrakech, the Xarife sent for his grandfather, Yosef Bacarta "xeque dos judeus" to pray to God to send them rain. Having placed an altar in the city square for this purpose, his grandfather brought out the Book of the Law which is called "sepher aTora" and he fasted and prayed that day with his community. Immediately afterwards a torrential rain fell that was considered miraculous.[44] Here the ceremony is even closer to the procedure as mentioned in *Mishna Ta'anit*: note the placing of the altar. The royal interest in Jews who bring down rain conforms to a well-documented Jewish idea as has been shown. It is also, at times, alluded to in non-Jewish Inquisition documents, i.e. in records of New and Old Christians' descriptions and expressions of their understanding of events.

VII

Observing and confronting the attitudes at the time in broader areas is certainly of comparative interest and may help to build an overall impression of the issues at stake here.[45] Further testimony appears in a letter that students from a Talmudic academy in Jerusalem sent to Italy in 1521, in which they describe vigils as a sign of divine response to their prayers:

> And on the day that we arranged the vigil, ... He showed us a sign of redemption... the Eternal thundered in the heavens, and his voice was heard from on high, and there was a driving rain and a great wind that broke up mountains and smashed rocks. And this was on the eleventh day of the *omer*, when rain in Jerusalem is a miracle, for rain does not fall there in the summer days, but only during the rainy season between Tabernacles and Passover...[46]

Here we find the interest and beliefs about prayer for rain in connection with the understanding of the link between rain and redemption.

The Christians in Muslim lands were sometimes accused of being responsible for some natural disaster due to the sin involved in their making of wine. As noted by the seventeenth-century traveler, Fray Matías: "the poor Christians also suffer great persecution, because if it does not rain on time or the storms ... they fall back on this as a crutch, saying it is the sins of the

Christians ... the cause of evil".[47] Figueras' study of rain folklore in the Catalan Pyrenees asserts that very often the villagers blame the local priest if hailstones destroy the crop.[48]

Kedar mentions an example of a contrary trend: in 1317, Jerusalem experienced a drought and all the wells went dry, except for the Spring of Silwän. Muslims, Christian, and Jews, went out to an open space and implored God for rain; their prayers were answered on the third day. Another case is from 1348, when a plague broke out in Damascus, Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims fasted for three days and then marched together in a procession, praying side by side. Both cases concern crisis situations.[49] Similar examples come from the writings of Rabbi Yom Tov Tzahalon, or Yom-Tov ben Moses ha-Sefardi, from Safed [b.1559], who heard the following story from his father:

> ...when the Moslem kadis prayed for rain unsuccessfully in time of drought, it is said that the great judges amongst them disheveled their hair (removing their headcoverings) and prayed. Some show even greater subjection, instead of a fine scarf that they put around their necks, making a scarf of shoes which they link one into the next and place on their necks instead of a scarf and pray in subservience; so I have heard from my master and father, of blessed memory, who saw that the great judges did this in Jerusalem in time of drought; yet with all this they were not answered, until they finally had to force us to pray. Then the Torah scroll was taken out into the city's streets and the rabbis of Israel came out; and the Lord heard them and answered them, and they did not return into the city except in a triumphant rainfall; and all the great men of the other nations came to greet them, and the gentile leader came out and spread his shawl over the Torah scroll so that it not be ruined by the heavy rain; and His great name was sanctified. Thus I heard from my father and master, who saw it with his own eyes.[50]

Here again we see the common goals of Jews and Muslims in a local setting in special circumstances. Attention to Safed, Jerusalem and Damascus helps to delineate more clearly – by contrast – the contours of the phenomenon in medieval Christian Spain. It is also – like many testimonies mentioned above – a text about oral traditions by someone who was not an eye-witness to the events, in contrast with the responsa or with the cases from Berlanga, Calatayud and Puebla de Montalban mentioned above.

Conclusion

The prominence of the texts about Jewish prayers for rain in Spain and its followings and derivates seem to be mostly fourteenth- to sixteenth-century phenomena. Although weather history tends usually towards long range chronologies, there seems to be a view that these dates belonged in a period of great transition from the milder climate of the High Middle Ages to the harsher one of the early modern period. This transition between one climatic regime and the next was marked by extreme variability in temperature and precipitation levels that could lead to unusually dry weather in some places or extraordinary rainfall in others.[51]

Questions of rain or drought bring into relief differences and contradictions. The

difference between the rain brought down by special individuals contrasts with the belief in the congregation or the innocent as agents. Drought could be a reason for anti-Christian action in Muslim lands or anti-Jewish one in Christian territories. But they could also be an occasion for local cooperation. The liturgical focus can, after research, be complemented by evidence for actions, such as the proclamation of special fasts. Christian contemporary observers reacted to these in different ways, but do not seem to have been aware that the activities for bringing down rain included fasting and were in accordance with ancient tradition and regulations on fasts. These actions appear to have been much more common than noticed in late medieval Spain. We have brought to bear on the question examples of eye witness reports from different types of evidence. But many others are not. They testify to a practice of writing down what were previously oral transmissions. They are particularly noticeable in the post-Expulsion period.

Endnotes:

1. Irit Ziffer, "Moon, Rain, Womb, Mercy. The Imagery of the Shrine Model from Tell el-Far'ah North—Biblical Tirzah." *Religions* 10 (2019): 1-24.
2. Manuel-Antonio Marcos Casquero, "Ecos de arcaicas cosmogonías acuáticas en el ocaso del mundo medieval." *'Ilū* 13 (2008): 91-118. He cites a story recorded by Pausanias, i.e. a second century author highly conscious of the importance of regional parameters. According to Pausanias, the Hagno fountain, at the foot of Mount Lyceum, in Arcadia, had the peculiarity of never drying up, neither in summer nor in winter. When drought ravaged the region, the priest of Zeus Lycius would go to the fountain, performed a sacrifice and, after the pertinent prayers, introduced an oak twig into the water. According to Pausanias, the water began to shake, a kind of great cloud rose from it and it began to rain. The basic idea was that the force resident in the water, activated by a precise magical ritual, was capable of causing rain.
3. Mathias Delcor, "Rites pour l'obtention de la pluie à Jérusalem et dans le Proche-Orient." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 178.2 (1970): 117-132; Itzhak Brand, "Following the Path of the Water Libation." *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 15.1 (2012): 43-60.
4. Naphtali Wieder, "Three Derashot for Fast Days for Rain from the Geniza." *Tarbiz* 54 (1984): 21-60 (Hebrew).
5. Anu Põldsam, "Prayer for Rain by Elijah and by Honi the Circle-Maker." *Theological Journal/ Usuteaduslik Ajakiri* 72.1 (2018): 59-77.
6. D.A. De Sola, *The Ancient Melodies of the Liturgy of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews*, Harmonized by Emanuel Aguilar. (London: Wessel, 1857) number 45. David Sabato, "Praying for Rain (Sheîlat Geshamim) in Israel and Diaspora: Halacha, History and Geography." *Oqimta. Studies in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature* 8 (2022): 117-40. On the Hallel see e.g. Abraham A. Neuman, *The Jews in Spain*, (Philadelphia: JPS, 1944), ii, 157
7. Arnold A. Lasker, Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Prayer for Rain in the Post-Talmudic Diaspora." *AJS Review* 9.2 (1984): 141-174.
8. Menachem Raab, "The proper time to say 'tal umatar'." *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 23 (2000-2001): 17-21.

9. Eleazar Gutwirth, "Jewish Moneylending in 14th Century Castile: The Accord of the Puebla de Alcocer." *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies*. Division B. Volume II. The History of the Jewish People. (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1990), 151-158.
10. Eleazar Gutwirth, "Fechas judías y fechas cristianas." *El Olivo* 19 (1984): 21-30; idem, "Sephardi Culture of the 'Cairo Genizah People' (Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)." *Michael* 14 (1997): 9-34.
11. Benjamin Richler, Malachi Beit-Airé, and Nurit Pasternak (eds.), *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Vatican Library* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2008).
12. The search for rain omens may be traced back to at least as early as the Talmud [*BYoma* 21b, *Baba Bathra* 25b]. In a famous article, C. Ginzburg attended to the roots of scientific method, to Morelli, Freud and innovators who changed the very tenor of their fields. Their achievement was rooted in valuing that which the average observer would dismiss as minor details, inadvertent little gestures. In some cultures, such interest in clues begins with -amongst others-the art of foretelling rain. See Carlo Ginzburg, "Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method." *History Workshop* 9 (Spring, 1980): 5-36.
13. Simon Bernstein, "The Dıwan of sacral poetry by R. Selomoh de Piera." Part. II. *HUCA* 19 (1945): 1-74 (Hebrew).
14. Peter Cole, *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492* (Princeton: University Press, 2009).
15. See for example Ezra Fleischer, "The Early Piyyutim for Tal (and Geshem)." *Kobez Al Yad* 8 (1975): 91–139 (Hebrew).
16. *Responsa*, Amsterdam 1738, II, 6. He also wrote a commentary on the Hoshanot published by Usque in Ferrara 1553
17. Yitzhak Baer, *Historia de los judios en la Espana cristiana*, traducida del hebreo por Jose Luis Lacave (Madrid: Altalena, 1981), 608; idem, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 2, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 477 n. 49. For drought as punishment for practices of the urban aristocracy in the Zohar see *op cit*, vol I, 262. For an analysis of Crescas' image see Ram ben Shalom, "Memory of a Leader: Don Hasdai Crescas in the Eyes of his Contemporaries and in the Eyes of the Generation of the Expulsion" in *Or-Ha-Shem mi-Sefarad*. ed. S. Harvey (Jerusalem: Shazar, 2020): 67-102 (Hebrew).
18. *Tzeror ha-Mor ha-Shalem*, ed. R. B. Wichholder, (Bne Brak, 1990); Abraham Gross, *The World of Rabbi Abraham Saba* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 209.
19. Dov, Schwartz, "From Theurgy to Magic: The Evolution of the Magical-Talismanic Justification of Sacrifice in the Circle of Nahmanides and His Interpreters." *ALEPH* 1.1 (2001): 165–213.
20. See Gross, *loc.cit*.
21. He wrote in his *Or Ha-Hayyim*: "Rabbi ibn Hasdai, who excelled in his intelligence over all the philosophers of his day, even the wise-men of the Moslems and Christians, not to mention the wise-men of the Jews, and was a great man before G-d, for he called to the Lord, and He answered him in gatherings of tens of thousands of gentiles, so that the Lord was sanctified by him." This passage may refer to the same event mentioned by Rabbi Abraham Saba. See Gros *loc cit*.
22. Yosef Sambari, *Divre Yosef*, ed. S. Shtauber (Jerusalem, 1981), 145.
23. Isaac Husik, *A History of Jewish Philosophy* (New York: MacMillan, 1916), 433.

24. Dov Noy, "Tefilat ha-tamim moridah geshamim" [The prayer of the Innocent brings down rain]," *Maḥanayim* 51 (1961): 34–45. See also Dan Ben Amos, *Folk Tales of the Jews, Tales from the Sephardic Dispersion* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2006), I, 426 on the donkey driver Pentakaka whose prayers for rain were answered. Peninnah Schram, *Stories within Stories: From the Jewish Oral Tradition* (Lanham: Aronson, 2000).
25. Ricardo Muñoz Solla, *Inquisición y conversos La comunidad judaizante de Berlanga de Duero en los siglos XV y XVI* (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2022), 856.
26. José Cabezudo Astrain, "Los conversos aragoneses según los procesos de la Inquisición," *Sefarad* 18 (1958): 272-282.
27. Cabezudo Astrain, *loc cit*, 282
28. *The ancient melodies of the liturgy,* ed cit.
29. Stephen Gilman, *Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 222 n. 31 about the Bachiller Ramirez de Orejon: "Andando a buscar Ios vecinos de la tierra de Montalban donde vivir mas sanos, porque vivian enfermos junto al rio, hallaron una poblacion de judios en el lugar donde esta aora fundada la dicha villa, y se vinieron con su jurediccion al dicho lugar donde esta fundada, y ansi Io oyo decir a sus padres y algunos ancianos desta villa" (263).
30. Gilman, *Spain of Fernando de Rojas*; Eleazar Gutwirth, "'Techne' and Culture: Printers and Readers in Fifteenth-Century Hispano-Jewish Communities," in *The Late Medieval Hebrew Book in the Western Mediterranean: Hebrew Manuscripts and Incunabula in Context*. ed. Javier del Barco (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 338-367; Javier Castaño, "'Cleanse Me from My Sin': The Social and Cultural Vicissitudes of a Converso Family in Fifteenth-Century Castile" in *Bastards and Believers. Jewish Converts and Conversion from the Bible to the Present*. ed. Theodor Dunkelgrün and Paweł Maciejko (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020): 102.
31. Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, vol. II, (Berlin: *Akademie*-Verlag, 1936), 528.
32. See, for propitiatory rituals concerning rain in medieval Madrid, the eighth chapter of Eduardo Jiménez Rayado*, Agua y sociedad en Madrid durante la Edad Media,* (Cádiz: Ediciones Universidad de Valladolid, 2021).
33. Encarnación Marin Padilla, *Relación judeoconversa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XV en Aragón: La Ley.* (Madrid: E. Marin Padilla, 1986), 79.
34. William A. Christian, Jr, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
35. Leonor Zozaya Montes, "A Thorn in the Community: Popular Religious Practice and Converso Dissidence in the District of Molina de Aragon" in *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond* I, ed. Andrew Colin and Kevin Ingram (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 171.
36. Richard E. Greenlea, "La Inquisición Episcopal En Nueva España, 1535- 1571." *Temas Nicaragüenses* 138 (2019): 307-341. Juan Blázquez Miguel, "Brujas e inquisidores en la América colonial (1569-1820)." *Espacio, tiempo y forma*. *Serie IV, Historia moderna* 7 (1994): 71-98.
37. *Shevet Yehudah*, eds. Azriel Shochat and Yitzhak Baer, (Jerusalem: Mossad Byalik, 1947), 142.
38. Maurice Kriegel, "Conscience historique et écriture de l'histoire dans le monde juif, IXe/Xe siècles-XVIe siècle. Histoire socioculturelle du judaïsme médiéval et modern." *Annuaire. Enseignements EHESS* (2011-2012): 277-278.

39. Silvia Iriso Ariz ed., *Libro de ejemplos muy notables* (Valencia: Lemir, 2001).
40. Ibid: "yo fui al Paraíso a reprehender a Dios e díxele que non sabía regir el mundo e fize contra Él una razón... Si demandamos sequedat, Vós dádesnos agua, e si demandamos pluvia, Vós non nos dades pluvia, e assí paresce que vós non sabedes regir el mundo".
41. J. Avivim, "Qore ha-Dorot Mi-Marakesh." *Peamim* 38 (1989): 58–67.
42. This point may add credibility to the source. On other remarks about dress see also Jennifer Vanz, "D'une rive à l'autre de la Méditerranée: mobilités, recompositions et adaptations des groupes juifs aux XIVe et XVe siècles." *L'Année du Maghreb* 27 (2022): 23-39.
43. Georges Vajda, "Un recueil de textes historiques judeo-morocains." *Hesperis* 36 (1949): 163-6.
44. Claude B. Stuczynski, "Apóstatas marroquíes de origen judío en Portugal en los siglos XVI-XVII.Entre la misión y la Inquisición." *Entre el Islam y Occidente Los judíos magrebíes en la Edad Moderna*. ed. Mercedes García-Arenal. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2003), n. 86.
45. The rain figures in Joseph Ha-Cohen's *Vale of Tears* [1563-1575]. That is to say, the work of an author whose family originated in Huesca. See Joseph ha-Kohen, *Sefer Emeq ha-Bakha. The Vale of Tears*, ed. Karin Almbladh (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1981). It also appears in the *Elyahu Zuta* [1523] by Elyahu Capsali, who writes that he records the information received from exiles. He refers to an undertaking by Jews to brng down the rain when there is drought. But his chapter 40 is thought to be inspired by Abravanel on Kings. On Capsali see e.g. Yolanda Moreno Koch *El judaísmo hispano según la crónica hebrea de Rabí Eliyahu Capsali: traducción y estudio del "Seder Eliyahu Zutá", capítulos 40-70* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2005), 58.
46. A. Ya'ari, *Iggerot Ereẓ Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1934), 165.
47. Maite Ojeda-Mata "Jews under Islam in early modern Morocco in travel chronicles." *Jewish Culture and History*, 21.2 (2020): 104-130.
48. J. Romeu Figueras, "Folklore de la lluvia y de las tempestades en el Pirineo catalan." *RDTP* 7.2 (1951): 92–326.
49. Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Studying the 'Shared Sacred Spaces' of the Medieval Levant: Where Historians May Meet Anthropologists." *Al-Masāq* 34.2 (2022): 111-126; Benjamin Z. Kedar, "Convergence of Oriental Christian, Muslim, and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya." *De Sion exibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 59-69; Daniel Boušek, "'... and the Ishmaelites Honour the Site': Images of Encounters between Jews and Muslims at Jewish Sacred Places in Medieval Hebrew Travelogues." *Archiv Orientalni* 86.1 (2018): 23-51.
50. *Responsa Maharitatz ha-Hadashot*, ed Y. Spiegel, (Jerusalem, 1980). See the richly documented study by Yaakov Spiegel, "'I will grant your rains in their season' – Sanctifying the Name of G-d", in Bar-Ilan University's *Parshat Hashavua Study Center*, https://www2.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/bechuko/spi.html#_ftn5.
51. Christopher M. Gerrard, David N. Petley, "A Risk Society? Environmental Hazards, Risk and Resilience in the Later Middle Ages in Europe." *Natural hazards* 69.1 (2013): 1051–1079; S. Lüning, et al. "The Medieval Climate Anomaly in the Mediterranean Region." *Paleoceanography and paleoclimatology* 34.10 (2019): 1625–1649; Adam Franklin-Lyons, Marie A. Kelleher, "Framing Mediterranean Famine: Food Crisis in Fourteenth-Century Barcelona." *Speculum* 97 (2022): 40-76.

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The average shot length and the ecological fallacy in Film Studies

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Abstract:

The ecological fallacy is an error in the interpretation of statistical data when one ascribes to an individual the qualities of the group to which that individual belongs. In this article I show that using the average shot length (ASL) leads film researchers to commit the ecological fallacy due to the skewed nature of shot length distributions. The ecological fallacy can be avoided when analysing motion picture shot length data using methods that assess the stochastic equality of films' shot lengths.

Keywords: Computational film analysis, film editing, ecological fallacy, average shot length

For nearly 50 years (Salt 1974), film scholars have employed the average shot length (ASL) as a statistic of film style to describe and compare the editing of motion pictures. The ASL is the mean duration of the shots in a film (where a shot is a continuous sequence of frames) and is calculated as the sum of the durations of the shots in a film divided by the number of shots, though many scholars do not, in fact, measure the duration of individual shots in a film and simply divide the running time of a film by the number of shots to arrive at the same result. Conventionally, the ASL is interpreted as a measure of the cutting rate of a film, and when comparing the editing of two films, to answer the question 'do the shots in film *X* tend to have longer duration than the shots in film *Y*,' the difference between their ASLs is understood to be an estimate of the size of the difference in their editing style.

In this article I demonstrate that the use of the average shot length (ASL) as a statistic of film style leads researchers to commit an ecological fallacy by making inferences about a low-level variable (the duration of shots in motion pictures) based on a statistic (the ASL) that aggregates shot length data at a higher level (a film). I show that film scholars can avoid the ecological fallacy by assessing the stochastic equality of shot lengths when comparing editing data from motion pictures.

The ecological fallacy

The ecological fallacy is an error in the interpretation of statistical data that arises from ascribing

to an individual the characteristics of the group to which they belong (Brewer and Venaik 2014). Wu (2007, 123) describes ecological fallacies as 'a problem of disaggregation (or downscaling) in which inferences about a lower level are made from knowledge of an upper level.' Consequently, 'one commits an ecological fallacy if one assumes that relationships observed at an aggregated level imply that the same relationships exist at the individual level' (Jargowsky 2021, 48). There are different versions of the ecological fallacy relating to (1) confusion between ecological and individual correlations; (2) confusions between group averages and total averages; (3) Simpson's paradox, in which correlations are reversed under aggregation; and (4) the confusion between higher averages and higher likelihood.

Here we are concerned with the fourth type of ecological fallacy, which Brewer and Venaik, (2014, 1067) dub the 'averaging ecological fallacy,' with high-level aggregate data in the form of averages used to make statements about individuals at a lower level producing a conflict between the unit of observation (i.e., the object for which data is collected) and the unit of analysis (the object for which data is analysed and conclusions made) (Sedgwick 2015). For example, just because a student is a member of a class that has a high average score on a test does not mean we can assume that that student scored highly on the test. The student may be a low scoring member in an otherwise high scoring class; or she may be a mediocre performer in a class that includes a small number of outstanding students who scored exceptionally highly. In this example, the unit of observation at which measurements are made are the individual students but the unit of analysis at which inferences are drawn is the collective (i.e., the class). It is an ecological fallacy to assume that inferences made at the level of the class can be applied to the individual students because the average attribute of a class does not necessarily apply to all members of that class.

A conflict between the level of the unit of observation and the level of the unit of analysis is evident in the use of the ASL in Film Studies. For example, Adelheid Heftberger (2018, 148) states that

> a high ASL thus means that on average, the film contains longer shots with fewer cuts.

Similarly, Kaire Maimets-Volt (2013, 67n19) states that

> a long ASL means the film uses, on average, longer shots and fewer cuts.

It is clear from these interpretations of the average shot length that a high-level aggregate (the ASL) at the level of the unit of analysis (the film) is used to make inferences at the lower level of the unit of observation (the individual shots in a film), where a 'high' or 'longer' ASL means 'longer shots.' As we shall see, this will lead film scholars into error when they conclude that the shots in a film tend to have greater duration than shots in a second film because that film has a higher ASL.

Une femme mariée (1964) and *Week-end* (1967)

To illustrate how the ASL leads us to commit an ecological fallacy I compare the shot lengths for two films directed by Jean-Luc Godard – *Une femme mariée* (1964) and *Week-end* (1967) – using data from the Cinemetrics database (Salt 2007a, 2007b).

Table 1 presents a statistical summary of the shot lengths in the two films, including the number of shots, the ASL, and the five-number summary comprising the minimum shot length, lower quartile, median shot length, upper quartile, and maximum shot length for each film. The lower and upper quartiles cut off the lower and upper 25% of a data set, while the median divides the range of the data into two equal parts.

Table 1. Summary of shot length data in two Jean-Luc Godard films.

Statistics	*Une femme mariée*	*Week-end*
Shots	211	231
Running time (s)	4750.3	6170.3
Average shot length (s)	22.5	26.7
Minimum (s)	0.8	0.2
Lower quartile (s)	6.0	2.0
Median (s)	13.0	6.7
Upper quartile(s)	33.7	26.0
Maximum (s)	119.5	474.0

From Table 1 we see that *Une femme mariée* has an ASL of 22.5 seconds and that *Week-end* has an ASL of 26.7 seconds. Going by the conventional use of the ASL in Film Studies, this would be interpreted as meaning that *Week-end* contains 'longer shots with fewer cuts' than *Une femme mariée*. However, this is clearly not true. Looking at the number of shots in each film in Table 1 shows that *Week-end* has 231 shots and that *Une femme mariée* has 211 shots. The conventional interpretation that a higher ASL means that a film will have fewer cuts is obviously false. In fact, it is not possible to arrive at any conclusion about which film will have fewer cuts based on the ASL.

From Table 1 we can also see that, although the ASL for *Week-end* is greater than that of *Une femme mariée*, the minimum, lower quartile, median, and upper quartile shot lengths of *Une femme mariée* are greater than those of *Week-end*, while the maximum shot length in *Week-end* is much greater than that of *Une femme mariée*. This is a clear sign that the ASL is leading us towards an erroneous conclusion because, as the five-number summary indicates, the majority of shots in *Une femme mariée* have longer duration than those of *Week-end*, while the latter film has some shots with very long duration.

It is easier to see the difference between the shot lengths of the two films if we visualise the data. Figure 1 plots the empirical cumulative distribution functions (ECDF) of the shot lengths in *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end*. The ECDF plots the proportion of shots in a film that have duration less than or equal to a specified value (X):

$$F(x) = \frac{\#(x \leq X)}{N},$$

where #(x ≤ X) is the number of shots (x) with duration less than or equal to X and N is the total number of shots in a film. Visually comparing the shot lengths in two films is straightforward because the ECDF of a film that has a greater proportion of shots less than or equal to some value X will lie to the right of the other film.

From Figure 1 we see that the ECDF of *Une femme mariée* lies to the right of that of *Week-end* for shot lengths up to 43.8 seconds, indicating that it tends to have longer shots up to this value, but that the ECDF of *Week-end* lies to the right of that of *Une femme mariée* for shot lengths greater than 43.8 seconds, which accounts for 15% of the shots in these films. We can therefore conclude that shot lengths in *Une femme mariée* tend to be greater than those of *Week-end*, though the longest shots in the latter film have much greater duration. As we saw when looking at the five-number summary, this is clearly very different picture of the style of these two films provided by comparing their respective ASLs.

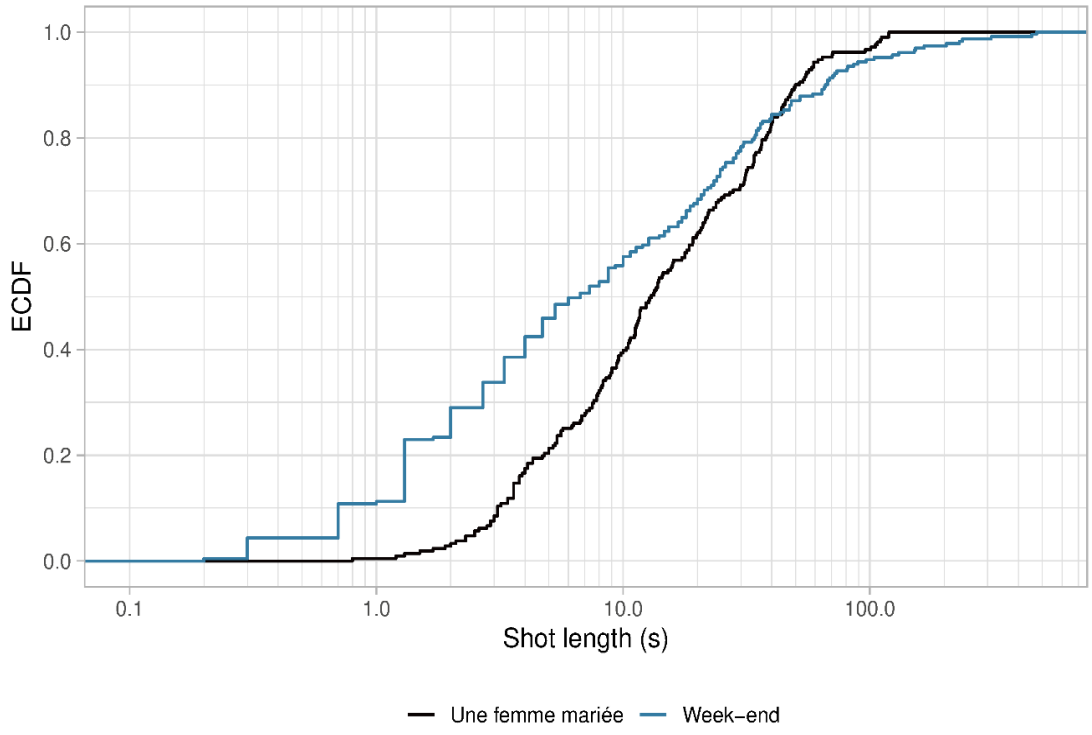

Figure 1. Empirical cumulative distribution functions of shot lengths in Jean-Luc Godard's *Une femme mariée* (1964) and *Week-end* (1967).

Why does the ecological fallacy occur for shot length data?

As we have seen above, summary statistics can 'sometimes conceal or even misrepresent what may be the most informative aspects of the data' (Hartwig and Dearing 1979, 9), and film scholars place too much trust in the ASL as a summary statistic of film style. The ecological

fallacy occurs when we uncritically apply a group-level aggregate (i.e., a film's ASL) to the all the individuals in that group (i.e., the shots in that film), ignoring the variation that exists within that group.

To understand why using the ASL leads us to commit an ecological fallacy, we therefore need to grasp the concept of a *shot length distribution*. A distribution is a representation of the variation in a data set and is the lens through which we investigate the patterns in the data (Wild 2006), attending to attributes including the centre (where is the mass of the data located?), modality (how many peaks are there?), spread (how much variability is there?), skewness (is the distribution symmetrical?), peakedness (are the peaks flat and broad or tall and pointed?), tailedness (how much data is located in the tails relative to the centre?), and deviations from the overall pattern of the data (e.g., the presence of outliers).

The data set of shot lengths collected from a film exhibits variation: *the shots in a film have different durations, they vary, and a shot length distribution is a representation of the variation of the shot lengths in a film*. It may seem unnecessary to make such a simple observation but few film scholars applying quantitative methods to editing in the cinema employ the concept of a shot length distribution. One reason for this is that many films scholars do not collect any shot length data and calculate the ASL by dividing the running time of the film by the number of shots. They cannot understand the variation in their shot length data because *they have no data*. But even when scholars do collect shot length data, they typically report only the ASL and fail to attend to the variation in the data. Consequently, film scholars discuss the shot lengths of films in terms of their average as if they exhibited no internal variation (Wenkert 1961) and do not address key features of the distribution of their data set. Without knowledge of the distribution of shot lengths in two films (i.e., information about the unit of observation) concluding that a film with a higher ASL tends to have shots of longer duration raises the dangers of committing an ecological fallacy because it is possible that the likelihood of randomly selecting a shot with greater duration in the film with the lower ASL is not reflected by the average shot length.

The averaging ecological fallacy occurs because the distributions of the shot lengths in motion pictures are, heavily and differentially, *positively skewed*. That is, they are not symmetrical with most of the data points concentrated in the left tail of the distribution with a long right tail. Figure 2 plots the distribution of shot lengths in *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end*. We can clearly see that the shot length distributions of both films are positively skewed. *Week-end* has a small number of shots that are over 150 seconds in duration that are much longer than the longest shots in *Une femme mariée*. Because the ASL is based on the arithmetic mean, it is highly sensitive to shots with very long duration which cause the value of the ASL to be pulled in the direction of the outlying data points. This is also evident in Table 1, which shows that the ASL in *Week-end* (26.7 seconds) is greater than even the upper quartile (26.0 seconds).

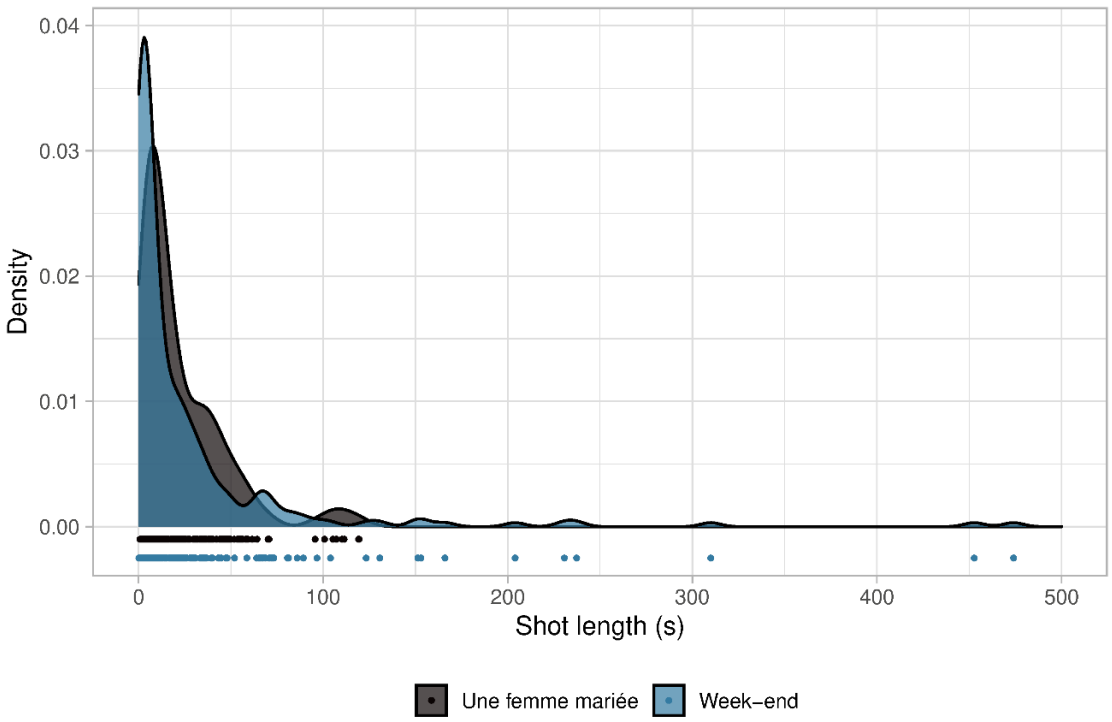

Figure 2. The distributions of shot lengths in Jean-Luc Godard's *Une femme mariée* (1964) and *Week-end* (1967) are positively skewed with the mass of the data concentrated to the left of the scale and long right tails.

The great variability in duration of shots within a film has important implications for the significance attached to the ASL. The ASLs of *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end* do not capture anything meaningful about the distribution of the shot lengths in these films. They do not locate the centre of the distributions. They tell us nothing about the spread of the data. They contain no information about the symmetry or tailedness of the distributions. The ASL is a vacuous statistic of film editing that forces us to make inferences about the individual shots in a film based on an aggregate at a higher level of data, creating a conflict between the unit of observation and the unit of analysis.

The stochastic equality of shot lengths

We can avoid committing the ecological fallacy when comparing the shot length data of two films by applying methods based on evaluating the stochastic equality of motion picture shot length data. This means we will analyse the shot lengths of our films directly and will not employ summary measures such as the ASL.

We can determine the likelihood that the length of a shot in *Week-end* is greater than or equal to the length of a shot in *Une femme mariée* by directly comparing the length of each shot in one film with length of each shot in the other to calculate Vargha and Delaney's *A* statistic (Vargha and Delaney 2000). The *A* statistic is equal to the number times the length of a shot in *Week-end* is greater than the length of a shot in *Une femme mariée* (#(WE > UFM)) divided by the product of the number of shots in *Une femme mariée* (N_{UFM}) and the number of shots

in *Week-end* (N_{WE}) plus half the number of times a shot in *Une femme mariée* and a shot in *Week-end* have equal lengths (#(WE = UFM)) divided by the product of the number of shots in each film:

$$A = \frac{\#(WE > UFM)}{N_{WE} \times N_{UFM}} + 0.5\frac{\#(WE = UFM)}{N_{WE} \times N_{UFM}}.$$

If A = 0.5 then there is no tendency for shots in one film to be longer: i.e., shots in *Week-end* as equally as likely to have longer duration than shots in *Une femme mariée* as they are to have shorter duration. A value of A greater than 0.5 tells us that shot lengths in *Week-end* have a higher likelihood of having longer duration than shot lengths in *Une femme mariée*, while a value of A less than 0.5 will indicate that shot lengths in *Week-end* have a lower likelihood of having longer shot lengths.

The A statistic for *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end* is 0.38. This means that if we select at random a shot from *Une femme mariée* and we select at random a shot from *Week-end*, the probability that the latter will have longer duration that the former is 0.38. In other words, shots in *Week-end* have a lower likelihood of having longer duration than shots in *Une femme mariée* even though it has the higher ASL.

A limitation of the A statistic is that it is not intuitive because stochastic equality occurs when A = 0.5. We can apply a simple linear transformation to obtain Cliff's d statistic (Cliff 1993): $d = 2A - 1$. Cliff's d statistic is equal to proportion of shots *Week-end* that have greater duration than shots in *Une femme mariée* minus the proportion of shots in *Week-end* with shorter duration than shots in *Une femme mariée*:

$$d = \frac{\#(WE > UFM)}{N_{WE} \times N_{UFM}} - \frac{\#(WE < UFM)}{N_{WE} \times N_{UFM}}.$$

d is more intuitive to understand than A because stochastic equality occurs when d = 0. The sign of the d statistic will then tell us the direction of the difference. For *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end*, $d = -0.24$, indicating that shots in *Week-end* tend to have shorter duration than those in *Une femme mariée*.

The conventional interpretation of the ASL is that the difference between two films' ASLs is an estimate of the difference in their styles. Subtracting the ASL of *Une femme mariée* from the ASL of *Week-end* gives us a difference of 26.7 − 22.5 = 4.2 seconds, indicating that, on average, shots in *Week-end* are much longer in duration than those in *Une femme mariée*. However, we know that this cannot be correct because shots in *Week-end* tend to have shorter duration than those in *Une femme mariée*.

We can estimate the size of the difference between the shot lengths in these two films by calculating the Hodges-Lehmann median difference (Hodges and Lehmann, 1963), which is the

median of all the pairwise differences produced by subtracting the length of every shot in *Une femme mariée* (UFM_i) from the length of every shot in *Week-end* (WE_j):

$$HL\Delta = median\left(WE_j - UFM_i\right).$$

For these two films, the Hodges-Lehmann median difference is −3.9 seconds. The sign of HLΔ is the opposite of difference between the ASLs and again tells us that shots in *Week-end* tend to be shorter than those in *Une femme mariée*, which aligns with the fact that shots in the former have a lower likelihood being of longer duration. Note that HLΔ and Cliff's *d* have the same sign.

A key advantage of using *A*, *d*, and HLΔ is that they allow us to make inferences about the duration of shots by analysing the duration of shots. Unlike the ASL, which forces us to make inferences about shot lengths at the aggregated level of the film, the units of observation and analysis are identical. Consequently, these methods allow us to answer the question 'do the shots in film *X* tend to be greater than the shots in film *Y*?' and to estimate the size of any difference.

Conclusion

The average shot length is considered to be a straightforward statistic of film style, a 'rather obvious concept' (Salt 1992, 146), deployed routinely by film scholars with a straightforward interpretation; but contrary to the definition of the average shot length used in Film Studies, a high ASL does *not* mean that, on average, a film contains longer shots with fewer cuts.

As the example of *Une femme mariée* and *Week-end* demonstrates, had we used the ASL as a statistic of film style we would have committed an ecological fallacy when interpreting the shot length data of these films, incorrectly concluding that shots in *Week-end* have longer duration than those in *Une femme mariée* when in fact the opposite is the case: *Week-end* has the higher ASL but the likelihood that a shot will have greater duration is higher for *Une femme mariée*. If our goal is to answer the question, 'do the shots in film *X* tend to be greater than the shots in film *Y*?,' then we must recognise that the ASL cannot answer that question.

Using statistics such as the five-number summary that describe shot length data, visualising the distribution of shot lengths in films, and using statistics such as *A*, *d*, and HLΔ to compare the style of films we are able correctly identify differences in style between films because when we make statements about shot lengths they actually will be statements about shot lengths. We will avoid committing the ecological fallacy because we will not be forced to make inferences about a lower-level variable based on aggregates at an upper level and we will not ascribe to individual shots the characteristics of the film to which they belong. We will be able to answer the questions about film style we wish to ask.

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Enabling and Facilitating Harm

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Abstract:

Enabling and facilitating are two significant ways in which one can become complicit in harm, and in this essay I pursue an in-depth treatment of these notions, two notions that are particularly relevant in contemporary discourse to the alleged complicity of people, especially people of privilege. It is my hope that the analysis offered here can bring a measure of clarity to discussions which embody ascriptions of complicity in public discourse.

Keywords: Complicity, Enabling, Facilitating, Likelihood, Condoning

Invoking the rhetoric of complicity has become increasingly common in public discourse. It is not unusual to hear claims to the effect that people in wealthy nations are complicit in the ecological disasters brought about by climate change or that large segments of the population are complicit in systemic racism, the oppression of marginalized persons, or dramatic increases in the population of homeless persons or political refugees. Elsewhere I have offered an analysis of the concept of complicity, including definitions of enabling the harm produced by the wrongdoing of others and facilitating the harm produced by the wrongdoing of others[1]. Enabling and facilitating are two significant ways in which one can become complicit in harm, and in this essay I pursue a more in-depth treatment of these notions, two notions that are particularly relevant in contemporary discourse to the alleged complicity of people, especially people of privilege. It is my hope that the analysis offered here can bring a measure of clarity to discussions which embody ascriptions of complicity in public discourse.

I. Enabling

Suppose that moral agent A intentionally acts in such a way as to cause or produce harmful outcome O. Then moral agent B can be said to enable the production of O just in case A's acts would not produce O were it not for B's action and B is aware that this action may contribute to O's occurrence (where "may" refers to a reasonable expectation on B's part that this action,

together with other present conditions needed to make the outcome possible, will bring about O). To say that B enables A to produce O is not to say that A could not produce O at all were it not for the action of B. What B does need not be a necessary condition of A's bringing about O. It is only a necessary condition of A's binging about O by means of the acts A in fact performs.

The account of enabling I have previously offered addresses situations in which more than one person can enable a moral agent to produce an outcome. Here it becomes particularly evident that the notion of enabling is relevant to concerns of a contemporary nature. Suppose the mayor of a large city wishes to implement a new policy regarding zoning regulations. To implement the policy she needs the city council to vote in favor of it. The members of the council realize that the new policy will have unfavorable consequences for members of minority groups, but a simple majority votes in favor and the policy is implemented. Each member casting an affirmative vote can truthfully be said to enable the harmful outcome.

If more than a simple majority votes in favor of the new policy, then none of the affirmative voters satisfies the conditions necessary to qualify as enabling the harmful outcome because the policy would have been approved if any individual member of city council had voted differently. In such a situation each of the affirmative voters can be said to facilitate the harmful outcome because by casting an affirmative vote each member increases the probability that the new policy will be approved. The next section of this paper offers a formal definition of facilitating harm, and more will be said about this example at that point.

A distinction can be drawn between situations where a single person enables harm and where multiple persons enable the same harm. If I know that you wish to stab someone and I lend you my knife, then I enable the resulting harm to the victim by means of your actions. By contrast, each of the affirmative voters of city council enables the outcome.

One might be tempted to suppose that a person is more blameworthy, other things being equal, if the person is the sole enabler of harm than if he or she is one of several enablers of the same harm. Perhaps the intuition underlying this position is that each enabler's share of the resulting harm is less than if he or she had been the sole enabler, and hence each enabler's share of the blame is diminished. James Fishkin has addressed a similar intuition concerning the moral responsibility of those who cause harm singlehandedly versus those who cause harm as members of a group. The view that one's portion of responsibility is diluted by virtue of sharing it with others he calls the "diminishing view."[2]

The diminishing view is certainly open to challenge. If two boys throw rocks through a neighbor's window at exactly the same time, it does not seem plausible to judge that each boy is less responsible for the broken window by virtue of sharing responsibility with the other. It seems more plausible to judge that in this example there is no diminishing of responsibility simply in virtue of the fact that it is shared with another. (As far as restitution is concerned, it might make sense for each boy to pay half the cost of replacing the window, but that is an entirely different matter).

Fishkin, in arguing against the diminishing view, quotes Robert Nozick as saying, "Responsibility is not a bucket in which less remains when some is apportioned out."[3] The diminishing view has been characterized as conceiving of moral responsibility along the lines of a pie analogy, where in each particular situation there is only so much responsibility to be divided up among the participants. The more persons sharing responsibility for harm that has taken place, the smaller the share of the pie of responsibility each incurs for the harm's occurrence.[4]

Applying the perspective of the diminishing view to the phenomenon of enabling harm, one derives the principle that when there are several enablers of the same harm, the moral blame incurred by each enabler is lessened by virtue of additional enablers. Thus, in the example of the city council, the blame incurred by each affirmative voter is lessened by virtue of the other voters casting affirmative votes.

Just as Fishkin appears correct in arguing against the diminishing view, applying the same notion to situations involving shared enabling yields dubious results. Consider a member of city council who casts an affirmative vote. If he had voted differently the measure would have been defeated, and hence the degree of blame he incurs appears to be considerable. Exactly the same is true of every other affirmative voter. It is hard to see why the degree of blame he incurs is lessened simply because others voted affirmatively. The situation might be different if he were threatened by others and cast his vote accordingly, but in the example under consideration this is not what takes place. The fact is that the vote of each affirmative voter is a necessary condition of the successful outcome of the mayor's desire to implement the new policy, and there is no apparent reason why one should conclude that a diminishing of blame results from the simple fact that others likewise served as enablers.

There is no clear sense in which each affirmative voter is assigned a share of the outcome, and hence there is no clear sense in the idea that each affirmative voter's share of the outcome is diluted by virtue of others having voted affirmatively. This is a point of importance inasmuch as those who enable harms that take place in contemporary society have a tendency to minimize the blame that attaches to them as individuals. Plainly, the supposed dilution of blame described here has less than obvious support, just as in the case of the diminishing view.

The definition of enabling requires that the enabler be aware that his or her actions may contribute to the harmful outcome in question, but it leaves room for a certain measure of ignorance regarding the circumstances. The members of city council realize that the new policy will have unfavorable consequences for members of minority groups, and this realization results from statements made by minority members of city council who intend to vote against adoption of the new policy. However, those who vote in favor of the new policy do not have a clear sense of how unfavorable the consequences or how widespread their effects will be. This is a point of importance because sometimes those who enable harmful outcomes plead ignorance of the scope of the harm they envisioned when performing the actions constituting enabling. Accordingly,

the affirmative voters in this example might convince themselves that there is nothing racist in their voting as they did.

Sometimes enabling takes the form of guaranteeing that someone else is not prevented from producing a harmful outcome. A man with a firearm is intent on committing an act of racial violence. A second man knows his intentions and attempts to steal his weapon. A third man, observing the actions of the second man, prevents him from stealing the weapon in order that the first man is able to commit an act of racial violence. Here it is evident that the third man enables the racial violence that takes place.

A decision not to take action can sometimes qualify as enabling a harmful outcome. In an urban neighborhood a police officer notices that someone has left a loaded handgun setting on the hood of a parked car. If the officer decides to leave the handgun, aware that someone might find it and commit an act of violence, then, if this is exactly what happens, we can plausibly judge that the officer has enabled the violence that takes place. The person who subsequently fires the handgun could not have done so if the officer had removed it from the hood of the parked car and turned it in to headquarters.

II. Facilitating

In this section I turn to the topic of facilitating harm. I will offer a definition of this notion and some examples of facilitating harm that will resonate with the contemporary concerns described earlier. The paper will conclude with a brief discussion of condoning harm produced by the wrongdoing of others.

Assume that a moral agent performs an action as a means of producing a particular harm. Another agent facilitates the harm by increasing the antecedent likelihood that the action is successfully performed by the first agent or that the harm in question is brought about by the performance of the action, and doing so in a manner that is morally blameworthy (where at least part of the blame is due to an awareness of what he or she is doing).

To take a simple example of increasing the likelihood that another's action is successfully performed, a manager in a large corporation learns that a male co-worker is making sexist comments about fellow employees and in doing so harming their morale and self-image. The manager could alert the human resources department, or he could encourage those being harmed by these comments to file complaints, but he decides to do neither. His decision therefore makes it more likely that further harm will take place, because he increases the likelihood that his co-worker is once again able to harm fellow employees by means of sexist comments. In other words, he facilitates the harm produced by the co-worker.

For an example in which facilitating harm takes place by way of increasing the likelihood that another's action produces harm, recall the example of the city council. In this example the mayor wishes to implement a new policy regarding zoning requirements, one that will have unfavorable consequences for members of certain minority groups. Suppose that more than a

simple majority of council members vote in favor of the new policy. Then no member can rightly be accused of enabling the harmful outcome, but each member who voted affirmatively can rightly be accused of facilitating the harmful outcome. The reason is that the likelihood that the mayor's declaration that the new policy ought to be affirmed successfully results in its being affirmed is increased by the affirmative vote of each member. In other words, by casting an affirmative vote each member increases the likelihood that the policy is approved and thus qualifies as a facilitator.

Sometimes a person can facilitate the harm produced by someone else through omitting to take action (the manager in the example of the co-worker making sexist comments makes the decision not to take action; he does not simply omit to take action). Imagine that two federal employees are assigned the task of ensuring that federal grants to small businesses are directed to adequate numbers of minority owned businesses. In addition, each employee is contractually obligated to make sure the other is executing his or her job properly.

One of the employees is very conscientious about ensuring that an adequate number of minority owned businesses receive federal grants, but she is resentful of being obligated to monitor the work performance of the other employee. Consequently she simply does not do so. She has not made an actual decision not to do so; rather, she simply does not take the initiative to monitor what the other employee is doing.

As it happens, the other employee is performing his job poorly. Sometimes he makes the effort to identify whether a particular small business is minority owned, and sometimes he does not feel like exerting much effort. As a result, some minority owned small businesses which deserve to receive a federal grant fail to do so. Arguably, some of these minority owned businesses are being deprived of federal grants that they deserve, and this is true whether or not their owners are aware of this deprivation. They are thereby in a sense being harmed by the slovenly and inadequate efforts of this employee.

The conscientious employee has neglected to monitor the work performance of her co-worker, and this neglect has increased the antecedent probability that in the future he will deprive some minority owned businesses of receiving federal grants. Thus, her neglect qualifies as facilitating such future harm. Of course, her neglect is also the violation of a contractual obligation with her employer, but that is a separate matter. In short, her neglect facilitates the harm produced by the other employee.

Facilitating harm is a stronger notion than that of condoning harm. When a person condones the harm produced by the wrongdoing of another, the person does not act in a way that increases the antecedent probability that the wrongdoer's actions are successfully performed or that they produce harm. The person observes the wrongdoer's actions and the harm they produce, realizes that the actions deserve blame, and finds no good reasons to cast blame upon the wrongdoer in any manner whatsoever. One can condone the harm produced by the other's wrongdoing through, at a minimum, tolerating it, but positive approbation might also motivate

the failure to cast blame. Nevertheless, the failure to cast blame in and of itself falls short of qualifying as facilitating.

Accusations of someone's condoning the wrongdoing of others have become common in public discourse. For example, in October, 2018 both Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi charged that President Trump condoned physical violence. The implication of these charges is that President Trump was blameworthy for condoning physical violence. Not all instances of condoning another's wrongdoing are blameworthy, however. In a public park a man is fishing next to a sign that prohibits fishing. I realize that he is guilty of wrongdoing, but I have no desire to accuse him of wrongdoing. In fact, I do not even form a judgment that he is guilty of wrongdoing, but insofar as I fail to form such a judgment no blame attaches to me.

Although the notion of facilitating harm is stronger than that of condoning harm, there is a small degree of overlap between the two notions. That is, it is possible to facilitate simultaneously the same harm that one condones. Suppose that the conscientious federal employee described earlier is aware that the other employee is sometimes failing to identify minority owned businesses that are deserving of federal grants, and she does nothing by way of expressing blame. Then she satisfies the conditions for facilitating the harm caused by the other employee. Thus, she simultaneously facilitates and condones the harm caused by her co-worker.

In contemporary society it has become fashionable to invoke the rhetoric of complicity to describe the actions and attitudes of people, especially people of privilege. It is not always clear how these actions and attitudes rise to the level of complicit behavior, and in this essay I hope to have shed some light upon circumstances in which complicity is in fact realized. In particular, I have focused on situations involving enabling harm and facilitating harm, two notions that are particularly relevant to the subject matter of contemporary discourse.

Endnotes:

1. Gregory Mellema, *Complicity and Moral Accountability*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016.
2. James Fishkin, *The Limits of Obligation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p.80.
3. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 130.
4. See Michael Zimmerman, "Sharing Responsibility." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 22 (1985), p. 116.

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Viciousness and the Beautiful Soul: A Critique of McGinn's Aesthetic Theory of Virtue

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Abstract:

This paper presents a sustained critique of Colin McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue. The critique is twofold. First, I demonstrate that there are a number of theoretical flaws which suggest that McGinn's theory is unable to properly evaluate racist literature. Then, using the novel *Frankenstein*, I show that, practically, McGinn's theory incorrectly evaluates problematically racist characters, such as Victor Frankenstein.

Keywords: Aesthetic Theory of Virtue; Frankenstein; Colin McGinn; Racism; Vice and Virtue

In this paper, I argue that Colin McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue, or ATV, is fundamentally flawed and inadequate. The argument against McGinn is both theoretical and practical. The paper will proceed as follows: First, I unpack McGinn's argument, to determine how he derives criteria of evaluation for the aesthetic theory of virtue. Then I highlight several flaws in his argument. Next, using the character of Victor Frankenstein, I show that on a practical level the aesthetic theory of virtue incorrectly evaluates a problematically racist character.

1. McGinn's Aesthetic Theory of Virtue

McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue is built on how he understands the nature of ethical knowledge. Using Thomas Reid's understanding of morals and Noam Chomsky's theory of language, McGinn contends that one has an innate moral faculty. "As Reid suggests, this type of knowledge [i.e. moral knowledge] is not like specialized technical knowledge that only certain individuals can acquire, as with science; rather, like language, it is something that all humans are equipped to grasp short of mental pathology" (McGinn 1999, 45)

McGinn is claiming that simply by being human, one is naturally predisposed to be able to "perceive" moral qualities. Further, by basing the moral faculty on Chomsky's understanding of language, McGinn is able account for what appears to be different moral beliefs across various

cultures, though McGinn is not convinced that the differences really are as great as they appear. Just as different cultures have differences in the particulars of grammar and syntax but still have language, different cultures may have different views on what counts as good or evil, virtue or vice, yet all humans—because of their innate moral faculty—will hold that the good and virtuous is commendable while the evil and vicious is condemnable.

McGinn, then, goes on to "expound and defend the following thesis: that virtue coincides with beauty of soul and vice with ugliness" (McGinn 1999, 93). To begin, McGinn maintains that there are three categories of moral terms. The first two categories, McGinn calls thin and thick moral terms. Thin moral terms "are very general and abstract terms of moral appraisal that describe little or nothing about the object in question [...,] words like 'good', 'right', [and] 'ought'" (McGinn 1999, 92). Thick moral terms, on the other hand, "are specific and descriptive while also carrying evaluative force [...,] words like 'brave', 'generous', [and] 'miserly'" (McGinn 1999, 92). The final category of terms has an aesthetic connotation. "There are many terms of this type: for example, on the positive side, 'fine', 'pure', 'stainless', 'sweet', 'wonderful'; and on the negative side [...], 'rotten', 'vile', 'foul', 'ugly', 'sick', 'repulsive', 'tarnished' (McGinn 1999, 92).

> These words, or their uses in moral contexts, have certain distinguishing characteristics. They are highly evaluative or 'judgmental', expressing our moral attitudes with particular force and poignancy, somewhat more so than words like 'generous' and 'brave'. Correspondingly, they are less 'descriptive' than those words, telling us less about the specific features of the agent, though they are more descriptive than words like 'good' and 'right'. They convey a moral assessment by ascribing an aesthetic property to the subject. What they give us are *qualities* of character, morally laden, rather than traits of character. [...T]hese terms fulfill a particular evaluative need, not already covered by 'thick' and 'thin' moral terms; they are not conceptually redundant or mere stylistic variants. (McGinn 1999, 92-3)

McGinn believes that using such aesthetically laden terms implies a commitment to the notion that vice and virtue are allied with aesthetic qualities of a person. "That is what our ordinary ways of speaking suggest; and the ATV holds that this is indeed a correct way to think about vice and virtue" (McGinn 1999, 93).

McGinn explains that the best way to understand the connection between morality and aesthetics is with a supervenience thesis. Broadly, the supervenience relation amounts to this: "properties of type A are supervenient on properties of type B if and only if two objects cannot differ with respect to their A-properties without also differing with respect to their B-properties" (Audi 1999, 891). Thus, the presence of certain aesthetic qualities is a necessary and sufficient condition for certain moral qualities—for example, a person being beautiful is a necessary and sufficient condition for that same person being virtuous.

Clearly, however, McGinn does not mean to suggest that a "pretty" person is good and an "ugly" person is evil, such that supermodels would be paragons of virtue, and someone like

Gandhi—who was not a particularly visually attractive person—would be at best morally sub-par. Using Reid's understanding of morality, McGinn clarifies: "[v]irtue equals beauty *plus* the soul. The particular *kind* of beauty proper to the soul is what virtue consists in" (McGinn 1999, 97). So, McGinn can go on to claim that "[a] person's *body* can be said to have positive aesthetic attributes and no moral implications be carried, but I [i.e. McGinn] do not believe we shall find any terms that describe the soul aesthetically that are morally neutral" (McGinn 1999, 100).

The notion of a soul which has both moral qualities and supervening aesthetic qualities is important for McGinn's ATV. First, it is important as it takes care of the above-mentioned, superficial objection. Moreover, it allows McGinn to argue that if the ATV is wrong,

> [t]hat would mean that a person could present an observer with both aesthetically positive and morally negative characteristics, these being instantiated by the same thing, namely a soul. This would imply that we should be both attracted and repelled by the same thing: we admire the beauty of it but deplore its immorality, valuing and disvaluing it simultaneously. (McGinn 1999, 100-1)

McGinn admits that while it is not logically impossible to value and disvalue the same object simultaneously, it does seem to strike one as psychologically awkward, and hard to tolerate. "This suggests a convergence of the two sets of characteristics is built into our normal psychology of moral reaction: we would be lost and confused if the two came apart; we proceed on the assumption of their coincidence" (McGinn 1999, 101).

Further, if one supposes, as McGinn does, that "[e]vil is *expressed* in ugly acts", then one cannot have a beautiful soul and commit wicked actions—which would be "characteristically evil" (McGinn 1999, 101). For McGinn, this commends the ATV because morality and beauty are connected by the way one normally sees the relation between character and action. Thus, aesthetics and morality are intimately connected, because by McGinn's account one does not naturally believe that the beautiful can create that which is not beautiful, and "[u]gly actions reflect ugliness within" (McGinn 1999, 101).

There is another aspect of McGinn's theory, that is, how one determines what is beautiful. First, he explains the kind of property beauty is such that it can be a possession of a soul. The definition must be sufficiently abstract in order to make it applicable "across all aesthetically evaluable objects" (McGinn 1999, 108). McGinn puts forth an idea he takes from author Vladimir Nabokov: "an object is beautiful if and only if it affords aesthetic bliss, and aesthetic bliss is a state of mind in which one is connected to other states of being in which art is the norm—where art involves curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy. [...] In a word it puts us into contact with certain ideals" (McGinn 1999, 110).

Nabokov's formula suggests the aesthetic puts one in contact with the explicitly moral domain by using the terms 'tenderness' and 'kindness'. Conversely, the aesthetic theory of virtue takes the moral into the aesthetic domain by using terms like 'fine', 'pure', and 'ugly'. McGinn believes that "[t]his is a nice result [...] because virtue, especially exceptional virtue, *does* make

us think of—even yearn for—a world in which virtue is the norm. [...] And this is a direct consequence of two ideas that have intrinsic appeal—the ATV and Nabokov's formula" (McGinn 1999, 112).

To sum up, McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue can be explained as follows: All humans that are not affected by some sort of mental pathology are able to perceive and understand morality. One is able to determine what is good/evil, vice/virtue, naturally and without mediation. Further, one's understanding of morality is closely allied to one's understanding of the aesthetic. In particular, that which is moral is necessarily and sufficiently connected to the beauty of the soul. Finally, the aesthetic connects one with the moral domain, and puts one in touch with certain moral ideals.

2. Theoretical Shortcomings and Concerns

I now turn to some general problems with the aesthetic theory of virtue. First, McGinn's theory seems to violate Occam's Razor. Second, McGinn appears to equivocate terms on a number of occasions.

"Occam's Razor suggests that simpler theories should be preferred to more complex theories. Simpler theories are generally preferable, however, only when other things (such as their respective clarity, scope, and power) are equal" (Fetzer 1993, 100). According to McGinn, one has a natural and innate ability to "perceive" moral qualities. Thus, to attach aesthetic qualities to the moral qualities is at best redundant. The aesthetic does nothing that cannot be accomplished by the moral alone. One can read a novel, and be moved by it morally, without having to attach aesthetic attributes to the novel in order to fully appreciate the moral import. So, the onus is on McGinn to explain why supervening aesthetic qualities makes one's moral understanding richer, etc.

As to my second problem, McGinn depends on our common use of language to defend the necessity of combining the moral and the aesthetic. While McGinn claims that the frequent occurrence of aesthetic terms in moral discourse suggests an implicit acceptance of the aesthetic, Noël Carroll has a different explanation. He claims that the aesthetic terms "only support the hypothesis that there is an enduring mythology of the aesthetic theory of virtue. They corroborate the fact that people have believed it in the past and that the remnants of that belief live on in our language and its vocabulary [...]. That the mythology once gripped people's imagination in no way argues in behalf of the truth of the aesthetic theory of virtue" (Carroll 2000, 652). I believe the problem is deeper.

It seems to me that McGinn is equivocating. While one may refer to a piece of art as "repulsive" and a person's character as "repulsive", it does not seem necessary to suppose that one is making a category mistake in the application of repulsive to morality, nor is it necessary to assume that repulsive in the moral sense has an aesthetic connotation, per se. Similar to the case of two entrees in a restaurant, both can be 'hot', but one can mean two entirely different things

by that. One dish could have a high temperature, while the other dish is very spicy. In ascribing the term 'hot' to both dishes, one has not said something false or erred in the attribution of the term. Further, one is not using the term to suggest that temperature is present in spiciness. Thus, it is conceivable that one can use terms that are used to describe aesthetic qualities to describe moral qualities, and *not* be implying an aesthetic connection.

Another concern I have is McGinn's suggestion that it is highly unnatural for one to be attracted and repelled by the same object at the same time. Consider: one can be very attracted to the aesthetic qualities of a piece of jewelry, yet be repelled by the extremely high price. This is not unnatural because what attracts one is one thing—the beauty—and what repels is an entirely different attribute—the price. Yet, these are both characteristics of the same object. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that a beautiful soul could attract one by its beauty but repel one by its lack of virtue. It is not that the soul is different, it is the various qualities that attract or repel within that one soul.

Finally, Noël Carroll has some additional objections to McGinn's theory, which I find quite compelling. Carroll points out that according to McGinn "[b]eauty of soul, if there is such a thing, would [...] be striking, as perceptible beauty is" (Carroll 2000, 652). Yet, most people seem to be virtuous/good, but do not come across as striking. "Thus, if the intuition that no person can be good and have no beauty of soul is supposed to support the aesthetic theory of virtue, I am not convinced that it is up to the task" (Carroll 2000, 652). Carroll further points out that beauty is a perceptible quality. "Thus, to the extent that beauty-talk has its natural home in perceptibilia, I find it hard to get my mind around the notion of a beautiful soul; it strikes the ear as a category mistake" (Carroll 2000, 654).

Carroll has two final objections. First, McGinn never addresses the Kantian view of beauty. "[T]he Kantian view [maintains] that beauty is disinterested in the sense that judgments of beauty are categorically separate from assessments of advantage, including morality" (Carroll 2000, 653). Carroll finds it "perplexing that McGinn does not even air his reservations about the most formidable theory of beauty we have, especially since it appears to be logically at odds with his own view" (Carroll 2000, 653).

Carroll, further, does not believe that the Nabokov formula is an acceptable definition of beauty. For the Nabokov formula, "an object is beautiful if and only if it affords aesthetic bliss, and aesthetic bliss is a state of mind in which one is connected to other states of being in which art is the norm—where art involves curiosity, tenderness, kindness, and ecstasy. [...] In a word it puts us into contact with certain ideals" (McGinn 1999, 110). Carroll argues:

> Surely there are all sorts of examples of beauty that do not put us in contact with kindness, tenderness, curiosity, and ecstasy. For example, the simple [...], delicate, bejeweled designs on the face of the Taj Mahal. There is no question of kindness, tenderness, or curiosity here, and, though these designs afford pleasure, it is tranquil—nothing like ecstasy. Moreover, things other than beauty are frequently (perhaps more frequently than our commerce with beautiful things) the source of contact with ideals of

> kindness, tenderness, curiosity and ecstasy: sermons, even lackluster ones (kindness and tenderness), science (curiosity), and mind-altering substances (ecstasy) are cases in point. (Carroll 2000, 654)

The lack of persuasiveness of the Nabokov formula is problematic, then, for McGinn because he uses the Nabokov formula to ground the connection of beauty and virtue.

My purpose here has not been to fully demonstrate the failure of the aesthetic theory of virtue. I have mentioned a few objections merely to suggest that there is reason to doubt the efficacy of the overall theory.

3. Practical Problems and the Case of Victor Frankenstein

Beyond the theoretical problems with McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue, implementing it practically raises, or underscores, additional concerns. To demonstrate this, I will consider the novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. For the purpose of this paper, I will be interpreting the novel as racist. In particular I will be interpreting the character Victor Frankenstein as a racist. In this way, I will show that McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue is not able to correctly interpret, or explain the situation, and is thus inadequate to condemn racist literature, or at least morally problematic.

First, I will establish that Victor Frankenstein is presented as a beautiful soul. In describing Frankenstein to his sister, Captain Walton states: "Sometimes I have endeavoured to discover what quality it is which he possesses that elevates him so immeasurably above any other person I ever knew. I believe it to be an intuitive discernment; a quick but never-failing judgment; a penetration into the causes of things, unequalled for clearness and precision" (Shelley 2003, 24). Here, not only is Walton pointing out the attractiveness of Frankenstein's soul, but in addition, his understanding is based on language that is similar to McGinn's Reidean understanding of moral knowledge. If it is not clear that Walton is referring to Frankenstein's soul, it becomes clearer as he continues describing Frankenstein. "[H]is full-toned voice swells in my ears; his lustrous eyes dwell on me with all their melancholy sweetness; I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are *irradiated by the soul within*" (Shelley 2003, 25-6 emphasis added).

Now, I will show that Frankenstein can indeed be understood as immoral and a racist. First, it should be pointed out that the Creature can best be understood as the child of Frankenstein. Not only is Frankenstein the Creature's father, but perhaps more accurately, he can be interpreted as the Creature's mother. Frankenstein is the creator and gestator of the Creature. He describes the creation as "labor", further the passage of winter, spring, and summer during the creation of the Creature suggests the nine-month gestation period of a typical human (Shelley 2003, 54). Finally, Frankenstein describes the "agony" of child-birth the night the Creature is brought to life (Shelley 2003, 55).

Frankenstein fully understood his responsibilities as a parent. "I created a rational Creature, and was bound towards him, to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and

well being. This was my duty" (Shelley 2003, 214). He also had parents who were exemplary models of parenting, and who instilled in him the understanding of the appropriate relationship of parent to child. The child was bestowed on the parent by Heaven, "to bring up to good, and whose future lot [i.e. the child's lot] it was in their [i.e. the parents] hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards [the child]. With this deep consciousness of what they owed towards the being which they had given life" (Shelley 2003, 29).

However, knowing all the above duties and responsibilities incumbent on him as a parent, Frankenstein totally rejects his child, the Creature. Moreover, the reasons why Frankenstein rejects the Creature, I contend, are superficial racist reasons. Frankenstein describes his first reaction to his child:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endevoured to form? [...] His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion and straight black lips" (Shelley 2003, 55).

Upon observing his ugly creation, Frankenstein runs out of the room and rejects the Creature. Rejecting the Creature for being ugly, while unbecoming and perhaps morally blameworthy, is not necessarily racist—e.g., one might argue that it is more an example of the discriminatory practice of straightforward lookism. Yet, Frankenstein goes farther.

Not only does Frankenstein find the Creature physically ugly, but Frankenstein goes on to ascribe moral qualities to the Creature based on the Creature's superficial appearance. The main problem is that Frankenstein views the Creature, in the words of McGinn, as "the dangerous alien other" (McGinn 1999, 147), when nothing about the Creature suggests this interpretation beyond his superficial physical appearance. The Creature is certainly human in form and has all the organs and functions of a human—though on a slightly larger scale. The Creature was rational, as Frankenstein himself admits (Shelley 2003, 214). He further had the ability to learn language, and "[t]hrough acquiring language the Creature becomes truly one of us; he acquires the capacity that defines the human community. [...] He has *reason*" (McGinn 1999, 160). Finally, as demonstrated in his interaction with the cottagers and saving the rustic child from drowning, the Creature conveys his possession of morality and fellow-feeling. The Creature describes himself as "benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity" (Shelley 2003, 98).

Finally, I would contend that even when the Creature acts violently, those actions just further demonstrate his humanity. He is reacting, perhaps overzealously, with a sense of justice. While his actions of killing "innocent people" seem vicious, I would claim that at worst it demonstrates a lack of practical judgment but is not a violation of a formal definition of justice. One must remember that the Creature is merely trying to gain that which he feels is his by right,

and that which even on Frankenstein's account of the duties of parenthood, Frankenstein owes to him. Even if one will not grant me the above account, the Creature does not become "*inwardly* monstrous" (McGinn 1999, 163) as McGinn suggests. Nor does the Creature ever attain to the status of evil. "The evil person derives pleasure precisely from someone *else's* pain" (McGinn 1999, 65). Yet, despite the Creature's vicious actions, he does not take pleasure in them. The Creature tells Walton: "do you think that I was then dead to agony and remorse? [...] Think you that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy" (Shelley 2003, 216).

Before moving on, I will point out, that the case of the Creature was not an anomaly in Frankenstein's character, and why his discrimination against the Creature is better understood as broadly racist rather than lookist—though that would still prove my appointment against McGinn. In describing his nurse who took care of him in an Irish jail Frankenstein says "her countenance expressed all those bad qualities which often characterize that class. The lines of her face were hard and rude, like that of persons accustomed to see without sympathizing in sights of misery" (Shelley 2003, 176). Here again Frankenstein is stereotyping someone's character based on superficial physical appearances, and again the stereotypes have no basis in reality. The nurse expresses sympathy by asking about his health. She then goes on to show that she has a moral sensibility when she states: "I do my duty with a safe conscience it were well if everybody did the same" (Shelley 2003, 176). Thus, Frankenstein's personality generally is racist. Not only does he treat the Creature as inferior for racist reasons, but when one adds the Irish nurse it suggests that racism is a matter of habit for him.

All this together strongly suggests the problematic nature of McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue. It shows that it fails to condemn racist literature. Frankenstein is portrayed as someone with a beautiful soul, yet he is capable of being evil through his racism against not only the Creature, but others as well—viz. the Irish nurse. The Creature is aware of the racism that surrounds him. He claims: "Once my fancy was soothed with dreams of virtue, of fame, and of enjoyment. Once I falsely hoped to meet with beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion" (Shelley 2003, 218). Then, when he demands justice for his mistreatment, he is further punished.

In short, in the novel, *Frankenstein*, beauty of soul is separated from morality. Aesthetic beauty is instantiated in the same soul as evil in Victor Frankenstein. Thus, one is attracted to and repulsed by Frankenstein at the same time, a view which McGinn feels is psychologically unnatural. Further, because according to McGinn's supervenience thesis aesthetic beauty of soul is both a necessary and sufficient condition for moral virtue, it does not seem that Frankenstein is logically possible. He is vicious because of his racism, yet his beauty requires him to be virtuous. Thus, McGinn is unable to condemn Frankenstein as a racist without at the same time abandoning the aesthetic theory of virtue. In order to maintain the aesthetic theory of virtue,

McGinn will have to claim that Frankenstein is not in fact a racist. However, I believe that I have given sufficient examples to show that Frankenstein does in fact have racist intentions.

4. Conclusion

It has been shown that Colin McGinn's aesthetic theory of virtue is unable to condemn racist literature. In applying the aesthetic theory of virtue to an example of racism in literature—viz. the novel *Frankenstein*—it was shown that either McGinn must prove that Victor Frankenstein was not a racist, or McGinn must abandon the aesthetic theory of virtue. I have also pointed out, with the help of Noël Carroll's article, several theoretical problems with the aesthetic theory of virtue generally. Interestingly, both the practical example and the theoretical issues derive a potentially similar result. The aesthetic theory of virtue is flawed precisely because it necessarily links virtue and aesthetics. If it did not, Frankenstein could be both beautiful and a racist, and many of the problems pointed out above would not be at issue. Granted, what would remain would be either no aesthetic theory of virtue at all or a very watered-down version thereof.

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