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# ATENEA

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**ENSAYOS / *ESSAYS***





## BODY POLITICS IN CORREGIDORA

Heather Duerre Humann

“Bodies write politics.” —Thomas Shevory, *Body/Politics: Studies in Reproduction, Production, and (Re)Construction*

“In the reality of practice the body is never outside history, and history never free of bodily presence and effects on the body.”  
—R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power*

Contemporary feminist discourse has consistently revealed that the female body is defined by—and constantly subject to—various socio-political, cultural, economic, and historical forces. Indeed, competing and contradictory politics of representation exist with respect to the female body. In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler emphasizes that “the body is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface, whose permeability is politically regulated” (177). Moreover, “the body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations” (Butler 92). The female body thus operates, as Sidonie Smith argues, as a site “upon which the struggle for cultural meaning is waged” (Smith 282). If the female body operates as a site of ideological contestation, this is especially true of the black female body, which is “caught between conflicting narratives,”<sup>1</sup> rendering it “a site of confusion and contradiction” (Barnett 19). In her discussion of black women’s bodies, Karla F.C. Holloway argues that they “metaphorically represent the conflicted presence of gender and race within America’s cultural history,” stressing that “theirs were the very bodies that political and legal systems in the United States had worked hard to render passive and silent” (Holloway 485; 483).

It is this practice of attempting to control and silence black female bodies that Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1975) simultaneously reflects and responds to. A novel that centers on the experiences of Ursa Corregidora, a female blues singer, *Corregidora* highlights the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Barnett, these include “the vulnerable female body, the sexual, and contagious black body—none of which account for the specificity of her coding” (Barnett 19).

degree to which the black female body operates as a site of ideological conflict in mid-twentieth-century America, a dynamic with roots that, as Jones's narrative makes clear, extend back to slavery. This essay examines representations of and resistance to the black female body as both object and commodity in *Corregidora* by considering how others, and Ursa herself, use her body to define—and confine—her. Those who seek to lay claim to Ursa's body have different, and sometimes competing, agendas. A common theme nonetheless binds them together: the desire to adapt and appropriate her body for their own purposes—purposes that are political in nature and which exist in direct response to the ideological forces of 1940s America at the same time as they link up indirectly with the legacy of slavery that Ursa and the other *Corregidora* women continue to suffer from and bear witness to. Considering the various functions attributed to the black female body in this literary context—and within its historical context—allows me to situate my observations regarding black sexual politics and ideology in *Corregidora* within the larger debate about the roles race, class, and gender play with respect to the commodifying and policing of female sexuality. This type of analysis will also permit me to trace the cycle of violence and exploitation that, as Jones's novel highlights, begins with slavery and ends with late-capitalism.

The cycle of violence that the *Corregidora* women bear witness to and suffer from begins with slavery. Their namesake, old man *Corregidora*, was a "Portuguese seaman turned plantation owner," who sired both Ursa's mother and grandmother (Jones 10). By enslaving Ursa's great-grandmother, her "Great Gram," repeatedly sexually violating her, and forcing her into prostitution, he lays claim to her body in a number of different ways. Through this practice, he both objectifies her for his own sexual desires and commodifies her sexuality by selling her body to other men for profit. Thus, as the passage that follows makes clear, old man *Corregidora*'s relationship with Ursa's "Great-Gram" began with, and was defined by, how he would exploit her for his own pleasure as well as for financial gain; the story of her exploitation and repeated victimization by old man *Corregidora* is passed down to Ursa by her great-grandmother:

*Yeah, I remember the day he took me out of the field. They had coffee there. Some places they had cane and then others cotton and tobacco like up here. Other places they had your mens working down in mines. He would take me hisself first and said he was breaking me in. Then he started bringing other men and they would give me money and I had to give it over to him. (Jones 11)*

This account highlights that old man *Corregidora* had a personal motive—his own perverse pleasure—as well as a profit-incentive to exploit and abuse Great Gram, incentives which are further under-

scored by his nicknames for her: "A good little piece. My best. Dorita. Little gold piece" (Jones 10).<sup>2</sup> He benefits on yet another level from his repeated sexual violation of her, since it results in her bearing him a child whom he legally has ownership rights to and can potentially garner a profit from. Thus, he further commodifies her by exploiting her reproductive labor by laying claim to its product—the child she bears—a practice common in slavery.

In the decades since *Corregidora* was first published numerous scholars, including Angela Davis, Deborah Gray White, and Hortense J. Spillers, have discussed this practice as part of their overall examinations of the experiences of female slaves. For instance, in *Women, Race, and Class* Davis notes how the legal system was adapted during slavery times to reward the sexual abuse of female slaves by slave owners. The legislation of that era "adopted the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*—the child follows the condition of the mother. These were the dictates of the slaveowners who fathered not a few slave children themselves" (Davis 12). White explains in her book *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* that "once slaveholders realized that the reproductive function of the female slave could yield a profit, the manipulation of procreative sexual relations became an integral part of the sexual exploitation of female slaves" (White 68). In her essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Spillers highlights that "under the conditions of captivity, the offspring of the female does not 'belong' to the Mother, nor is s/he 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesses' it, and in the African-American instance, often fathered it, and, as often, without whatever benefit of patrimony" (Spillers 269).

Thus, it is under conditions just like those Davis, White, and Spillers describe that old man Corregidora sires Ursa's grandmother and mother. The legacy the Corregidora women pass on to Ursa is a transgenerational transmission of trauma stemming from the abuses inflicted on them by him under the system of slavery. He is not only her ancestor, but functions in the text as well as "the symbolic progenitor of evil within Ursa's limited world" (Tate 140). Indeed, Ursa's foremothers have actively worked to keep his memory alive: "Four generations of Corregidora women, beginning with her great-grandmother, refuse to let his memory die with time. They pay homage to him by promulgating his sins in ritualized oral expression, passed down from generation to generation of female children" (Tate 140). The mandate that

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<sup>2</sup> Tellingly, this label "little gold piece" suggests both an object, the "piece," and a commodity, via the modifier "gold," something which is currency and has monetary value, which thus underscores how Great Gram herself was both objectified and commodified under slavery by old man Corregidora.

the Corregidora women must “make generations” is passed down the matrilineal Corregidora line by Ursa’s Great Gram (Jones 101). She believes that by continuing the line, she will preserve the evidence of the atrocities old man Corregidora committed as a “slave-breeder and whoremonger” (Jones 8-9). Great Gram stresses to Ursa that by recounting these stories, she is “leaving evidence” and tells Ursa that “you got to leave evidence too” (Jones 14). Because old man Corregidora, along with other slave owners, destroyed records in an attempt to cover up these crimes, the Corregidora women must pass on the history of these atrocities orally and continue to bear witness to what happened:

*They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood. (Jones 72)*

This edict has been issued in direct response to, and as a way to counter, the slave owners who attempted to hide their crimes. As Stephanie Li points out in her essay, “Love and the Trauma of Resistance in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*,” “by instructing Ursa to make generations to preserve the memory of their sexual abuse, Great Gram and Gram convert the female body into a form of documentation” (Li 132).

Great Gram’s pronouncement means, as Deborah Horvitz persuasively argues in her book, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction*, that indeed the Corregidora “women’s bodies are again used as the site of history’s inscription” (Horvitz 46). Because Great Gram’s mandate to Ursa refigures the body as a potential path to testimony (“bearing witness”) and healing, her charge—at least to a degree—represents a project of reclamation. Yet these efforts to redefine the female body and, specifically, the maternal body, remain problematic for a number of reasons. First, as Horvitz emphasizes, one result of Great Gram’s charge is that “their commodification is continued by the women themselves, not for money this time, but for history” (Horvitz 46-47). Second, as Li argues, this mandate works also to transform the female body into a tool and thus reduces women to a physical function. She explains:

Once objectified as lucrative ‘pussy’ within the slave economy, the Corregidora women now privilege the womb as the primary site of female value. In both conceptions, women are reduced to a physical function and alienated from any notion of personal desire or sexual pleasure. By shifting attention from the reproductive to the purely sexual, Great Gram and Gram stress the creative potential of women. However, they appropriate the female body as a tool rather than claim it as a means of asserting personal agency. (Li 133)

By using their bodies to “make generations” and “bear witness” to the horrors committed under slavery, the Corregidora women reappropriate for themselves what was once used for others’ purposes, but in their attempt at reclamation they find themselves unable to define their bodies in any ways other than the one laid out for them by Great Gram.

Not only does Great Gram traumatize them by retelling her stories to them time and again—and thus making them relive the abuses she suffered—but her charge to “make generations” also transforms their sexual relations into rote encounters carried out with the purpose of procreation, not pleasure, in mind. Ursa’s mother confides in Ursa that she was drawn to Martin because she saw him not as a life-partner, but as a way to help her fulfill Great Gram’s charge. To Ursa she admits, “I didn’t want no man” (Jones 114). She discloses her reasons for having sexual relations with Martin: “It was like my whole body knew it wanted you, and knew it would have you” (Jones 114). Mama has obeyed the edict laid out for her, but it costs her dearly. She is unable to relate to Martin or any man in any way other than sexually, yet sexual fulfillment is closed off to her too, since for her, sex is strictly about procreation, a way to “make generations.” Horvitz highlights how the tragic Corregidora family history affects Ursa’s mother’s, and Ursa’s own, relationships with men when she declares that “Mama’s sexual life, like her own, has been ruined by slavery” (Horvitz 40). As Li explains,

Mama is the first of the Corregidora women not to experience the horrors of physical enslavement and the perverse cruelties of Corregidora. Instead she endures the destructive consequences of her foremothers’ demand to make generations. Raised upon stories that present men as domineering rapists who commodify and abuse women, Mama fears men even as she is drawn to Martin so that she can fulfill the mandate of her foremothers. (Li 133)

For Mama, the desire to fulfill Great Gram’s charge is so strong and so all-consuming that it eclipses any other longings she might have.

Mama’s attempt to reclaim her body by fulfilling Great Gram’s mandate does represent a shift from how Gram and Great Gram’s maternal bodies were used/abused under the system of slavery, yet her re-appropriation of her body remains clouded nonetheless by historical practices, including the practice during slavery of forcing women to serve as breeders. Additionally, her so-called desires may be tainted by the very system she seeks to subvert. As Butler emphasizes, “the female body that seeks to express itself is a construct produced by the very law it is supposed to undermine” (Butler 93). Despite Mama’s belief that “making generations” is an act of subver-

sion, she participates, to a degree, within a system and society that wants to define her by her reproductive abilities. Thus, she conforms to society's prescribed role for her at the same time as she tries to redefine herself by/through her body's functions. Butler explains this dilemma; the female body, she stresses, "freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation" (Butler 936).

Ursa's current dilemma, like her mother's, has its roots in the myriad forms of abuse her foremothers suffered under the system of slavery. When a violent confrontation with her drunken husband Mutt Thomas causes her to miscarry and forces her to undergo an emergency hysterectomy, she must come to terms with her inability to fulfill the mandate laid out for her by her Great Gram. For Ursa, this proves quite difficult. The desire to "make generations" has been deeply ingrained in her, as a conversation she has with Tadpole, the man who will become her second husband, makes clear:

'What do you want, Ursa?'

I looked at him with a slight smile that left quickly. 'What do you mean?'

'What I said. What do you want?'

I smiled again. 'What all of us Corregidora women want. Have been taught to want. To make generations.' (Jones 22)

Ursa's foremothers have indoctrinated her into their belief system so much so that she has internalized their desires as her own. She wants, as she puts it, "what all of us Corregidora women want," and now that she is unable to "make generations," she must find another way to define herself. This already difficult task proves even more complicated for Ursa because she must do it amidst individuals and a society which seeks to define—and confine—her in ways that fit their agendas.

Far from operating separately from the system which exploited her foremothers, the conditions under which Ursa is oppressed and defined link up in a very real way to the legacy of slavery. In fact, Ursa is figuratively confined by the same forces that literally enslaved her foremothers. As Griffiths emphasizes, "the legacy of Corregidora's plantation follows her, and she seems enslaved to others and owned by their desires" (Griffiths 357). Ursa must, then, not only reconcile the voices of her foremothers, who have sought to control her destiny with their mandate to "make generations," but on an almost daily basis she also must confront others who seek to objectify her and lay claim to her body. This is, of course, the case with Mutt Thomas, whose relationship with Ursa is often described in terms

that suggest ownership. What sets Mutt off and leads him to assault Ursa that fateful night at Happy's Café, where he shoves her down the flight of stairs causing her to miscarry and also lose her womb, is that men at this club, where she is singing, "mess with they eyes" at her, which Mutt not only heartily dislikes, but also resents since he sees their gaze as an infringement on his proprietary rights over Ursa (Jones 3). Thus, it is a conflict over her body, and who can lay claim to it, that is responsible for her accident and inability to "make generations." At another point, Mutt demands of her, "Are you mine, Ursa, or theirs?" (Jones 45). Tellingly, Mutt's question assumes that someone must have ownership rights over Ursa—in his view, she must *either* belong to the Corregidora line, and thus be "theirs," or belong to him. He does not allow the possibility that Ursa, perhaps, is her own agent, a self-determining individual. Rather, he feels she must belong to—and thus answer to—someone else. Later in the novel, Ursa recalls how Mutt liked to claim exclusive rights to her body and her sexuality: "Talking about *his* pussy. Asking me to let him see his pussy" (Jones 46).

Mutt is not alone in wanting Ursa to conform to his own desires and agenda. As Jennifer Griffiths highlights,

in every interaction, Ursa must see herself as an object of someone else's desire or as a sexual threat to other women. In both the public space of the nightclub, the fair, and the town streets and in the private spaces in which she seeks refuge and recovery, Ursa's body exists as a spectacle, revealing a legacy that she has internalized and the outside world has confirmed. (Griffiths 356)

Ursa is an object of sexual desire for Cat, whose advance Ursa spurns, and for her second husband Tadpole McCormick, the club-owner who assumes ownership rights over her, as well. Though he does not physically abuse Ursa as Mutt did, he is a very controlling presence in her life, wanting a say in what she eats, how much she sleeps, and how long she performs on stage at a time. When Tadpole puts Ursa on stage at his club to sing, he commodifies her, both because he makes money through her talents and by the way he exploits her physical attractiveness and desirability as a way to fill up seats in his club.

Indeed, it is when Ursa sings the blues on stage that it becomes most obvious that her body is caught between conflicting narratives. Ursa represents a cash profit to Tadpole when she performs at his club. He profits financially from her talents as a blues singer and thus appropriates her bodily functions, her voice and her presence on stage, for his own purposes. This is true, as well, of the owner of the Spider, another nightclub where Ursa performs. He suggests as



much when he repeatedly tells her that his club's popularity is due, in large part, to her singing: "I knew when I seen you, get you here and we'd be doing good business. Something powerful about you" (Jones 93). Ursa, thus, is clearly commodified on the job by those who earn money from her singing. She is also objectified, however, when she performs the blues, a point Mutt makes clear in his jealous rants about how men "mess" with her when she is on stage (Jones 3). Mutt paraphrases these men's desires, asserting that when they see her perform they can think of nothing but "that woman's standing up there. That good-lookin woman standin right up there" (Jones 84).

Though Mutt's anxieties and accusations stem, in part, from his jealous nature and his desire to possess Ursa, his observations about how men objectify Ursa when they see her on stage nonetheless ring true. Ursa is sexually defined on the job; remember, for instance, that part of her allure as a singer is, of course, her physical attractiveness and stage presence. The tendency to sexually define women on the job is a widespread practice, which numerous feminist scholars make clear. In her study *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, Catharine A. MacKinnon posits that men "consume" women's sexuality on the job, and women [...] must accommodate this fact as part of their work" (MacKinnon 22). MacKinnon is careful to point out the pervasiveness of this practice; she explains that women must confront this tendency regardless of the type(s) of work they perform. Thus, as she emphasizes, a woman "need not be a secretary or hold a 'woman's job' to be sexually defined on the job" (MacKinnon 19). Adrienne Rich, who in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" also examines the practice of sexually defining women on the job, points out that "women in the workplace are at the mercy of sex as power in a vicious circle" (Rich 21). Indeed, working women have had to learn to accept a degree of powerlessness with respect to this practice. For women, it is part of the price of holding a job in a male-dominated society. Rich explains:

The fact is that the workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their psychic and physical boundaries as the price of survival; where women have been educated—no less than by romantic literature or by pornography—to perceive themselves as sexual prey. (Rich 22)

In Ursa's position as a female blues singer, she must confront her sexualization on the job—and the fact that when she performs the blues at these clubs she is "sexual prey" to the men in the audience.

Yet for Ursa, singing the blues is also a form of expression which represents her attempt at recovery and reclamation. She emphasizes these reasons for performing the blues when she says "I didn't just

sing to be supported [...] I sang because it was something I had to do” (Jones 3). Singing the blues connects Ursa with an ideological framework that is specifically African American; as Angela Davis observes in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, both the “historical context within which the blues developed” and the subject matter of blues songs reveal “an ideological framework that was specifically African-American” (Davis 4). At the same time, for Ursa, singing the blues is a type of personal narrative. As K.M. Langellier highlights in her essay, “Voiceless Bodies, Bodiless Voices,” a personal narrative functions as “a story of the body told through the body which makes cultural conflict concrete” (208). She explains as well that a personal narrative represents a “performative struggle over personal and social identity rather than the act of a self with a fixed, unified, stable or final essence” (208). Singing, for Ursa, is a process rather than a final product. It is by singing the blues that Ursa thus confronts the very forces that attempt to confine and define her as she also reflects them. By performing blues songs, Ursa is finally able to reconcile the legacy of pain she has inherited from old man Corregidora and her foremothers with her personal struggles in mid-twentieth-century America. In her essay, “The Role of the Blues in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*,” Donia Allen explains that “by digging around in the past and connecting it to her own life, Ursa is able, finally, to move beyond it” (Allen 261).

Thus, for Ursa, her body also functions as a path to testimony: by singing the blues, Ursa connects to the spiritual. Through her ritual of singing, she is finally able to “bear witness” to the atrocities committed during slavery as well as to testify to her own personal struggles. By telling her story and the stories of her foremothers, Ursa’s singing operates as means of recovery and reclamation. Through her voice, Ursa’s body functions as an instrument to counter the various cultural and historical forces that seek to oppress and contain her. Though the path of “making generations” to “bear witness” to old man Corregidora’s crimes is closed off to Ursa because of her miscarriage and subsequent hysterectomy, and because she is therefore unable to literally fulfill that mandate, she is nonetheless able to obey and honor the spirit of this command through her blues songs.

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## **TLON, UQBAR, ORBIS TERTIUS: THE INTRUSION OF A NOT-SO-FANTASTIC WORLD**

*Tina V. Cabrera*

**T**he fantasy genre has been one that readers have explored for generations, entering epic worlds (as in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy), or time and space far, far away (as in the *Star Wars* series). The key word here is ‘enter’—one steps out of one’s world and enters into another. However, the step one takes is not always very far.

These fantasy worlds are not entirely different from our own. If they were too alien, foreign or fantastic, then we would find little reason to enter into them. In the case of the *Lord of the Rings*, one recognizes the very human themes of war and good versus evil, even though these themes are explored within the context of wizards, hobbits, elves and dwarves. In *Star Wars*, the hero Luke Skywalker, though he is not from earth, is still human, and even the anti-hero Darth Vader (part man, part machine) is discovered to retain a human heart. Nevertheless, both forms of fantasy, and the majority that fit into this genre, are set in times long past or far into the distant future. While we enter these worlds, for the most part they retain their attributes of fantasy, and so we keep one foot in our own world so to speak. In Jorge Luis Borges’s unique brand of fantasy, *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*, one discovers a world that is not so fantastic, and rather than simply entering, the reader’s world is intruded upon by this strange world. We discover the world of Tlon through the eyes of a human being with no special powers—a writer who discovers first a fake country (Uqbar) and then the imaginary world, Tlon. The setting for his investigation is the late 1930s through early 40s, and the place is Buenos Aires, a world in time and space not “long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.” Let us first look at some of the humanistic features of Tlon.

To begin with, Tlon takes up the space of an encyclopedic record, a very common, familiar form: “I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopedia” (Borges 68). The discovery of this undocumented country, Uqbar, eventually leads to the discovery of Tlon. Now, a report on an encyclopedic entry is not

otherworldly or unusual. Further, we are informed in the postscript that the records of the imaginary world Tlon grew into forty volumes, so that “some of the unbelievable features of Volume Eleven” had to be eliminated in order to “set forth a world that is not too incompatible with the real world” (81). This clever turn in the narrative comes too late, since the reader has by this point, already been exposed to these baffling features (such as “the multiplication of *hronir*,” which along with other elements will be closely examined shortly). The ironic effect is that our attention is drawn even more so to these attributes, and we find them more and more compatible with our own world than we ever imagined.

What is it about these characteristics of Tlon that make them not so incompatible with our world? There are the references made to those familiar and famous names in philosophy, such as Berkeley and Schopenhauer, related to philosophical ideologies and questions which parallel those in our own minds—questions of knowledge, existence, God, and so on. The territories of Tlon, Uqbar and Orbis Tertius may be “essayistic commentaries on imaginary, non-existent countries, authors, or books...deserving of the fantastic label” (Menton 417), but the end result is the depiction of worlds with which we are readily acquainted.

Another way the narrative proves more realistic is that the narrator is a human with no special powers, such as wielding a light saber or moving objects with only the force of his mind, but is rather, an everyday human being, like the reader. That is why it is easy to follow the voice of this narrator as he reports his findings, step-by-step, until we reach the same final conclusions that he does. Interestingly, even though he is initially doubtful of the reality of the undocumented country, Uqbar, and recognizes that Tlon is an imaginary realm, the leap he makes from unreality to reality is so smooth we barely notice it. After asking who invented Tlon, he surmises that the original conjecture that said it was invented by a secret society of “astronomers, biologists, engineers,” is implausible; few are capable of such imagination and “fewer still capable of subordinating imagination to a rigorous and systematic plan” (Borges 72). In the next phrase he decides that although at first Tlon was thought of as “a mere chaos, an irresponsible act of imaginative license, today we know that it is a cosmos, and that the innermost laws that govern it have been formulated, however provisionally so” (72). The lines between fantastic and real blur, and we are swept right along.

Our human reporter, in effect, holds Tlon up as a mirror to our world (a world that we share with him) as he reflects on its resonant themes, philosophies and ideals and compares them with ours.

However, while Tlon often reflects our world in many ways (as we shall see), it often distorts it. It is just what takes place for the narrator of “Covered Mirrors,” another of Borges’ stories: “the constant, infallible functioning of mirrors, the way they followed my every movement, their cosmic pantomime...I feared sometimes that they would begin to veer off from reality” (Borges 297). The mirrors began to intrude upon him—pantomiming his movements but also distorting them. In a similar way, we find the Tlon mirror intruding upon us, and we cannot easily escape, so that the unreal begins to replace the actual.

We can examine the ways in which Tlon intrudes upon our world, both reflecting and distorting it, by taking a look at Tlon’s so-called “unbelievable features,” its “architectures and its playing cards, the horror of its mythologies and the murmur of its tongues, its emperors and its seas, its minerals and its birds and fishes, its algebra and its fire, its theological and metaphysical controversies” (71-72). By doing so, we find ourselves both amazed and perplexed at the accuracies and fallacies of the Tlon mirror.

We can begin with its conception of the universe: “Hume declared for all time that while Berkeley’s arguments admit not the slightest refutation, they inspire not the slightest conviction. That pronouncement is entirely true with respect to the earth, entirely false with respect to Tlon” (Borges 72). Here we are informed that the people of Tlon are, like our own Berkeley, idealists. Berkeley’s idealist doctrine says that objects do not have any existence outside of the minds or thinking things, which perceive them. Similarly, for Tlon, “the world is not an amalgam of *objects* in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent *acts*” (73). Echoing the idealist notion, in the language of Tlon there are no nouns, but a series of verbs and adverbs: our “moon” becomes for them “to moonate” or “to enmoon.” These linguistic rules hold for the southern hemisphere; in the northern, the primary unit is the monosyllabic adjective—nouns are formed by stringing adjectives together so that instead of “moon” one says “aerial-bright above dark-round” or some such string (73). While this philosophy of language may at first seem ridiculous, it springs from a mutual desire to use language to order, shape and construct our realities. Borges himself discussed this precise need in his nonfiction essay, “Verbiage for Poems.” He recognizes that “language is an efficient ordering of the world’s enigmatic abundance” and that “we invent nouns to fit reality” (21). He also uses the example of the moon:

The moon itself is a fiction. Outside of astronomical conventions, which should not concern us here, there is no similarity whatsoever between the yellow sphere now rising clearly over the wall of the Recoleta



cemetery and the pink slice I saw in the sky above the Plaza de Mayo many nights ago. All nouns are abbreviations. Instead of saying cold, sharp, burning, unbreakable, shining, pointy, we utter “dagger.” (21)

He says we lie to ourselves, as when we “touch a sphere, see a small heap of dawn-colored light,” and when “our mouths enjoy a tingling sensation” calling these three disparate things only one thing, an orange.” However, the point is the “inventive character of any language,” or language to construct realities (Borges 21). We need to do this in order to make sense of our world. Similarly, though the people of Tlon construct their reality through language far differently than we do, their purpose reflects our own. It is *not* entirely true, then, that Berkeley’s idealist notions are without conviction here on earth. Many of us—especially poets—would rather (and perhaps do) string along verbs or adjectives rather than confine ourselves to the use of nouns in our attempt to define the array of objects in our universe.

Another aspect of Tlon to investigate is its psychology. The conception of the universe as “a series of mental processes that occur not in space but rather successively, in time” (73) is not a novel idea to one familiar with Berkeley and Hume. Berkeley is the source of *esse est percipi* (to exist is to be perceived). For Hume, each man is “a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity” (Borges 320), as noted by Borges in his nonfiction essay, “A New Refutation of Time.” Both Berkeley and Hume, like Tlonists, affirmed the existence of time. But Tlon takes it a step further. Their idealism “renders science null” (Borges 74). How so? Our narrator tells us that “to explain (or pass judgment on) an event is to link it to another; on Tlon, that joining-together is a posterior state of the *subject*, and can neither affect nor illuminate the prior state” (74). This is perhaps where we begin to see Tlon’s distortion of idealism into a rejection of the scientific method, which does link events together and which is a time-honored field in our world. Further, the “metaphysicians of Tlon seek not truth, or even plausibility—they seek to amaze, astound. In their view, metaphysics is a branch of the literature of fantasy” (74). To reduce the philosophy of the mind into a form of fantasy is to offend centuries of deep human thought and study into it, as well as fervor for its discoveries.

Nevertheless, while distorting our conception of idealism, science and metaphysics, the anxiety stirred by their philosophical views resembles those aroused by controversies in our own branches of philosophy. This leads to the next branch of philosophy of Tlon, one having to do with the existence of time.

One of these schools of philosophy “goes so far as to deny the existence of time; it argues that the present is undefined and indefi-

nite, the future has no reality except as present hope, and the past has no reality except as present recollection” (Borges 74). Does this not sound familiar? If it does, it is because Borges similarly refuted the continuity of time. He respected both Berkeley and Hume, who—while agreeing on the existence of time—disagreed on their views of the existence of objects. But Borges took them both to task by refuting the existence of time itself. He backs his argument up from sources such as Marcus Aurelius, Schopenhauer, and even from Buddhist concepts.

A passage from Marcus Aurelius says that, “No one loses the past or the future, because no man can be deprived of what he does not have” (Borges 227). As much as any of us talk about the past or future as if we own them, none of us have either in our grasp. For Schopenhauer, “No man has lived in the past, and none will ever live in the future; the *present* alone is the form of all life” (227). The fifth-century Buddhist treatise, *Visuddhimagga* or *The Path to Purity*, says: “The man of a past moment has lived, but he does not live nor will he live; the man of a future moment will live, but he has not lived nor does he now live; the man of the present moment lives, but he has not lived nor will he live” (Borges 331). If these concepts of time are baffling—and they are for many—then the Tlonists’ denial of time is not necessarily surprising. For them, present, past, and future are unreliable; for Borges, time does not exist outside each present moment.

So far then, this particular school of thought on time from Tlon’s perspective is very much reflective of schools of thought in our own world. But notice the alternative views of other schools on Tlon, each one equally intriguing:

Another school posits that all time has already passed, so that our life is but the crepuscular memory, or crepuscular reflection, doubtlessly distorted and mutilated, of an irrevocable process. Yet another claims that the history of the universe—and in it, our lives and every faintest detail of our lives—is the handwriting of a subordinate god trying to communicate with a demon. Another, that the universe might be compared to those cryptograms in which not all the symbols count, and only what happens every three hundred nights is actually real. Another, that while we sleep here, we are awake somewhere else, so that every man is in fact two men. (74)

Is the Tlon mirror here serving as a cosmic pantomime, or veering off from reality? Do these various choices in schools of thought amaze or frustrate? Perhaps the array of possibilities borders on the ridiculous or unfathomable. Regardless, the answer relies on our view of what reality is, and as we’ve seen from just the previous examples among our own world philosophers, the matter is clearly debatable.

In our literary experiences, one of the joys of owning a library

is having books signed by our favorite authors. On Tlon, “books are rarely signed” (Borges 76). In fact, neither “does the concept of plagiarism exist: It has been decided that all books are the work of a single author who is timeless and anonymous” (77). There goes the ego and vanity of the aspiring writer who wants to stand out from all the rest. Does this concept of one anonymous author seem absurd? Think of the reverse; for example, the claim that has been made that Shakespeare was not really one man or author, but several. These individual identities then become obscured or narrowed down into a single subject. The same possibility has been claimed for Homer. Looking into the mirror of Tlon in this case, we see not a distortion but a reversal.

Let us now move on to what can be considered the most peculiar feature of Tlon—the *hronir*. There are three things to note about the nature of the *hronir*: (1) They are secondary objects, or duplicates, and are found or perceived because they are expected; (2) They are slightly longer than the primary or original object; (3) The first attempts to produce them were unsuccessful. Looking at the experiment performed by the warden on his prison inmates helps explain why these first attempts failed, and thus further enlightens the nature of the *hronir*.

The inmates were told that if they brought in an important find from among ancient tombs, they would be set free from prison. They proved unsuccessful because they were overreaching in their greed to find the objects. This experiment on how to produce more of the *hronir* was repeated at four high schools. When the project was spontaneous at one of these schools (where the principal died early in the excavations), the results were better; in other words, it was better when people were not aware of the experimental nature of the search. They (the Tlonists) perceived objects into being when totally unaware that they were doing so—in other words, naturally. But at the same time they would have to expect to find what they were looking for; the rules, then, in the production of *hronir* are that they can only see something that they have something to connect it to—in this case, an image in their heads of what they want to find. Another example to elucidate this notion is where two people are looking for a pencil—one finding it, but the other finding it too because he expects to do so.

The *hronir* is a prime example of this fact on Tlon: “Century upon century of idealism could hardly have failed to influence reality” (Borges 77). And this idealism is rooted in Berkeley’s notion of *esse est percipi*. Or did Tlon come up with idealism first? The narrator is never clear and by this time neither are we. What he does right before the postscript is say that the “systematic production of *hronir* (says

Volume Eleven) has been of invaluable aid to archaeologists, making it possible not only to interrogate but even to modify the past, which is now no less plastic, no less malleable than the future” (77-78). If objects only exist because they are perceived by minds, then the past and the future can be modified through mind perception; an example of this on Tlon: “the only *hron* unearthed...dated some time *later* than the date of the experiment” (77).

What about idealism’s influence upon our reality? We owe much of the empiricist way of thinking—a form of idealism—to Berkeley, one of the three philosophers (the other two being Locke and Hume) whose notion “demands that all knowledge, except for certain logical truths and principles of mathematics, comes from experience” (Solomon 244). This school of thought endured into the 20<sup>th</sup> century through the philosophy of Bertrand Russell and the logical empiricists or positivists (244). Berkeley’s thesis of subjective idealism falls under epistemology, “the study of human knowledge—how we get it, what it is, whether we have it, or why we don’t” (185). And for us, as for Tlon, subjective idealism is “the doctrine that there are no material substances, no physical objects, only minds and ideas in mind” (214). Therefore, Tlon and our world reflect each other when it comes to idealism. The questions to consider are: Is it possible for us as humans to take our idealism and modify the past or the future? If so, how? We can arrive at the answer by looking at the postscript to Tlon.

Here the ‘truth’ about Tlon begins to unravel. We learn that since 1940, all forty volumes of the history of Tlon have been found. It is confirmed that it has its roots in the early seventeenth century with a secret society in London (including George Berkeley, not surprisingly), with the simple mission of inventing a country. Eventually, “the members of the society realized that one generation would not suffice for creating and giving full expression to a country” (Borges 78). They decided to pass the work on to the next generation and the next, until two hundred years later, a reclusive millionaire named Ezra Buckley decided that “it was nonsense to invent a country—what they ought to do was invent a planet” (79).

Most interestingly, our narrator reveals “the first intrusion of the fantastic world of Tlon into the real world” when the Princess Faucigny Lucinge discovers a compass in a crate amidst her silver table service with one of the letters of the alphabets of Tlon (Borges 79-80). The encyclopedic volumes of Tlon are thus supported in their reality by discovered objects from Tlon such as gleaming metal cones—unbearably heavy, which the narrator says left him with an “unpleasant aftertaste of fear and revulsion” (80). What is it he fears? The spread of the Tlonian objects through various countries expands the Tlon

reality to the point that “handbooks, anthologies, surveys, ‘literal translations,’ authorized and pirated reprints of Mankind’s Greatest Masterpiece filled the world, and still do” (81). What he fears is what has already taken place—“Contact with Tlon, the *habit* of Tlon, has disintegrated this world. Spellbound by Tlon’s rigor, humanity has forgotten, and continues to forget, that it is the rigor of chess masters, not of angels” (81). He goes on to list the intrusion or infiltration of Tlon—into schools with its history obliterating the history he knew, into pharmacology and archaeology, into biology and mathematics.

Our disillusioned narrator plunges us with him into despair, as he predicts that by the time “the hundred volumes of *The Second Encyclopedia of Tlon*” are discovered, “French and English and mere Spanish will disappear from the earth. The world will be Tlon” (Borges 81).

Like our disillusioned narrator, the narrator of the “Covered Mirrors” feared that these mirrors “would begin to veer off from reality” (Borges 297). And by the end of his story, he learns that his companion, Julia, went insane because she saw his reflection in the mirrors in her room—“usurping her own” (298). He defines this experience as “dreadful bondage” (298). Before the postscript, we reveled, sometimes amazed, sometimes perplexed, at the discovery of Tlon’s philosophies, ideas and way of living. It was the novelty of this discovery that prompted us to read on, at times seeing reflections of our own world, at other times distortions or reversals. Nevertheless, we learn from our discovery of the cultures of Tlon that our own worldview is not necessarily universal, and we are moved to be accepting of alternative views of the world. But by the end of the postscript, we sympathize with the despair of our narrator that this world of Tlon, despite having been fake, has the power to usurp our own reflection and replace our world. This postscript serves as a warning: Do not let the Other take over and supplant your own identity and culture.

Roberto González Echevarría says in his *Myth and Archive* that “what the new discourse seeks is not so much knowledge about the Other as much as knowledge about the Other’s knowledge” (González Echevarría 150). Learning about other cultures and their viewpoints can indeed prove enlightening, but on the other hand it can prove dangerous if we allow such knowledge of these other cultures to erase our own. Then we lose ourselves. And by the end of the Tlon adventure, we face the horror of the real world being swallowed up by the imaginary one. Yes, the horror lies not just with the possibility of our personal identity being usurped by the individual ‘Other,’ but by an ‘Other’ entire world.

This warning has currency in our contemporary lives, when more than ever the virtual world (broadly defined as any kind of perceptual illusion) intrudes on the real. When watching a movie in a theater such as the recent blockbuster *Avatar*, for example, we go into it knowing it is just fantasy, and yet for some of us the illusion continues to exist even after we exit the theater. We find ourselves envying the otherworldly powers of the big-screen heroes, dissatisfied with our comparably mundane lives. Perhaps we snap out of such fantasy once the film is over. However, a constant bombardment of similar virtualities on the Internet and television can make it difficult to discern the pressing matters of our world. To paraphrase Noam Chomsky (*Noam Chomsky on the World*), there are two elements of television—content and fill. The content is the advertising, and “the fill is the car chase to keep you watching until the next ad comes on.” Humor aside, Chomsky turns to the very serious matter of how the inundation of advertisements to buy this or that turns people into passive consumers who max out their credit cards in pursuit of their personal fantasies rather than citizens who pay attention to what’s going on in the world. He points out the shameful fact that most Americans don’t know anything about the outside world. Not only are people ignorant in terms of geography and politics, but of the oppression of fellow human beings in other parts of the world, and of impending dangers that threaten to disintegrate the world at large. In effect, we become victims of ignorance not only of the ‘Other’ but also of our immediate world and the powers that be. Ultimately, the virtual world dominates.

The Tlon anthropological report ends with the narrator giving up, and giving in to the disintegration of the world, his only useful action being to revise “an indecisive translation in the style of Quevedo of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Urne Buriall*” (Borges 81). As we too exit this not-so-fantastic world, let us put our knowledge of its concepts and perplexities to use by taking with us, among other things, the *hronir* and its idealistic nature. González Echevarría further muses: “Anthropological knowledge could correct the errors of the conquest, atone for the crimes of the past, and make for a new history” (150), thus turning our cultural knowledge of the ‘Other’ and of ourselves into something positive and useful, rather than controlling and oppressive. In a sense, this hopefulness is idealistic; he is saying that knowledge can prove to be an active force for atonement. How can knowledge be turned into reality? As the systematic production of *hronir* made it possible for archaeologists to interrogate and modify the malleable past, so too can we interrogate our past and make for a new history. We can do this by first actively acquiring knowledge

of our (entire) world, including the ways in which we suppress and abuse both ourselves and the ‘Other,’ and secondly, by preventing such damaging occurrences from occurring in the first place—thus molding the future. Ideally, it will not, as it did for Tlon, take century upon century to do so.

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## THE NATURAL RIGHT TO ABSOLUTE FREEDOM

Vartan P. Messier

*L'alternative à la loi du plaisir est introduite ... par le droit à la jouissance. C'est par là que Sade change pour chacun l'axe de l'éthique en y faisant reculer dans sa perspective antique cet égoïsme du bonheur, encore si aisé d'accès à la définition de Kant, et avec lui tous les appels du salut, voire du progrès que Kant lui substitue.*

–Jacques Lacan, “Kant avec Sade”

In the aftermath of the French revolution, Sade wrote *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, in which he inserted the brief political pamphlet entitled “Français, encore un Effort si vous voulez être Republicains,” an ironical response to Robespierre’s post-revolutionary discourses. Popular interpretations of the work of the Marquis have attempted to show that his philosophy of sexual freedom can be read as a manifesto against the legal and moral constraints of institutionalized dogma.<sup>1</sup>

Le Chevalier’s repudiation of religion and morals (*les moeurs*) elaborates on many of the precepts of libertine philosophy already hinted at in Sade’s larger work. Read within the context of the French Revolution and the First Republic, Sade’s pamphlet is not only a reaction to the political philosophy of Robespierre’s mentor, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, but also a response to the modern theories of state and sovereignty elaborated by two of Rousseau’s predecessors, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, whose ideas about natural right and contractual agreement largely informed the work of the Frenchman. However, Sade does not aim to advocate an entirely different,

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<sup>1</sup> This reading was perhaps first propagated by the surrealists in the 1920s, and re-appropriated by the various cultural movements of the 1960s on both sides of the Atlantic. It would be important to note, however, that recent scholarship has produced more complex and mitigated understandings of the Marquis and his work; for a comprehensive overview, see James Steintrager’s “Liberating Sade” (*The Yale Journal of Criticism* 18.2 (2005): 351-379)



e.g. “libertine,” form of political organization. Rather, he dismantles their position by turning the logic of institutionalized statehood on its head, taking the premise of sovereignty—“the fundamental laws” or “rights” of freedom and self-preservation—to its logical extreme.

While Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau might have differing opinions on which is the more efficient form of sovereignty (monarchy or democracy), as well on the extent of its powers over its subjects (absolute or limited), they have all argued that outside of civilized society, i.e. in a “state of nature,” the fundamental rights of people to freedom and self-preservation are at best insecure (Locke and Rousseau) or at worst constantly jeopardized (Hobbes). They contend that because one’s unbridled passions, desires, and appetites may interfere with the rights of others, some form of state sovereignty is necessary. Therefore, in order to live and thrive, the people willfully surrender their individual freedom for the perceived mutual benefit of joining forces in civil society by contracting a sovereign—a person or a group of people with the power to act with authority—who in return will guarantee their safety and protection through the establishment and enforcement of state legislation. In yielding their natural rights of individual freedom to the sovereign, the people become his subjects and are able to enjoy their property peacefully and securely under his protection.

For a purported libertine like Sade—or rather, Le Chevalier<sup>2</sup>—these so-called “civil liberties” contradict an ideal of absolute freedom inherent to the laws of nature; any derivation thereof is a perversion of the birthright to freely seek one’s own means of self-preservation as instructed by one’s passions and desires, and it is these liberties that Lacan identifies as “categorical” in the Kantian sense.<sup>3</sup> He believes that this natural right is inalienable; by prioritizing the absolute freedom of the sovereign individual over the limited civil liberties offered by state sovereignty, he advocates for a notion of statehood in strict agreement with the laws of nature. For Sade, the only valid form of republicanism wherein individual rights are preserved is one that positions freedom as a priori to any social contract.

Although the Marquis massively disagrees with the main thesis of his predecessors—that civil society ultimately benefits the individual—he nonetheless borrows extensively from their work. And because his own discourse interweaves the various premises and

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that I will use both names interchangeably; the thoughts expressed in the pamphlet could arguably be attributed to Sade, even if that means committing an intentional fallacy.

<sup>3</sup> See “Kant avec Sade” in *Critique* 191 (April 1963).

notions of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, Le Chevalier's diatribe provides an interesting blend or hybrid of the above. Therefore, to follow and appreciate the logic of his argument it would seem appropriate to review in some detail the theories of his forerunners.

### **Hobbes' *Leviathan*: From Perpetual War to Total Surrender**

Hobbes' theory of sovereignty exerted a strong influence on his contemporaries, Locke and Rousseau, as well as on much of modern political philosophy. Charles Edward Merriam Jr. points out in *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* that the basis for a modern notion of sovereignty can be attributed to Jean Bodin. In *De Republica* (1586), Bodin defines sovereignty as "The supreme power over citizens and subjects, unrestrained by law," which is very similar to Hobbes' definition. Merriam notes that Bodin clearly avoids the original notion of a popular sovereignty as it circulated in Antiquity and the Middle Ages<sup>4</sup> by declaring that the supreme power of the sovereign is absolute; it can enact laws on its subjects without their consent, and it is not constrained by conditions or limitations apart from those imposed by God, nature, and other nations. Merriam notes that "[a]ll these limitations are, however, ethical rather than political in character, and could at best bind only the conscience of the ruler" (16). Following Bodin, Hugo Grotius likewise theorized sovereignty to be absolute, but in addition to being limited by natural, divine, and international law, it is also limited by the contract between the government and the governed and its exercise aims to benefit both parties (qtd in 22-23).

Hobbes is much closer to Bodin in that he argues against the original theory of popular sovereignty and for the notion of absolute sovereignty, unrestricted by laws of any kind. Proceeding methodologically through definition and deduction, Hobbes' theory of sovereignty emerges from his characterization of a state of nature wherein man's unbridled passions create a condition of total and perpetual war. In chapter 13, "Of the Naturall Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery," Hobbes indicates that Men

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<sup>4</sup> According to Merriam the origins of the theory of sovereignty can be traced back to Aristotle and Roman law. In Chapter 7 of Book III of *Politics*, sovereignty is defined as the supreme power that exists in a state and which can be in the hands of one, a few, or many, and Merriam points out that in Rome, "The will of the Prince has the force of the law, since the people have transferred to him all their right and power" (qtd in 11). In the Middle Ages, the theory of sovereignty was that the ruler was chosen by consent of the ruled (12), and that it was recognized that the "people" were the sovereign although the term did not designate any physical person, but rather, merely "the mass of subjects" (13).

are by nature equal.<sup>5</sup> But because there is a limited amount of resources to be found in nature, conflicts arise when individuals, driven by their appetite or desire, covet the same thing.<sup>6</sup> Outside of civil society, wherein man is free to act as he pleases with no limitations, the triangulation of desire produces a condition of fear and danger, of continuous war and violence:

[D]uring the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in a condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man. . . . In such condition, there is no place for industry . . . no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation . . . no commodious Building; no instruments of moving . . . no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short. (88-89)

In this state of nature, there is no sense of right or wrong, just or unjust, no vice nor virtue; such qualities are only valid when one lives in society. There is also no sense of property, “no *Mine* or *Thine*,” everything belongs to everyone and everyone is free to indulge in one’s desires and passions at will (89). As I will explain below, Sade insists on the absence of these relative values and considers passions and desires as constitutive of the laws of nature; if the drive to commit murder and destruction is inherent to the state of nature, then they must form part of the laws of nature.

Hobbes draws a rather apocalyptic picture of a natural state wherein there is no common power and no law. But amidst the natural passions that potentially drive men to destroy each other, Hobbes identifies that fear and reason will eventually guide men toward self-preservation through peace rather than war (90). Fear of dying will make natural man seek peace by escaping the impending doom of the state of nature, while reason will show him the means to do so. As a result, men are inclined to draw agreements between them, “Articles of Peace,” which he calls the “Lawes of Nature” (90). “The Right of Nature” (*Jus Naturale*) is the right of every man to act freely in order to guarantee his own safety. Based upon a concept of “Liberty” which

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<sup>5</sup> “Nature hath made men so equall, in the faculties of body, and mind; as that though there bee found on man sometimes manifestly stronger in body, or of quicker mind than another; yet when all is reckoned together, the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable . . . For as the strength of body, the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest, either by secret machination, or by confederacy with others . . .” (86-7).

<sup>6</sup> “[I]f any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their End, (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their delectation only), endeavour to destroy, or subdue one an other” (87).

implies that one can act without restraint or limitations,<sup>7</sup> this right allows one to act as one sees fit according to his own judgment to preserve his own life. In slight contrast, a “Law of Nature” (*Lex Naturalis*)—which differs from a “Right” in the sense that the latter binds one to act in a certain way, while the former consists in the freedom to act—is one “by which a man is forbidden to do that, which is destructive of his life, or taketh away the means of preserving the same; and to omit, that, by which he thinketh it may be best preserved” (91). Following Hobbes’ deduction, we are confronted with a double-bind: when every man is free and has the natural right to whatever he might covet (be it another man’s life), there is an underlying condition of war of all against all and as long as these rights and laws are in effect, no one’s life can be secured. Hence, the very same rights and laws that ought to guarantee one’s safety simultaneously put one’s life at risk.

In order to avoid the impasse of this double-bind, Hobbes argues that there needs to be as a precept a “general rule of Reason” which dictates “That every man, ought to endeavor Peace, as farre as he has hope of obtaining it; and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek, and use, all helps, and advantages of Warre.” Hobbes’ method is quite effective: although he recognizes the validity of the passions, he is quick to point out the ways in which their unbridled pursuit leads to an existential paradox. By underlining their validity while simultaneously pointing out that the state of nature is untenable because it undermines the right to self-preservation, Hobbes is able to articulate a theory of sovereignty based on the fundamental law of nature, i.e. “*to seek peace and follow it,*” wherein peace becomes the means through which self-preservation is ensured. The fundamental law generates the second Law of Nature, which marks the passage from a natural state of war and insecurity, to a societal state by the drawing of an agreement, a “Contract,” in which everyone’s safety and defense of one’s right is insured through peace: “That a man be willing, when others are so too, as farre-forth, as for Peace, and defence of himselfe he shall think it necessary, to lay down his right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself” (92). This passage outlines the necessity for one to “lay down his right to all things,” and hence, to forego the “liberty” to act without limitations. But Hobbes points out that this “Contract,” which is the mutual transfer of right, does not mean that one acts in contradiction to the Law of Nature,

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<sup>7</sup> “By Liberty, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment, and reason shall dictate to him” (91).

but that rather, one does so for his own good by benefiting directly or obtaining a reciprocal right (93).

Having rigorously laid out the conditions that entice men to enter in contractual agreement with each other, Hobbes then proceeds on elaborating on the more specific contract that generates both the State and the Sovereign. Although men might be bound to their covenants, under the laws of nature, there is no way to ensure that they will perform their duty, especially if certain passions interfere with them. Laws are but “words,” Hobbes argues, and to make sure that men will abide by them, there needs to be a “sword,” a form of power that will instill in them the fear of punishment thereby ensuring they will carry out their covenant (117). Hobbes argues that in order to uphold the long-standing abidance of the law there needs to be the institutionalization of “a Common Power,” which will be elected through mutual accord; to whom men will transfer their rights and who, in return, will guarantee the preservation and security of all contractual members (120). This simultaneously marks the institutionalization of the State (or “Common-Wealth”), the sovereign (or “Sovereign”), and the subjects. In Hobbes’ theory of sovereignty, the sovereign holds absolute power over his subjects, who are bound to obey him under the laws he establishes and enforces, a right conferred to him by the institutionalization of the commonwealth. The rationale of instituting a commonwealth is to escape the state of nature, and thus to provide peace and security to the people. The sovereign, which may be an individual or a group of people, is the entity responsible for the well-being of the commonwealth. In order for the sovereign to perform his duty, the people confer to him the power of authority to employ whatever means necessary to protect the commonwealth; the only right they retain is their natural right to self-preservation, which is also the original incentive for establishing the Leviathan.

Hobbes explains there are two ways in which the sovereignty can be attained, one through *acquisition* (i.e. by force: by bending people to the will of the sovereign by threatening their lives), and the other through *Institution* (i.e. voluntary mutual agreement), what he calls a “Political Common-wealth” (121). While the latter corresponds to the process described above and remains Hobbes’ point of focus throughout *Leviathan*, both share the same purpose—to protect the commonwealth and to secure internal and external peace—and both have the same indivisible, inseparable, and absolute rights over their subjects (139). However, they differ in the sense that whereas an institutional sovereignty comes to power because people fear *each other*, a sovereign who comes to power by acquisition gains the support of the people because they fear *the sovereign himself*. This being said,

both kinds of sovereignty are consented to contractually, and both contracts are catalyzed by fear.<sup>8</sup>

Hobbes draws a parallel between civil society and the family by arguing that contractual sovereignty is in many ways similar to the authority of a parent over a child. In the state of nature, both parents exert dominion over a child by agreement,<sup>9</sup> but if there is no contract that right belongs to the mother.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the child owes his obedience to the mother since she protects him and caters to his needs, just as the subject owes his allegiance to the sovereign. But we can draw the parallel even further by suggesting that just as humans escape the state of nature by institutionalizing a commonwealth and contracting a sovereign, thereby giving up their natural freedom in exchange for security and peace, so does a child with his father and two parents with each other. The father only has sovereign power by contract (which is then called “Paternal”),<sup>11</sup> which subjects mother and child to the authority of the father, but the implication is that sovereign power does not *naturally* reside in the father<sup>12</sup> (it actually resides in the mother), and that hence, only the contract determines sovereign power in the commonwealth. A number of implications can be drawn from this parallel. For one, sovereignty asserts itself through a transaction or exchange wherein one party vows allegiance and obedience to the other party for preserving their life through care and protection. But more interestingly, it appears that sovereignty is not exclusive to civil society, as in the case of the mother and her child, it also exists in the state of nature. This sovereignty is not bound to any contract, but Hobbes is not clear as to what force motivates the mother to care for her offspring: is it a “maternal instinct”? Is it the expectation of the child’s obedience as a sign of his gratitude for

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<sup>8</sup> “In both cases they do it for fear: which is to be noted by them that hold all such covenants, as proceed from fear of death or violence, void: which, if it were true, no man in any kind of Commonwealth could be obliged to obedience” (138).

<sup>9</sup> “In this condition of mere nature, either the parents between themselves dispose of the dominion over the child by contract, or do not dispose thereof at all” (140).

<sup>10</sup> “If there be no contract, the dominion is in the mother. For in the condition of mere nature, where there are no matrimonial laws, it cannot be known who is the father unless it be declared by the mother; and therefore the right of dominion over the child dependeth on her will, and is consequently hers” (140).

<sup>11</sup> “The right of dominion by generation is that which the parent hath over his children, and is called paternal. And is not so derived from the generation, as if therefore the parent had dominion over his child because he begat him, but from the child’s consent, either express or by other sufficient arguments declared” (139).

<sup>12</sup> Hobbes also makes the allusion that it is mostly because of historical conditions contingent upon the ways in which power circulated amongst men that paternal authority became the norm (139-140).

her taking care of it? Is it a selfless act, or on the contrary an act that demands retribution? Is it an act of freedom, or one bound by some type of natural/instinctual order?

While Hobbes seems to overlook these intricacies—and this might constitute a “blind spot” in his theory—Sade will address the relationship between mother and child as one of sovereignty and consequently argue that the rights of a mother over her child are absolute, including the right to murder (131). For Hobbes, there is no such thing as an originary form of natural sovereignty akin to each individual; sovereignty is and can only be instilled through a covenant or contract between people who, acting upon the drive for self-preservation, decide to become subjects and defer their rights to a sovereign who consequently holds a supreme power over them. In the family or in civil society, the relationship between subjects and sovereign emerges from a contractual agreement that simultaneously marks the foundation of civil society. In exchange for surrendering their rights to the sovereign, subjects gain peace and prosperity and to ensure these laws, the sovereign becomes both the foundation of all knowledge and the embodiment of absolute power through the exertion of civil laws. Whereas natural man has absolute liberty, and is free to act as he wills, under the commonwealth, he forfeits his freedom by binding himself to civil laws in order to ensure his natural right to self-preservation. What he gains from it far exceeds the possible benefits he could obtain from a condition of perpetual war. Hobbes will eventually argue that since man was plagued by the constant fear of death in the state of nature, he was never really “free.”

Hobbes defines freedom, or liberty, as “the absence of opposition” (145), the ability to act without being physically hindered to do so. In that sense, all subjects of the sovereign can act as freely as they will, even if they act by fear or necessity, for the civil laws instituted in the commonwealth are “artificiall chains,” not physical chains (147). That is, any subject can rightfully resist or disobey the sovereign’s orders if he or she so chooses since it remains in synch with the natural right to freedom (150). In addition to the fact that fear imposed limits on his actions, Hobbes also hints at the idea that because man is subjected to his own uncontrollable appetites in the state of nature, he was never free to begin with (147). Conversely, even though subjects do things in the commonwealth out of the law, they retain the freedom to refuse to perform them (146). More importantly, Hobbes points out that the subjects voluntarily created these contractual obligations and that as a consequence, as the “Author[s] of every act the Sovereign doth” (148), they are solely responsible



for any hindrance to their actions.<sup>13</sup> In other words, subjects gave up their freedom as an act of freedom, and insofar as the surrender of authority to a sovereign power is an act of freedom, whatever ensues is consistent within it. Therein lies the implication that although subjects have conferred to the sovereign absolute power, they have attained absolute liberty because they are the authors of the sovereign's power and hence, are responsible for his actions. In a sense, freedom is a result of power exerted through one's own responsibility. This relationship between freedom, responsibility, and power is not possible in the state of nature, because one is not responsible for, nor is the author of, the actions of others.

### **Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*: From the Executive to the Legislative**

Locke treads along a similar line of argumentation to trace the process through which state sovereignty is established. Like Hobbes, Locke describes the state of nature as a state of equality in which no one has more power over another, and all are free to do as they please: "...the state that all men naturally in, ... is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man" (sec. 4). He notes, however, that this *state of liberty* is not a *state of license*, wherein one can dispose of others as one sees fit or even destroy his own life. A natural law guided by man's propensity to reason instills the notion that "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions" (sec. 6), and that in the state of nature, where everyone is equal to another, everyone has the right to be an executor of the law (sec. 7). Locke does not preclude that man might not abide by this law, and in such cases where one transgresses it, following the right of self-preservation and that of preserving mankind, others have the right to punish the offender accordingly (secs. 8-12). However, Locke recognizes there will be instances wherein man's passions will overcome their reason or better judgment, and in a state of nature where everyone has the executive power of the law of nature, there is bound to be disorder and chaos (unrest). Therefore, Locke perceives in forms of civil government "the proper remedy for

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<sup>13</sup> Subjects are bound to the laws through their own agreement, nonetheless, there are instances wherein the fundamental right toward self-preservation is at stake and wherein Hobbes considers that subjects are dispensed of their obedience to the sovereign. See pp. 150-151, and again 153-154; Hobbes argues that subjects have the liberty to defend themselves and refuse to follow the sovereign's orders if they require that they put their lives at risk. These go back to the laws of nature.



the inconveniences of the state of nature” (sec. 13).

Yet in sharp opposition to Hobbes’ direct equation of the state of nature to one of perpetual war, Locke distinguishes between the two. In contrast to the state of nature, wherein men live amongst themselves in relative peace, the state of war is a state of “enmity and destruction” triggered by one person’s pre-meditated attempts upon another’s life. By the fundamental law of nature, which is that of self-preservation, one may kill another in self-defense in the same sense that one can kill an animal that threatens one’s life. In drawing this parallel, there is an implication that the endeavor to kill or threaten another eludes “the ties of the common law of reason” but rather, rests upon the “rule ... of force and violence” (sec. 16). Locke also translates this as the attempt of one individual to subject another to one’s power, which constitutes a stab to that person’s freedom. This definition rests upon the presumption that any aggression by one person against another constitutes a challenge to that person’s *freedom* (sec. 17), and for Locke, “*freedom* from any form of absolute, arbitrary power, is so necessary to, and closely joined with ... a man’s preservation, that he cannot part with it” (sec. 23). Although both the State of Nature and the State of War share in their composition the absence of a common authority, they differ in the sense that in the former, it is presupposed that people are capable of living together as long as they are guided by reason, while the latter is caused by a *lack* of reason, wherein one is guided by the instincts of a beast of prey (sec. 19). But in a sense, there is always the threat of war in the state of nature, and according to Locke, it is because of this perpetual threat that people decide to form communal bonds: “To avoid this state of war ... is one great reason of men’s putting themselves into society, and quitting the state of nature” (sec. 21).

Although Hobbes and Locke might differ in their characterization of the state of nature, they both share the view that the establishment for state and sovereignty is correlated with the desire of people to leave the State of Nature for some perceived benefit. Locke emphasizes that it is by *consent* that men “put on the bonds of civil society,” wherein one waves the right of natural liberty for the peaceful and safe enjoyment of life and property, which become secured under one authority, “one body politic” (sec. 95) as elected by an “act of majority” (sec. 96). Locke elaborates on the reason one is willing to give up his absolute freedom by asking, “Why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power?” It is foremost because the enjoyment of his life, liberty, and estates, i.e. his “property,” is uncertain that man consent to forego

his natural liberty (sec. 123).<sup>14</sup> Men enter a society out of a concern for self-preservation: “The great and *chief end* therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property. To which in the state of nature there are many things wanting” (sec. 124). It is out of their mutual, shared interest, that a group of people, i.e. “a community,” surrender their individual rights and create a political society that is duly legislated. In contrast to the State of Nature, wherein there were no laws to resolve disputes amongst men, in the commonwealth, the *law*, which Locke eventually calls the “legislative power,” acts with authority “to decide all controversies between them” (sec. 124). In the commonwealth, man gives up his two fundamental rights, the one to act as he sees fit for self-preservation, and that to punish whoever makes an attempt on his property (secs. 129-130); Locke points out that first, “he gives up to be regulated by the laws made by society,” and then, “he wholly gives up, and engages his natural force (which he might before employ in the execution of the law of nature, by his own single authority, as he thought fit) to assist the executive power of the society as the law thereof shall require” (sec. 130).

This *legislative* becomes the supreme power and the source of all laws whose aim is to ensure the preservation of mankind, which is the fundamental law of nature (secs. 134-135).<sup>15</sup> Hence, for Locke there is a direct correlation between the law of nature and the foundation of society. This will be Sade’s cue for considering the laws of nature, i.e. freedom and self-preservation, as absolute, but in opposition to Locke (and Rousseau), he totally disregards the common good as it might interfere with the individual’s fundamental rights to look after his own good (including the pursuit of pleasure) and to use whatever means necessary to do so. For Locke, the individual gives way to the community, and whereas the law of nature is directed at individuals, the law as it is applied in society aims at the common good; as he remarks, “the power of the society, or *legislative* constituted by them, *can never be supposed to extend farther than the common good*” and that the establishment of laws and their execution is to “be di-

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<sup>14</sup> Locke defines *natural liberty* as a person’s right to be ruled solely by the laws of nature, and *social liberty* as the right to be under no legislative power other than that founded by consent of the commonwealth (sec. 22).

<sup>15</sup> Even though the *legislative* is the supreme power of the commonwealth in the sense that it “directs how the force of the commonwealth shall be employed for preserving the community and the members of it,” Locke distinguishes it from two other interrelated forms of power: the *executive power* and the *federative power*, whereas the first is concerned with the “*execution of the municipal laws of the society within its self*,” i.e. internal matters, the second takes care of “the *security and interest and of the public without*,” i.e. external affairs (sec. 147).

rected to no other *end*, but in the *peace, safety, and public good* of the people” (sec. 131). In Locke’s conceptualization of sovereignty in the *legislative*, sovereign power is always subservient to the common good and can never act contrary to the fundamental law of self-preservation. For these reasons, the *legislative* is limited in a number of ways: it is not arbitrary (sec. 135), it abides to standing laws and rules that are publicly declared (sec. 136) and there can be no form of absolute arbitrary power which does not conform to “*declared and received laws*” (sec. 137); it cannot take someone’s property without their consent, although it does have the power to regulate property disputes amongst men (sec. 138); and it cannot transfer the power of legislation to another entity (sec. 141).

Unlike Hobbes, Locke thus theorizes in the *legislative* a *limited* sovereignty. Although it yields supreme power, it remains subordinate to the power of the community and can be removed or altered in the eventuality that it does not act in concordance with the fundamental law of self-preservation (sec. 149). Locke points out that “the *community* perpetually *retains a supreme power* of saving themselves from the attempts and designs of any body, even of their legislators, whenever they shall be foolish, or so wicked, as to lay and carry on designs against the liberties and properties of the subject.” For Locke, the fundamental law of nature, i.e. self-preservation, is absolute, inalienable and unchanging. It is fundamental to both the state of nature and the state of civil society. Not only does it act as the guiding principle for the establishment of society and the *legislative*, it is also that through which the people retain power over sovereign power and reserve the right to dismantle it or destroy if it betrays the trust that was placed in it. Even though people give up the power to act freely and independently, they do not renounce their natural right to self-preservation. It could be argued that in Locke’s political theories men never actually renounce their right to freedom since it is intrinsically linked with the notion of self-preservation. Rather, it remains *latent* and can be called upon if it is put in jeopardy by the act of the sovereign.

### **Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract*: Freedom and Equality for the People**

Following closely the trajectory of Locke, Rousseau uses the premise of Freedom and Equality as inalienable natural rights to take the theory of popular sovereignty elaborated by his forerunner to its logical conclusion. To do so, he reasserts what he dubs “the general will” of the community, indicating that the people retain their

power over the actions of the sovereign. Rousseau begins *On the Social Contract* with his now famous diagnosis of the modern human condition in the modern state, “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (17), in which he stresses that civil societies have only succeeded in negating the birthright to natural freedom without ensuring any civil liberties.

In his endeavor to articulate a political theory of sovereignty that enforces and preserves a fundamental notion of freedom, Rousseau begins by considering families as a “natural” form of society. He argues that once basic needs have been provided for, i.e., “Once the children are freed from the obedience they owed the father and their father is freed from the care he owed his children,” the family unit “maintains itself only by means of convention.” In other words, as in Hobbes, the basis for the maintenance of societies is not one ordered by nature, since family members are free from their natural obligations of allegiance and caretaking, but one of mutual contractual agreement. But Rousseau also refutes the claim made by some of his predecessors, notably Grotius and Hobbes, that the relationships between father and son and ruler and ruled are similar; the father maintains his authority out of the love for his son and his preservation, in the ruler, “the pleasure of commanding takes place of this feeling”. This is perhaps Hobbes’ “blind spot” as pointed out earlier and hence, the ruler in a monarchy does not so much “care” for his subjects. Therefore, Rousseau is weary of a societal model wherein “the human race is divided into herds of cattle, each one having its own leader who guards it in order to devour it” (18). This model of the superiority of the ruler over the ruled is inspired by Greek Antiquity (Aristotle, Plato) wherein it is considered that some individuals are born to be rulers while others are born to be slaves and which, according to Rousseau, coincides with the view of Grotius and Hobbes (18-19). Rousseau strongly rejects Grotius’ (and Hobbes’) idea that a private individual might voluntarily “alienate” his liberty to become the subject of a king, for one has very little to gain from such a relationship, where neither his freedom nor his liberty can be maintained or preserved (20). The condition of slavery is only made possible through force, for an individual will first and foremost act out of a concern for self-preservation and the conservation of his individual freedom. These relationships are not “natural,” they are “despotic” and governed by self-interest, they are only reinforced by force and hence this form of political authority does not find its foundation in nature, for it is contrary to human nature, to one’s “moral duty”; Rousseau argues that “the right of slavery is null, not simply because it is illegitimate, but because it is absurd and meaningless” (22).

As we have seen in *Leviathan*, Hobbes asserts that human life in the state of nature is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,” and therefore, civil society greatly improves the human condition. Rousseau had argued in *Émile* and the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* that it was not the natural state that brought out the worst in man; rather, it was politics that corrupted man’s good nature. For that reason, it is impossible to return to a pre-societal state. Although Rousseau alters his views in *The Social Contract*, he nonetheless refutes the idea that a state of war is inherent to a state of nature wherein people enforce individual liberties: “Men are not naturally enemies,” Rousseau argues, “for the simple reason that men living in their original state of independence do not have sufficiently constant relationship amongst themselves to bring about either a state of peace or a state of war.” He further explains that wars are between “things,” and do not arise between private persons, but between one state and another, where property is at stake (21).

For Rousseau there is no sense in willfully surrendering one’s individual right to freedom without receiving anything in return. Similar to Locke, a “contract” arises when there is a common perception that there might be mutual benefits in joining forces (22), and Rousseau’s concern is foremost to find a form of contractual agreement that does not alienate one from his right to self-preservation, a right, which in the natural state, is guaranteed by one’s individual liberty. According to Rousseau, “The problem is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (24). Hence, Rousseau’s objective in articulating the social contract is to find a form of political society in which an idea of freedom as inspired by his natural state can be maintained. Although the social contract indicates that each individual must surrender himself to the community, Rousseau refutes the idea of a total surrender to a figure of absolute power, for it would imply that the people would alienate themselves from their natural right to freedom. The condition for the contract is based on both freedom and equality, wherein the former is guaranteed by the latter since all members surrender equally to the state. Based on these premises, Rousseau expresses the social contract in the following terms: “Each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction of the general will, and, in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole” (24).

Through the social contract, however, subjects are doubly bound: they are bound toward the sovereign as members of the state, and

they are bound to other individuals as member of the sovereign (25). On the one hand, the sovereign, which is essentially the political entity that expresses and enacts the general will of the community, cannot act in any way that would violate the social contract since he owes his existence to it. On the other, he cannot act detrimentally towards his subjects for he would act detrimentally toward himself. Nonetheless, although the sovereign has contractual obligations toward the general will and the best interests thereof, it is not bound individually to each of its members. Conversely, individuals can act at their discretion in private matters so long as they do not interfere with the common interest. But Rousseau is clear to emphasize that no individual can reap the benefits of the state without contributing or inversely, by acting in a manner that is detrimental to the common good. Subjects will be “forced to be free,” Rousseau famously argues, which implies that potential dissidents will be forced to obey the provisions of the general will. Of course, this can be regarded as a form of despotism and Sade will certainly not fail in pointing out that any republic that makes such proscriptions intrinsically betrays the right to freedom on which it is based.

For Rousseau, the passage from the state of nature to the civil state implies that in losing one’s natural liberties one gains civil liberties. Contrary to what Rousseau might have argued in his earlier work, he now regards this as something that ultimately benefits man (27). This notion is predicated on the idea that whereas in the natural state we experience a form of freedom that is akin to animals—a form of freedom based on need and instinct and is completely irrational—civil freedom is of a much nobler form since it is based on reason and responsibility, which “gives his actions a moral quality it previously lacked” (26). Hence, according to Rousseau, morality and rationality are what distinguish humans from animals, and if these are obtained by entering the civil state, it implies that becoming a citizen is a necessary condition to becoming human. Rousseau argues that “to be driven by appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is liberty.” In an extended sense, it could be argued that Rousseau transfigures Plato’s famous dismissal of instinctual needs and appetites. The freedom to follow our instincts is not a form of absolute freedom because our drives and appetites evade our control. In contrast, in civil society we learn to control our instincts and therefore liberate ourselves from our appetites. Here Rousseau takes a similar stance to Hobbes; rather than “giving up” our freedom by entering into civil society, we learn to fully realize it by mastering ourselves (27).

Societies are instituted by the desire of individuals to join their

forces for the common good, and as such they can only function insofar as the state operates in accordance with this general will that is expressed through the sovereign. Rousseau presents a form of popular sovereignty that is both inalienable and indivisible. On the one hand, the general will of the people cannot be represented by anything else (29), and on the other, it can only express the will of the people as a whole and not that of individual interests (30). Conversely, although the sovereign has absolute power over all public matters it does not interfere in private affairs that do not concern the common good; in these, individuals retain the liberty to act independently (33). For that reason the sovereign can only impose rules that benefit the community as a whole, and in turn “the commitments that bind us to the body politic are obligatory only because they are mutual” (33). Rousseau maintains the notion that the sovereign hold absolute power only if it acts according to the general will of the people and works for the common good. Sovereignty for Rousseau is not a “convention between a superior and an inferior”; therefore, he rejects the idea of sovereignty held by a single monarch, which was clearly the view held by Hobbes (and to some extent Grotius before him). On the contrary, popular sovereignty is first and foremost the expression of the people, not of a single individual or private party (34).

Rousseau focuses on how the sovereign maintains himself since the situation is different in the state of nature because “everything is commonly held,” and there are no bounds to property. In civil society, this is not the case, and there need to be conventions and laws that regulate the behavior of its citizens. But these laws are abstract and ought to be the expression of the general will and applicable universally (37), and Rousseau is careful to point out that “the legislator is an extraordinary man of state,” for only a person with godlike reasoning powers can determine what is right or wrong for the populace (39). At the same time, this person cannot have any legislative right for his private interest might interfere with the public good (40). Rousseau also insists that the fewer the laws, the better (as to avoid confusion) and that likewise a smaller state is easier to maintain than a bigger one, wherein there is more propensity for individual interests to conflict with that of the common good (43). Following the premises upon which the civil society is built, all law should have as object the principles of freedom and equality (46). There are four types of laws for Rousseau: political or fundamental laws, which regulate the internal structure of the state; civil laws, whose concern is the relationships between individual members or to the body politic as a whole; criminal laws, which administer cases where the law is broken; and the morals, customs and beliefs of the citizens, which Rousseau



considers to be the “true constitution of the state.” But there is somewhat of a paradox in establishing morality as the guiding principle of the state, since Rousseau argues that morality only emerges from humans beings in a civil state. Hence, it is not clear as to what gives rise to what: is it morality that gives rise to the state or is it the state that gives rise to morality? Earlier, Rousseau contrasted the ways in which the benefits induced by enjoying civil liberties out of a sense of morality and rationality far exceeded the liberties of a pre-moral state of nature. Now, he implies that morality acts as a basis for the foundation of the state, and it becomes unclear exactly what function morality plays, if any, in either the state of nature or the civil state. This is perhaps one of the many instances where Sade perceives in Rousseau the residue of an outdated system of beliefs, one which he does not hesitate to attack virulently.

Rousseau’s objective in the *The Social Contract* is to articulate a form of popular sovereignty where an idea of freedom is preserved in civil society. In the state of nature, humans are free to do as they please, there are no limitations imposed on their behavior. By choosing to be part of a community and creating a civil society humans forfeit their natural freedom to act instinctively and gain the civil freedom of being able to think rationally and behave morally. Both reason and morality are a consequence of civil society since in the state of nature there is only instinct and desire. But if morality and rationality only has significance in civil society, how can morality constitute the foundation stone of civil society? Or phrased differently, what role, if any, does morality play in the state of nature in triggering in man the desire to enter civil society?

### **Sade’s “Républicains”: From State Sovereignty to Individual Sovereignty**

The invariable logic of the political theories outlined by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau is that guided by their “better” passions, i.e. reason and morality, individuals enter in contractual agreement with each other to institutionalize a form of sovereign power for their mutual benefit. Rather than linger in a state of nature wherein their right to self-preservation is not guaranteed because their unbridled passions may inspire them to jeopardize the life or property of another, individuals decide to surrender their birthright to absolute freedom in exchange for peace. As a result, under the guidance of the sovereign, a monarch or a democratic (republican) power that will enforce a number of legal bonds, they will share the mutual benefits of living in an ordained society and be truly “free” for they will have



learned to master their natural propensity toward (self-)destruction. The most notable variations are that whereas Hobbes perceives the State of Nature as a state of perpetual war of all against all, Locke and Rousseau are more moderate in their account. In Hobbes, civil society rises out of a necessity to escape a state of nature wherein the fundamental law toward self-preservation is constantly jeopardized. In Locke and Rousseau, the impetus to form civil societies emerges from a perception of mutual benefit that only a joining of forces under the hospice of a legal authority can provide. Whereas for Hobbes it is mostly through fear and reason that the state and the sovereign are created, for Locke and Rousseau it is essentially through reason as informed by the perception of mutual shared benefits. While all theories allow the sovereign to hold absolute power over its subjects, there is a divergence in agency. In Locke and Rousseau, to ensure that the focus remains on the common good, the sovereign (or *legislative*) has *limited* power in the sense that people retain *latent* power over him by preserving the right to destitute him if there is any violation of the principles of freedom and equality inherent to its formation. In Hobbes' configuration, due to the provisions of the contractual agreement, the sovereign has *de facto/in situ* absolute power over its subjects (since there is the implication that they will be far better off under any form of government than in the state of nature). In other words, as Merriam observed, in Hobbes the government absorbs the state, whereas in Rousseau (and Locke) the people absorb the government (37-38).

As hinted previously, Sade will pick up on a number of these ideas to present his own argument. But given the rather extraordinary character of some of his claims, it could be argued that one of the objectives of Sade's political tract is to unveil the hypocrisies of some of his contemporaries who claimed that the form of civil government they promote guarantees absolute and equal rights for everyone. Sade is more concerned with demystifying the logic that would induce humans to forfeit their natural birthright to freedom of enjoyment than in articulating a theory of civil society wherein the rights of all to live and prosper are equally respected and preserved. In other words, in turning the persuasive argument underlying the social contract on its head, Sade puts in doubt the notion that the *civil liberties* obtained through legal bonds will make people "more free."

The pamphlet begins with a well-rehearsed repudiation of religion, which, by the end of the eighteenth century had already been extensively reiterated, including by Hobbes and Rousseau. The main thrust of his critique of theories of the state begins in the section entitled "Moral," in which he claims that a new republic will have to

start anew: “a citizen of a free state cannot possibly behave like the slave of a despotic king” (116). Rousseau emphasized “Liberty and Equality,” which was institutionalized in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and Le Chevalier would use it as a point of departure to unveil the ways in which the social contract that institutionalized the republic betrays its foundations. By mostly emphasizing the ideal of freedom, Le Chevalier puts forth the notion that the only laws worth upholding are those dictated by nature:

Citizens, remember: in granting freedom of conscience and freedom of the press, you must allow freedom of action, with few exceptions. And aside from what directly shakes the foundations of government, you will have infinitely fewer crimes to punish; for in a society based on liberty and equality, there are, at bottom, very few criminal acts. If things are thoroughly examined and investigated, then nothing is criminal but what the law rejects; for nature, dictating both vice and virtues, takes charge of our mental and physical constitution, or, to put it more philosophically, our needs for vices and virtues; and what nature in spires would become very uncertain measure for precisely regulating what is good and what is evil. (116)

This provides the basis from which the speaker will proceed methodologically in analyzing—and dismantling—the different types of crimes as determined by previous legislature. Le Chevalier outlines three distinct categories: 1) “Duties toward the supreme being as imposed by conscience and credulity”; 2) “Duties that man must fulfill towards his brothers”; and 3) “Man’s Duties toward himself.” Regarding the first and the third he is considerably brief. Since God does not exist, crimes such as impiety, sacrilege, blasphemy, or atheism are insignificant and one ought to have “the freedom to scorn or mock all religions” (117). Regarding the third duty, he ironically refers to Rousseau’s own justification in Letter XXI in part 3 of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, as well as to various instances in Greek and Roman antiquity wherein suicide was perceived as a virtue and not a crime (147-148).

Le Chevalier elaborates at length on the second duty and begins with discarding the precept of Christian morality that proscribes to love one’s neighbor as oneself “since [it] contradicts all the laws of nature” (118). Rather, he claims that one should love one’s neighbors “as brothers, as friends whom nature gives us, and with whom we must live all the better in a republican state in which the disappearance of the social classes must necessarily tighten the bonds” (118). Every individual is unique and the law should take this into account, but to avoid the promulgation of so many laws, they should be kept to a strict minimum (118-119). This would therefore reduce the need to resort to punishment and especially capital punishment, whose justification he dismantles. On the one hand, he exposes the perverse mechanism that inflicts on a person the same crime that the person

is accused of, and on the other, he questions the rationale of a form of legal punishment that finds its source in nature whereas the law is supposedly not interested in the laws of nature (119). Furthermore, he categorizes the death penalty as ineffective since it has failed as a deterrent and has not succeeded in reducing the crime rate (120). Consequently, Le Chevalier argues that the most efficient way for the state to be free of crime is to decriminalize most actions, including slander (120-121), theft (122-123), and of course, any type of sexual conduct, whether it be prostitution, adultery, incest, rape, sodomy, or pederasty (123-137).

Le Chevalier also repudiates the argument for a moral state by pointing out that since the state preserves itself through war, which is by definition immoral, self-preservation (of a republican state) cannot be achieved through moral means (124). This also applies to its citizens: “how can we manage to demonstrate that, in a state made immoral by its obligations, it is essential for individuals to be moral?” (124). In addition, Le Chevalier argues extensively for the right to murder, claiming that destruction is part of nature and that man is not different than other animals in that regard. He further extends his argument by indicating that murder is also a political incentive (141); that a unique murder incident will not change anything with regards to the society as a whole (142); that murder is useful with regards to population control and natural selection (144-146); and that the punishment of murderers by murder is the sole just recourse of the relatives of the murdered (146). Further adding that suicide is not a crime, except a failure to observe a duty towards oneself, Le Chevalier points out that all regimes that perceived murder as a crime were in fact despotic (147-148).

Hence, Sade is foremost concerned with respecting the natural right of absolute freedom against an institutionalized legislature, regardless of whether cruelty and violence prevail. In fact, all so-called “crimes”—whether they be theft, slander, adultery, incest, rape, sodomy, pederasty, even murder—are part of nature and as such they are a natural right. The radical stance of Le Chevalier is not surprising and whether Sade is being sardonic in having a libertine voice these views matters little. What is considerably more interesting is the subversive attempt to destabilize the *logic* of the argument for state sovereignty. If the so-called laws or rights of nature, i.e. the freedom of one to act accordingly to one’s desire in preserving one’s own life, is taken as the premise and the fundamental guideline for the establishment of civil society and its legislature, then why should they be surrendered, transferred, alienated, or restricted?

If the state objective of civil society is to “remain as free as before”

as Rousseau argued, then why accept any form of limitation or restriction? In considering “Français” as a response to Rousseau’s politics, then we could argue that Sade uses Hobbes’ arguments against Rousseau by demonstrating that any logic that requires people to surrender their rights will eventually alienate them; in Hobbes, such a transfer of right gives birth to a form of absolute power to which people, whether individually or jointly, will be entirely submitted. But if Sade’s sovereign is far more despotic than any of the possibilities outlined by Hobbes; by retaining the idea that (self-) destruction is not only one of man’s natural passions but also one of his most fundamental natural rights, Sade’s sovereign is not only absolutely free, it is also nihilistic in the absolute.

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## ACCEPTANCE OF THE OTHER: RECONCILIATION IN J.M. COETZEE'S *DISGRACE*

*Rachel McCoppin*

**W**ith the backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* focuses on David Lurie's inability to understand the Other, as portrayed by his university colleagues, his daughter, and his daughter's South African neighbors. Intruders rape Lurie's daughter, Lucy, locking him in the bathroom, and then set him on fire. Lucy will not talk to him about what happened to her, and more telling, she will not leave her land, even if it means that she could be in danger of its happening again. Lurie wants justice done for these acts of violence and Lucy to flee back to a more conventional lifestyle, but he is forced to recognize that he will never be able to truly understand her or anyone else in the novel, leading him towards a revised understanding of reconciliation.

After the atrocities that occurred during apartheid South Africa a system called the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC, was set up in which people voiced their grievances, with no legal action being done, only to have the truth be made public. As Rebecca Saunders notes, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "difficult mandate [was] to be at once a quasi-judicial body charged with measuring the accountability of perpetrators and a forum for witnessing the searingly emotional, embodied and profoundly interior testimony of victims" (99).

This is the system that Lurie is forced to accept. He wants justice, but must accept his verbalization of the act in front of others as enough. Along these same lines, he must also account for whatever wrongs he is responsible for. Coetzee's *Disgrace* ties reconciliation together with acceptance of the intangibility of the Other. It is through Lurie's acceptance that he will never understand the Other, or the violence that occurred, which leaves him only accountable for his own personal responsibility.

James Meffan and Kim L. Worthington in "Ethics Before Politics: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*" point out that "ethics is the ongoing process of self-critique...of putting the knowing ego into question through the process of the exposure to...absolute Otherness"; Coetzee's novel leaves the reader with a message that one cannot control others, or the events in life; one can only be individually accountable for one's own actions.

Coetzee's view of reconciliation in this novel is contested by many critics; therefore, when teaching this novel, it is important to introduce this fact to students. Coetzee is a white South African author writing about the oppressed. This novel is written in third person, though it mainly focuses on Lurie's perceptions; the other characters within the novel are left ambiguous. Even the reader finds actions within the novel confusing, just as Lurie does; for instance, Lucy marries Petrus, a leader over those who raped her, so that she can stay on her land. The reader's inability to grasp the characters' reasoning only reiterates Coetzee's message that one cannot understand the Other.

Lurie revises his perception of reconciliation to fit the culture around him. He learns that true reconciliation only can come about if one is willing to see one's own blame in the situation at hand. This novel undoubtedly invites multiple interpretations and lends itself towards invigorating, dynamic discussion, but it is this point of personal responsibility, without ever truly being able to understand the Other, that allows for classroom discussions to focus on student responsibility in these tumultuous times.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC, was created to compile a picture of the atrocities that occurred during apartheid, 1960-1994. As Archbishop Tutu pointed out during the TRC, "We are charged to unearth the truth about our dark past, to...contribute to the healing of the traumatized and wounded people...and in this manner to promote national unity and reconciliation" (Cited in Nagy 718). The TRC "articulated its justice...as 'restorative' rather than retributive, its amnesty branch nonetheless operated on the principle of reasonable exchange and measured its judgments in terms of...proportionality—whether the truth had been adequately confessed, and whether the act, omission or offense was proportional to the political objective pursued....it maintained its purchase on the reasonable by measuring ends and means and by bartering amnesty for truth" (Saunders 101). However, the TRC "produced a truth limited by complex political, ideological, juridical, temporal, spatial and material factors" (Saunders 103).

What is important, as Saunders has observed, is that, “While there is a strong body of evidence that for many victims who testified at the TRC, the process of turning oneself inside out was cathartic, that it restored a sense of human dignity and made possible the process of healing; there are also numerous troubling instances where this visceral outpouring was clearly painful, wounding and even re-traumatizing...sacrific[ing] one’s personal healing for the nation’s” (Saunders 105). Similar to Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, the TRC “leaves us with a messy, nettle-strewn bed on which the social conscience is destined to find little rest” (Saunders 105). Many critics have discussed a connection to *Disgrace* and the TRC proceedings; Coetzee does address the concept of reconciliation within this novel, but complete reconciliation appears in many ways to be impossible because of the characters’ inability to understand the Other. Without true understanding of past injustice, which according to Coetzee seems impossible because one can never truly know another person’s experiences, complete reconciliation may never happen. What is clear, though, is that Coetzee does provide a means towards personal reconciliation; the past with its injustices may never be resolved, and future justice may also be unclear, but one can decide how to live a meaningful life within this context by not creating more harm towards others.

Coetzee’s message of personal responsibility towards others is an essential component of this novel. Though one will never truly understand the Other, one still has a responsibility to them; this is one thing that can be controlled by the individual.

The novel in large part is meant to be confusing, as Lurie’s perspective is often of confusion; Elizabeth Anker observes that “*Disgrace*, moreover, is a novel with significant ethical purchase... because it refuses any such pretense of certitude” (234). The novel is only narrated through a concentration on Lurie, and this is essential towards understating Coetzee’s message about the inability to grasp the Other; likewise Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has noted that “*Disgrace* is relentless in keeping the focalization confined to David Lurie.... When Lucy is resolutely denied focalization, the reader is provoked, for he or she does not want to share in Lurie-the-chief-focalizer’s inability to ‘read’ Lucy” (Spivak 22). The novel does not “give ‘voice,’ to either Petrus or Lucy,” as main characters of the novel (Spivak 24). This technique allows Lurie, and perhaps the reader to come to the realization that though one cannot understand the Other, this does not mean that one is not responsible for others; instead, one is completely responsible for one’s actions, especially in a time of upheaval.

In *Disgrace*, according to Rosemary Nagy, “Coetzee provokes



a nuanced examination of what it means to be responsible and to take responsibility, particularly, how deep a moral transformation is needed and of whom it should be expected. He relentlessly captures the ambiguities of assigning and taking responsibility, and the limits of moral transformation" (Nagy 709). David Lurie's inability to understand his daughter as the Other forces Lurie to accept responsibility for his actions towards others. He begins as an idealistic, lonely professor who is aware of something missing in his life; he searches in the rural environment of his daughter, yet is still immersed in his old mentality of romanticism, and the violent, darker side of life makes him struggle past his comfortable areas of reasoning. Very slowly Lurie grows to embrace acceptance and humility that is purely occasioned by his experiences with the Other.

In the TRC "the uncertain meaning of 'accepting charges'... presented itself most glaringly in the guise of perpetrators who stonily...recounted acts of unfathomable barbarity, counting on this 'truth' to pay their debt, purchase amnesty and settle the demands of responsibility... [this] led some South Africans to regard the TRC's 'truth for amnesty' deal as...exchanging justice for truth, or as merely canceling debts rather than exacting payment for them" (Saunders 101). The unrest surrounding the TRC is apparent within this novel, though it is on an individual level. The confusion that resulted in the TRC's reconciliation attempt is echoed in Coetzee. The TRC praised victims who forgave perpetrators for the benefit of a new South Africa, calling them "heroes"; "the pressure to forgive misplaced the burden of reconciliation on victims rather than on those who were responsible for apartheid" (Nagy 719). Coetzee allows Lurie to grow into an understanding of his own responsibility in a tumultuous environment. He changes throughout the novel because what he represents about the past society, with his Romantic period interests, no longer holds in this changed South Africa. *Disgrace* "is about guilt bigger than the individual life...acceptable life plans nor ideologies play a significant role...Only those who expose themselves to disgrace and redemption, guilt and atonement are likely to encounter anything close to justice" (Leusmann 61-62). Lurie cannot change much of anything, and learns not to strive for this; what he can change, though, are his individual actions towards others. This message of an individual acceptance of responsibility towards others is seemingly Coetzee's means towards reconciliation.

Lurie is first introduced as a professor of the Romantics, attempting to write his opera on Byron. There is an element early on that shows that he has become disillusioned with life; he knows that his students' treat him with indifference: "their indifference galls him more

than he will admit. Nevertheless he fulfills to the letter his obligations toward them, their parents, and the state” (4). But he is immersed in a lifestyle of idealism. When he is caught having an affair with his student Melanie, he refuses to apologize because he claims that to apologize formally to a college committee would be something false. They don’t really care if he apologizes, and he doesn’t feel he owes them an apology; the only basis for it would be to save his reputation, or follow authoritative procedures. His romantic nature will not allow him to bend in the face of bureaucratic authority. He resigns because of some level of pride.

This scene addresses the TRC process; Lurie admits to the university committee, but they aren’t satisfied, like the TRC—redemption comes within to Lurie (Sarvan 27). Lurie’s refusal to plead guilty to the university early in the novel reveals the novel’s sentiment that pleading guilty does not always equate ethical responsibility. At this early point in the novel Lurie does not accept responsibility for his actions.

Many critics, such as Rosemary Nagy and Sue Kossew, have connected this part of the novel with the TRC process, making any apology of guilt automatically earned amnesty for past crimes; “Interestingly, remorse was not considered part of the TRC process, as it was deemed too difficult to measure its sincerity. Lurie refuses public repentance, drawing a distinction for the tribunal between a ‘secular plea’ of guilty, and the more spiritual realm of repentance which Lurie believes to be ‘another universe of discourse,’ that of the soul” (Kossew 159). Lurie retracts from the community, “choosing exile over reconciliation” (Nagy 716).

Through Lurie’s indignation at the process of apology forced by the university committee, Coetzee is condemning the efficiency of the TRC and its goal of reconciliation; “guilt...as a dischargeable debt is what Nietzsche calls ‘the oldest and naivest moral canon of justice,’ one that relies on an idiom of equalizing, translates human action and suffering into calculable values, presumes that ‘everything has its price [and] all things can be paid for,’ and makes justice into more or less a branch of accounting” (Saunders 100).

Coetzee does portray Lurie as guilty of wronging Melanie, and for this Lurie is accountable, though it takes him much of the novel to realize this. In the beginning, Lurie is “unwilling to recognize the extent of his own act of violence toward Melanie...In this pretence, we see that the complexities of establishing and acknowledging responsibility are compounded by how violence is defined and recognized” (Nagy 714). As Sarvan points out “Melanie is twenty-one, childlike in appearance, with the hips of a twelve-year-old and ‘neat’

breasts. The relationship carries overtones of rape: she is passive throughout the act; he usurps her, forcing her sweater upward. He thrusts himself upon her, and she crumples like a marionette" (27). Again, at this early point in the novel, Lurie is unable to accept his own accountability towards Melanie; he must visit his daughter and experience trauma in order to learn the importance of his personal responsibility towards others.

As has been stated, when Lurie goes to visit his daughter, Lucy, on her rural compound, he is a very different man before the central tragedy of the novel ensues. It is this tragedy that forces Lurie to face the full force of the Other. It is evident from the beginning that he doesn't understand his daughter Lucy, but it takes the act of violence done to them for him to realize the magnitude of his inability to understand her.

Intruders rape Lucy, while Lurie is locked in the bathroom, helpless; the intruders then set Lurie on fire. Lucy will not talk with him about what happened to her, and more telling, she will not leave her land, even if it means that she could very possibly be in danger of its happening again. Lurie is forced to recognize, very slowly, that he will never be able to truly understand Lucy. This is Lurie's main struggle throughout the book. He wants to face Petrus, a local leader who protects the perpetrators; he wants justice done to the boy whom Petrus protects, and most of all, he wants Lucy to flee back to a more conventional lifestyle. But Lurie is forced to accept the TRC process; he wants justice but must accept his verbalization of the boy's act in front of Petrus' party as enough.

The reader understands Lurie's shock and confusion; he is Lucy's father, and she has expressed that she thinks it is even likely that violence could enter her home again. It is hard not to see Lucy as very strong, even admirable, though she is an enigma. As Kossev and Marais observe, "Lucy is enabled to take important steps towards overcoming her disgrace and finding ways to live in a future South Africa that does not entail guilt and punishment; when she learns to share the land, endure her suffering and make compromises" (Cited in Zembylas 229). Lucy embodies "the excesses of bearing responsibility" (Nagy 711); it is Lucy "who has suffered the most egregious of violations, takes *all* the sins of apartheid—something for which she alone cannot possibly be held responsible" (Nagy 714).

Accepting personal responsibility is central to reconciliation. The character of Petrus represents those under apartheid who didn't take personal responsibility:

Petrus by vacating the scene, relieves himself of explicit responsibility for the attack on Lurie and Lucy. The parallel with white South Africans' claims of ignorance...about state torture and death squads is unmistakable. And Petrus, like apartheid beneficiaries, prospers from the attack that he passively ignored. His pretense that the past is over and done is surely inadequate, yet even if he were to hand the boy over to the police, it is not clear that the boy can be held responsible. There is something mentally wrong with the boy... [and] he was following orders. (Nagy 717)

This is much like the TRC stating that amnesty "was contingent on following orders, and on the denial of responsibility from the uppermost echelons of the state and beneficiaries in general" (Nagy 717). According to Nagy, "Petrus' understanding of reconciliation has had far more resonance in South Africa than that of taking moral responsibility" (721). Coetzee here seems to be addressing the limits of the TRC. On one end of the spectrum, there is Lucy who takes full responsibility for what she is not responsible for, and on the other end, there is Petrus, who takes no responsibility. Lurie falls in between both extremes; Lurie may represent the reader and his/her role of acknowledging personal responsibility in his/her own life. Lurie must accept Petrus' system, and accepts and supports Lucy's decision to care for the baby she carries from the rape. Coetzee creates a middle ground for Lurie, of self reflection and personal accountability.

Again Lurie does not understand Coetzee's form of reconciliation at the start of the novel, but he changes through his inability to understand Lucy; as stated by Marais and Spivak, this novel is not to give a voice to the Other; it about the refusal to give a voice to the Other (Cited in Zembylas 226).

After the tragedy, Lurie and Lucy both take the focus away from themselves; Lucy will now care for her baby, and Lurie begins to care for unwanted dogs. Reconciliation, as Michalinos Zembylas states, "demands that we reach a new level of ethical responsibility and community...inconsolable mourning becomes a way of testifying to a renewed form of relationality with/to the Other" (229-230). In this novel, "inconsolable mourning is thus rewritten as ethical... commitment.... *Disgrace*... forces us to confront the brute materiality of the suffering engendered by oppression... bear[ing] witness to the brutality of history and the responsibility for the Other" (Zembylas 230). Violence was done to them presumably because of past hurt and injustice, but Lucy and Lurie stop the perpetuation of violence by not returning it; instead, they will show love towards others and care for others, starting a new process.

After the scene of violence, and after Lurie is forced to accept Petrus' system of justice, Lurie learns that he must face his own

accountability and responsibility towards others. With Petrus, Lurie now knows what it is to experience the pain of a disingenuous judicial system, and because of this Lurie undergoes a transformation towards accepting responsibility for his own actions to others. This is revealed in his apology to Melanie.

When Lurie confronts Melanie's father, he asks Lurie why he has come to him, and though Lurie is there to apologize, he cannot. He dodges a true apology with the father. He speaks of abstract excuses, and the father understands that this isn't really an apology; he asks him what it is that he has learned. Lurie responds that he doesn't believe in God, but that a part of him believes that he has been punished for his past sins, and that is why he and his daughter were victimized. This reveals Coetzee's message of responsibility for one's own accountability.

Lurie is done speaking to the father, and he goes into a separate room with the mother and the younger daughter. No words are spoken in this scene, which makes it very different from his university hearing; Lurie walks up to the women and "with careful ceremony he gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor" (173). An act of ultimate humility it seems; it shows a respect for the Other putting himself entirely aside. Yet immediately after doing this selfless act, a surge of desire pulses through him for the young daughter. This line does not change the action that he has committed though; instead, it only serves to show that he is still human, which in itself means that humility and responsibility will have to be a constant choice, a constant struggle.

The remaining chapters show a very changed Lurie, a man who is personally responsible, a man past his earlier, Romantic pride. He has taken it upon himself to move permanently back to Lucy's rural lifestyle after attempting to go back to his old home. He has given up his opera about Byron. He helps Bev Shaw euthanize dogs. Lurie has learned from Bev Shaw that putting the dogs to sleep is an act of love. This is Lurie's reconciliation with the past; "the dogs symbolize him as he was and perhaps also the anonymous lives discarded by apartheid. Even the worst of dogs is deserving of dignity and understanding. This implies that openness and understanding are preferred in eliciting acknowledgment of responsibility.... This is not, however, to patronize or let those responsible off easily. Lurie must continually work at it, it is hard, and he is far from complete.... we see that with grace comes obligation, and grace is not infinite" (Nagy 724).

Allowing his favorite dog to die is the essence of Lurie's struggle throughout the novel; it is the letting go of not only the ones he loves,

like Lucy, to make her own decisions, but it is also something bigger. Allowing the dog to die is his realization that everything in life is fleeting. He has finally come to terms with the Other. As cited by Kimberly Wedeven Segall in Zembylas, Lurie participating in the dog's death shows his "refusal to be oblivious about the suffering and tragedy of life." He can accept the bad that did happen to him and Lucy, and he can go on. It suggests that he knows further trouble is likely in his life, but he now harbors the knowledge of acceptance. He has to let go of the dog, almost as if its fate is to die. If he were to hold onto it, he would be still immersed in his old struggle. He is no longer the romantic professor, longing for a life on idealistic terms; he accepts his personal responsibility in a world he may not be able to change with humility. As Marais states "Lurie's offer for death... of the dog he expresses fondness for, [is] 'the transformation of his desire for the Other into self-substituting responsibility'" (Cited in Diala 58). *Disgrace* allows the concept of personal responsibility to reveal hope for communal responsibility.

*Disgrace* is an excellent choice to include in the classroom; it always initiates dynamic class discussion. The controversies, tragedies, and uncomfortable situations tied to this novel create great opportunities to discuss concepts like the Other and personal responsibility.

Antjie Krog claims that "only literature provides inspiration to reach the Other and thus perform the miracle of reconciliation between conflicting groups" (Cited in Zembylas 224). Teaching *Disgrace* allows students a chance to look at the Other with Lurie's sense of confusion. As has been discussed previously, Coetzee never reveals an in-depth understanding of any character besides Lurie with the intention to force readers to acknowledge the inability to truly know another person.

Zembylas argues that literature bears witness to the "insistence on remaining inconsolable before history and the Other's suffering" (224). *Disgrace* provides a chance to question students—is it important to accept that each individual cannot ever understand the experiences of another? *Disgrace* would suggest that this important. This novel shows students that Lurie indeed changes throughout the novel by witnessing trauma and learning his limits with the Other. It suggests that students can change by reading another's experiences, but only by accepting and respecting the inability to completely know the Other.

As Bouchard, Schweber, and Zembylas point out, "it has been

argued that introducing students to trauma narratives and testimonies is an important way of approaching controversial issues such as war, cross-cultural conflict, genocide, racism and terrorism (Cited in Zembylas 230). In course discussion, it is very important that “Educators and their students... resist the process of verbalization that turns suffering into another (digestible) historical narrative; instead, we are urged to confront the indigestible materiality of the suffering (Zembylas 231). Zembylas’ message is a good one; though one cannot understand what victims of trauma went through completely, it is vital to read trauma narratives without needing to understand or “digest” trauma. It should be difficult for students to read this material, but it is important for them to learn to commiserate with others, by understanding that they cannot ever know the extent of their suffering; as Sara Ahmed observes, “creating affective connections with others who suffer aligns us with them” (Cited in Zembylas 231).

To be aligned with the suffering is important to help create a conscientious student, as a citizen of the world, yet, Lauren Berlant warns one not to imply identification with the Other’s suffering (Zembylas 231). Again, *Disgrace* makes this point clear—one must be responsible for others without assuming he/she knows what is best for the Other. Spivak “insists that those who are recipients of stories such as trauma narratives have a tremendous responsibility: first, not to presume that suffering can be understood universally, and second, to be vigilant about mis-uses of such stories. There is never anything transparent or universal about the meaning of wound” (Zembylas 232). Students may be desensitized to suffering; “a critical approach to witnessing trauma and suffering in the classroom urges educators and their students to question the taken-for-granted assumptions about the self and the Other and what it means to respond to the Other’s suffering” (Zembylas 233). Once students have discussed their ideas as to Coetzee’s message towards the Other and post apartheid suffering, a dialogue of moral/personal responsibility is essential.

During the TRC “The accountability of individual perpetrators [was] embedded within the accountability of political leaders [and the dominant system]. It was expected that the moral conscience of passive bystanders would be reawakened during the witnessing of victim and perpetrator testimony...the commission held public hearings... in order to better understand how ordinary people were able to ‘turn a blind eye’ to the impoverishment and suffering of fellow citizens” (Nagy 715). As the TRC stated “Ordinary South Africans ‘did not see themselves as represented by those the Commission defines as perpetrators, failing to recognize the “little perpetrators” in each one



of us” (Cited in Nagy 715). This point is essential—Lurie learns that to only hear another’s injustice is not enough; he learns that he must accept his own responsibility for injustice. This concept is one that initiates great classroom discussion creating an atmosphere where students can discuss concepts like: what current events students feel need amended, how responsible do they feel for their role in a present day unethical situation, and is Coetzee’s message of reconciliation with one’s self a suitable attitude to counter modern violence?

Kevin B. Theissen states that “45 per cent of white South Africans in 1996 either thought that apartheid was not unjust or did not know whether apartheid was unjust” (Cited in Nagy 717). And “the majority of South Africans knew quite clearly that apartheid was a crime against humanity and that torture and other gross abuses were being systematically conducted. But in the face of domestic and international pressure, electoral support for the apartheid regime actually grew (Cited in Nagy 710). *Disgrace* provides an opportunity to discuss students’ feelings about their role in the world and their responsibility towards others. Coetzee’s backdrop of post-apartheid South Africa allows a good opportunity to view present day indifference to a matter that was so blatantly unethical. Without a sense of individual responsibility, these atrocities seem only destined to continue; students need to acknowledge that these matters must be discussed in terms of their own responsibility.

Finally, according to Ian Glenn, many critics “felt the novel was ‘racist’...and that it presented not only a pessimistic view...of the whole future of South Africa... the novel, with its soundings of farm attacks and land redistribution and of old alarms about white female vulnerability to black male sexuality, clearly resonated and became a cultural work worth debating” (Glenn 81). Students need to discuss this element as well. Traumatic and controversial accounts need to be analyzed by students. Students need to be involved in an open format where they can speak freely about this time in history, and what it means to reconcile past injustice. Whether they agree with Coetzee or not isn’t important; what is important is the conversation.

The TRC’s “final report wisely emphasized that it should not be taken as complete, unitary or authoritative truth, but as an initial step toward understanding, as a basis for debate and as one among many efforts to reconstruct the past, the collective memory and historical record” (Saunders 104), and this is exactly what Coetzee’s *Disgrace* allows students the opportunity to do. *Disgrace* suggests a different process of attaining grace through an acceptance of the Other, and the TRC’s process of hearing and not understanding the Other is part of Coetzee’s message of transformation and healing. As Zembylas



observes "What *Disgrace* tells us is that...there is no easy resolution of the difficulties between reconciliation and responsibility, and to presume otherwise may distort past and future" (Zembylas 230). Readers of *Disgrace* will hopefully begin a process of self-reflection towards their own responsibility to present situations that need to be reconciled.

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## ASSERTING THE LOCAL: WHITE SUBVERSIONS IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S *THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS*

Priya Menon

The White termites on their way to work.  
The White ladybirds on their way home.  
The White beetles burrowing away from the light.  
The White grasshoppers with whitewood violins.  
The sad white music.  
All gone.

- Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Race produces unconscious effects, and as a hybrid structure located somewhere between essence and construct, it determines the destiny of human bodies. It is our ethical and political task to figure out how destiny comes to be inscribed as anatomy, when that anatomy does not exist as such.

- Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness* (2000)

**A**rundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* tells the story of the Ipe family through the eyes of Rahel, as she realizes that their lives have been controlled by and subjected to Kerala's color-coded norms. *The God of Small Things* has inspired articles and books offering intense discussions exploring questions of caste, untouchability, and loss in contemporary Kerala, India. While discussions have generally revolved dis/approvingly around Roy's mapping of the southernmost state of India, Kerala, on to the larger national palimpsest through her twin protagonists, reviews in mainstream media as well as from academics rarely seemed to consider the increasingly radical disruptions of whiteness in the text. These disruptions include the deaths of all the major white characters (Kari Saipu and Sophie Mol) and the routine integration of authority within color lines. Remarkably, in Roy's Kerala, which often gets referred to as *God's own Country* (symbolizing the utopian representation of a divinely sanctioned locale), whites are featured as being unable to survive. The text begins with and revolves around the arrival of white Margaret and Sophie Mol to Kerala. One of the primary causes of

the subsequent tragedy in the Ipe family is also depicted, as Rahel points out, as the result of the appearance of these white characters in Kerala: "it all began when Sophie Mol came to Ayemenem" (Roy 33). After her arrival from England, Sophie Mol quickly becomes the center of attention in all of local Ayemenam. However, Sophie coded as the next generation-white figure also dies while the local Estha and Rahel survive; in fact, Rahel is even credited with the final word in the text "Tomorrow," that anticipates a future in which she can thrive and overcome the tragedy of her household (Roy 321). These disruptions are not accidental and one possible explanation lies in Roy's reliance on critical race theory to dislocate the white hegemonic hold in Kerala, an interpretive lens not commonly used to study *The God of Small Things*. What Roy has accomplished through her text is to explore the color-coded relationships—its functions in Kerala, its dominance within social exchanges and the resistance it meets (and needs) by various subjectivities within and outside Kerala.

The concept of whiteness as a cultural hegemon interestingly intersects with postcolonial interrogations of colonial dominations and its repercussions. Melissa Steyn describes whiteness as "an ideologically supported social positionality that is accrued to people of European descent as a consequence of the economic and political advantage gained during and subsequent to European colonial expansion" (121). Steyn is of the opinion that the privileged position was originally facilitated by the construction of race, of the phenotypes, which acted as a marker of the entitlement to this privileged position. In a colonial setting then, whiteness can be viewed as a shared space in which the psychological, cultural, political, and economic dimensions of this privileged positionality are normalized as a referent. One of the reasons for whiteness to remain as a part of the postcolonial world is because of the few white settlers who refused to leave colonized countries, such as India upon its independence sustaining the white values of the colonial regime. The privilege of being white did not essentially or irrevocably come with the kind of concessions that it now enjoys in India, but as with other colonial cases, it has been at the expense of those who are not white, or white enough (Bhabha 23). The objective of this paper is not to undo or 'destroy' whiteness, as the *race traitor* school of whiteness studies argues, but to show how the position of whiteness within the Kerala context in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* is neither uniformly dominant nor stable, and that the power of whiteness is contingent upon its performance (Hill 4). By merging gender and racial oppression, I examine the ways in which Roy subverts whiteness to provide visibility to the local characters in *The God of Small Things*.

Kerala society's hegemonic colorblind world synchronizes with the deceptive and arbitrary world created by Pappachi for the Ipe family. Pappachi, Reverend John Ipe—Rahel's grandfather—like Chacko after him, serves white hegemonic English idealness in Kerala. Oxford-educated, Pappachi was as Ammu tells us, "an incurable British CCP, which was short for *chhi-chhi poach* [which] in Hindi meant shit-wiper" (Roy 50). Pappachi "was charming and urbane with visitors, and stopped just short of fawning on them if they happened to be white" (Roy 171). However, Pappachi had a different face for the female members of his family. Pappachi is physically abusive to his wife and he even refused to believe his daughter, Ammu, as she confesses the reason for her divorce being the attempted rape of Mr. Hollick, her husband's English boss who "suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be *looked after*" (Roy 41). Rahel tells us that Pappachi's refusal to accept his daughter's testimony is "not because he thought well of her husband, but simply because he didn't believe that an Englishman, *any* Englishman, would covet another man's wife" (Roy 42). Roy explains that such a foreknowledge of whiteness for Pappachi is a result of Anglophilia. Pappachi's particular brand of "Anglophilia" meant that his "mind had been brought into a state which made him like the English" (Roy 51). The syntax of the phrase *had been brought* underscores the conditioning effect of white hegemonic grasp over Pappachi and over many other Macaulay's minutemen like him that served British Raj. Clearly, Pappachi is a victim of the colonial project that ensured the production and proliferation of white hegemonic discourse throughout the Empire. By discourse, I refer to the structure of thinking that dominates how the British white power imagine colonial brown subjects and their relations with them. One such structure is the stereotype, and Roy's depiction of Pappachi as the stereotypical Macaulay's minutemen with the designation of the "Imperial Entomologist," wearing "three piece suits and the gold pocket watch" every day in the sultry heat of Ayemenem work well to mock and establish the ridiculousness of Pappachi's desire to mimic/conform to the hegemonic discourse of white law (Roy 45). Pappachi's dress and behavior clearly evokes the theme of artifice in the proliferation of the white law. Mammachi's imported violin and violin stands, Pappachi's expensive suits and cufflinks, and dressing tables made in Vienna are all liberally sprinkled throughout the narrative that describes the Ipe family home. European artwork adorns the walls and Pappachi's old Plymouth purchased from an Englishman gets referenced substantially, further suggesting links to whiteness, the start of British colonialism, and the perception of whiteness as endowed with superior humanistic attributes. Even though the text is set in postcolonial Kerala, most of the Ipe family members continue

to ascribe to white values. The local subjects struggle within an environment shouting whiteness representing those that have learned to value themselves only as imitators of whiteness. They show how domination and power is diffused throughout culture regardless of how one is racially classified.

The motif of distorted images, depicted through the near blind Mammachi, comments on the actual state of contemporary colonial Kerala and the façades of misrepresentation. Mammachi, Rahel's grandmother, is portrayed as the "blind mother widow with a violin" (Roy 159). Inconsistencies surface in the ways in which Mammachi deals with her son, Chacko. Pappachi's mistreatment of Mammachi and her failed marriage did not provide her with a mental vision to understand and accept Margaret as Chacko's wife but she "hated Margaret exactly for being Chacko's wife" (Roy 160). Yet, Mammachi tells Margaret on her arrival that she is "sorry that [she] can't see" Margaret (Roy 165). This courtesy is a privilege that Margaret receives from Mammachi simply because she is white. While Mammachi was known to usually pay off Chacko's women, she realizes that Margaret, being white, was "a different kettle of fish altogether" (Roy 161). Also, Mammachi is a victim of patriarchy and a perpetuator of its ideals. Ammu and Chacko, though born to Mammachi, live out different destinies. Chacko is sent to Oxford, England for his education that produces a brief marriage with the British-born Margaret. Chacko is continuously supported by Mammachi to fulfill his "Man's Needs," at the risk of ruining the family name while Ammu is punished for marrying a man she loved at that time. Rahel tells us that Mammachi's vision was distorted after a cornea transplant following which she could "only see light and shadow" (Roy 165). Mammachi's distorted vision also corresponds metaphorically to her uneven display of affection for her grandchildren wherein she is seen to clearly privilege her white grandchild Sophie over Rahel and Estha. Roy deliberately disfigures Mammachi's vision as Mammachi is never able to internalize the reality of her existence: that the difference she perceives between Sophie and her other grandchildren, and the *civility* she displays to Margaret whom she really hates, is based on her biased internalization of white hegemonic codifications. The racial parallels are obvious: white supremacy depends upon maintaining illusions that blinded subjects accept without resistance.

*The God of Small Things* is concerned with challenging white normalcy, the workings of hegemony and ideological domination. The text begins with the arrival of Margaret and Sophie to Ayemenem from England and how by being white, they *naturally* become endearing figures among the majority of the Ipe family members. Nevertheless,

through Rahel's narrative, the text very quickly narrows in on Sophie and Margaret's out-of-placeness in Kerala and questions seemingly unrelated core assumptions. For example, Rahel lays open Margaret's suitcase from England to us and describes how it is packed with a variety of medications, "quinine, aspirin, broad spectrum of antibiotics," that will not, ironically, help her child survive on her trip to Kerala (Roy 252). Rahel tells Velutha that Sophie Mol is so "delicate that if she gets dirty she'll die" (Roy 200). However, like the non-white Ipe family members, Roy's white characters too face the daunting task of trying to understand and exist outside, within, and around the colonial system that they now experientially know is faulty. For example, Margaret's visit to Kerala sets up some of the racial assumptions that she uses comparatively in her assessment of the local population. Roy tells us that Margaret's father "disliked Indians, and that he thought them as sly, dishonest people" (Roy 228). Margaret's travel to India and the *preparations* she takes for the trip as "you may never know," all explore the anxiety of Margaret's relationship with the colonial Other and the stereotypes associated with it (Roy 252). Yet Margaret, though divorced from Chacko, cannot fully sever her ties to India especially because of their child, Sophie.

The ways in which white discourse, mainly through the façade of the colonial past, is promoted in the setting of *The God of Small Things* through a variety of Althusserian ideological state apparatuses such as the church, police, the school and so forth, is revealed to be compromised and deceptive (70). In the initial pages of the text, Rahel connotes that there is something hideous that remains masked in all of Kerala's utopic representations—in its schools (that still cling to colonial British influences made visible by characters such as Comrade Pillai's children who comically recite verses from Shakespeare), its churches (where Baby went religiously to seduce the Irish priest, Father Mulligan), and even its police (who end up torturing innocent Velutha). Tying in with Kerala's continuous fascination with colonial ideology and Margaret and Sophie's out-of-placeness is the figure of Kari Saipu.<sup>1</sup> That Kari Saipu's whiteness is the symbol of his alienation, rather than the site of his privilege or power is apparent throughout the novel. Kari Saipu, "the black sahib," the Englishman "gone native," described as "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" is represented as lacking in presence, a ghostly colonial vestige, death-like owner of the legendary history house at Ayemenem (Roy 51). Significantly, Kari Saipu, who assimilated so well to the Kerala culture that he even "spoke Malayalam," does not survive in Kerala; rather he ends up "shooting himself through the head" (Roy 51). This inability of her

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<sup>1</sup> *Kari* in Malayalam refers to Black and *Saipu* is a reduction of Sahib.



white characters to survive in Kerala brings to light one of the most salient aspects of Roy's critiques in how *The God of Small Things* refutes the naturalness of racialized constructions by exposing the relationship between commonly accepted stereotypes and exploitation.

Critiques of the interlocking relationships between gender and race characterize major parts of *The God of Small Things* that throw light on white hegemony. The novel depicts male characters dominating the scene. Strong and forceful male characters like Pappachi and Chacko, who are alike in desiring whiteness, give orders that reflect white ideology. Local males, like Valya Pappan, work in subordinate roles, and consistent with white patriarchal constructions, women are relegated to the domestic front. Mammachi, though adept and shrewd with business skills, is never given a voice and is "beaten by Pappachi every night with a brass flower vase" (Roy 4). Similarly, the only major white male character, Kari Saipu is depicted as far from being the stereotypical white male tower of strength, but as being trapped in Kerala, unable to resist the social forces he doesn't understand.

The answer for the Ipe family survival, primarily suggested through Rahel, doesn't lie in the imported colonial white culture in which they have been reared. Instead, Roy suggests recognizing how whiteness had succeeded in masking local subject formations and culture as the route to liberation. Unlike most members of the historically privileged Ipe family, who could choose to deny the disingenuousness of white oppression; many others have not had the option of ignoring Kerala society's ideological determinants. The most positive consequence of this awareness is the development of oppositional, subjugated knowledge. Such cultural and intellectual standpoints are alluded to in *The God of Small Things* through the depiction of Velutha, who by virtue of being an untouchable is the first *real native born* citizen of the land.<sup>2</sup> The moments in the text where Ammu, reared in patriarchal and whiteness ideology, recognizes Velutha as representing the history and culture of local Kerala metaphorically functions to be the only instance of happiness for her. The suggestive representation of Velutha as being quintessentially local and the resulting satisfaction it gives Ammu as she embraces him signals Roy's suggestion to explore Othered and local ideologies, ones that do not enforce white ideals. As a member of Pappachi's household Ammu is tied to systems and white ideology but her choice to recognize Velutha is celebrated by the author. Velutha, unlike any other figure in the text, has an identity based on a different expanded knowledge,

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<sup>2</sup> Many sociological theories allude to the Dalit untouchable group as the original people of Kerala and others as immigrants who later established the Varna/caste system.

experiences and information. Velutha is the most industrious, talented and creative character in *The God of Small Things*. Roy explains that as Ammu “watched him [Velutha] she understood the quality of his beauty. How his labour had shaped him...Had left its stamp on him. Had given him his strength, his supple grace” (Roy 316). Velutha’s life is rooted in an organic non-white reality as he makes possible, as Saldivar says, a “qualitative cognitive reorientation through his beauty and his labor” for Ammu and her children (Needham 361). Velutha’s creative engineering skills are used at Ammu’s family’s business where he reassembled “bottle-sealing machines” and maintained “new cannery machines” and automatic fruit and vegetable slicers (Roy 72). Velutha’s creations and skill sets are in clear contrast to the Ipe family’s pretentious hoarding of European artifacts. Because indigenous skills and ability is glossed over by the mainstream culture of contemporary Kerala, Roy’s depiction of Velutha is her way of reclaiming the likes of his place in the grand and unified narrative of the powerful representations within historical Kerala. No doubt, Velutha the untouchable Paravan *is the god of small things*. In creating Velutha, Roy notes that the work of the marginalized bear silent testimony to the rights and abilities of such outcastes in Kerala. In his creative and indigenous existence, Velutha reveals an enormous ability to create culture and society for everyone around him. He has a vast imaginative and cognitive life of experiences that the *coloniality of power* in Kerala has denied him as a Paravan.<sup>3</sup> That Roy names her untouchable-outcaste-paravan protagonist as Velutha (white) is indeed her way of endowing agency to the local subaltern. It is through this trope of naming that Roy relates the racialized Velutha with whiteness; obviously the most powerful signifier within Kerala’s color-coded power relations. Ammu’s subversive affair with an outcaste man named White (Velutha), who in actuality was ‘as dark as a slab of chocolate’, and their subsequent tragic ends represent the reality that genuine social change also requires a conceptual conversion, that mere appropriation of names will not blindfold the big things that dictate the “love laws” that condition this society (Roy 205). Through Velutha, Roy unearths a cultural production that challenges the colonial supremacist notion of white superiority.

Rahel, who has returned to Ayemenem after twenty-three years of agony that resulted in the loss of her mother and its subsequent

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<sup>3</sup> Aníbal Quijano discusses the concept of coloniality of power to argue that “modern regimes of power” are characterized by what he terms coloniality, which, as distant from colonialism, is not simply defined by a “formal redomination between empire and colony but primarily defined by global and national/cultural hierarchies (gendered, racialized, sexualized) that are articulated differently in time and space” (Saldivar 363).

effects on her personal life, narrates the tale of the *small things* to us. The *small things* that Rahel describes are really things that are generally missed out, glossed over by history and its various representations. The “Cost of Living,” significantly the title of the text’s last chapter, as Rahel finds out is that small things are often crushed by the larger hegemonic machinery operated in the name of societal norms. Roy’s success, however, rests in making visible the operations of power that comingles the historical and geopolitical, which gives precedence to *big things*. In the text, Rahel does not find the answers through conforming to what society requires her to do, i.e. continue a life of patriarchal subservience in Kerala. Instead Rahel exerts her independence by moving away from the oppressive environment and moreover, it is never made clear to us if she finds any answers at all. All we know for certain is that she is able to narrate the story to us, that she has reclaimed her muted twin, signifying her voice. Roy’s concern does not seem to be in providing solutions or even moralizing but to make visible the white gods of domination that rule over Kerala’s sociopolitical and cultural scene.

Roy’s Ayemenem disposes yet another ingrained understanding of whiteness—that white people are central to human progress and the pursuit of divine utopias. Consistent with global reality, Roy depicts a sampling of both white and non-whites that live in Ayemenem—not just groups of Keralites or whites alone. Both the white and non-white younger generation of the Ipe family—Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol—are all loving, intelligent, caring beings to each other and can be viewed as Roy’s hope for the future. The three form a defensive tripod, each supporting the other against adult/moral supervision when they go out to meet Velutha. This suggests unions not normally depicted in postcolonial texts. Chacko, the embodiment of white cultural capital and pretensions is compelled to choose between his own selfish needs and acquiescence into the trio’s demands. Their interactions are not reflections of stereotypical childhood fantasies enacted; instead they exude the essence of a creative, diverse humanity whose strength is a passionate, fiery hope for the future. Unlike the adult members of the text, they radiate an immediate vibrancy and enthusiastic life force in their play. Rather than reinforcing the white/non-white stereotypes, the interaction of the younger generation of the Ipe family members—Rahel, Estha and Sophie Mol—represents a conjoined commitment to each other. They play freely, share and communicate, often transforming Ayemenem into a vibrant site of life. Yet Roy’s narrative cannot progress, however idealistic it may seem, without the death of Sophie Mol. This moving away from whiteness is not merely a backdrop to Roy’s text

as she searches for answers but it *is* the answer for postcolonized Kerala. The choice of Sophie Mol, a seemingly white child (Sophie is Margaret and Chacko's daughter and thus is half white) as a pivotal character does not necessarily negate a disruptive interpretation of the text. Realistically, Sophie Mol is perceived as white since she is "made in England," "her pale skin the color of beach sand," and as symbolic of whiteness, she is indisputably granted special privileges (Roy 137). Nevertheless, these advantages do not translate into the expected narrative formations of privilege and survival, but into an ultimate negation of self—white death. As a signifier of whiteness, Sophie's special privileges are in part authority; such authority can and must support dismantling of the system. This is suggested in the character of Kochu Maria, the family maid, who openly idolizes Sophie as the one who will save her: "See her?" Kochu Maria said when she got to Rahel with her tray of cake. She meant Sophie Mol. "When she grows up, she'll be our Kochamma, and she'll raise our salaries, and give us nylon saris for Onam" (Roy 175). Kochu Maria hopes that the white Sophie will free her from her current existence. Kochu Maria is testimony of the helplessness felt when interacting with people immersed in whiteness. Those afflicted with whiteness will not believe in non-white values unless an authoritative white endorses or appropriates marginalized viewpoints. However, Sophie differs from the other white characters in her spontaneous, pure, unadulterated interaction and affection for the twins. Sophie initiates a friendship with the twins and helps in setting up "a home away from home in the back verandah of the History House" (Roy 250). Sophie Mol "convinced the twins that it was essential that she go along" with them to "heighten the adults' remorse" (Roy 276). In alluding to interracial cooperation as necessary for postcolonial transformations, Sophie Mol, Rahel and Estha jointly function as interlocking role models working toward a transformed Kerala society.

Also, Kari Saipu, the white male subject of *Ayemenem*, does not initiate any changes in *Ayemenem* but it is the local Velutha who at first learns from the Oxford-educated Chacko, finds his place, and then attempts to fight in concert with the imported-Marxist group against the forces threatening them all. Accordingly, dirty roads and places of Kerala and exhibition of strong emotions show unpretentious humanity. Conversely, Kari Saipu's house that gets converted to a hotel chain with its manicured lawns and technologically engineered illumination suggest enormous amounts of energy spent in maintaining contrived appearances and spaces. It is a clear contrast to Velutha's house, where light comes from the kitchen fire—a natural and direct source of energy. Conversely, the hotel has no integra-

tion of natural light sources; only artificial lighting for its dark interior places, suggesting a comparative imbalance between knowledge rooted in experience and abstracted cold florescent epistemologies.

At any rate, the text does not deny white creativity or insights; the fascination that the twins have for *The Jungle Book*, their inherited attachment to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, their fascination with *The Sound of Music*, and their ability to use and love the English language allude to this. Nevertheless, it is within and through Rahel's narrative, structured like the ancient art form of native Kathakali<sup>4</sup> that we get a glimpse of white productivity, which in turn reflects the centrality of localizing resistance for the powerless and raises the possibility of local ideology as a historical, tangible catalyst for acquiring agency. While *The God of Small Things* begins with the celebrations and performances associated with the arrival of Margaret and Sophie, by the end of the text Rahel's voice is the only remaining one in Ayemenem that is capable of creativity. This is unmistakably Roy's suggestion that Rahel can be seen as a model that subverts and resists whiteness, and that social reform and agency, of speaking out, may also begin with non-white Othered subjects, not with whites as inspirational saviors as depicted in countless colonial texts.

A further sign that *The God of Small Things* values subjugated knowledge surfaces in the novel's employment of Indian english.<sup>5</sup> Although Rahel, the narrator of the text, is proficient in Standard English, it's precisely the subversion of this linguistic norm that disrupts the assumption of aesthetic creativity as uniquely white. Unlike the contrived nature of the language and demeanor of the quintessential Macaulay's minutemen Pappachi or even the *read aloud* cultivated style of Chacko's *proper English*, Rahel's narrative disrupts the idea of Indian english as inferior and also challenges its understandings as measured by standards of white superiority (Roy 52). Rahel and Estha's adept use of English disrupts another deeply held, but rarely overtly articulated, racist assumption—that western culture/wisdom is unique and pure. Sophie Mol's unfamiliarity with Shakespeare and Baby Kochamma's assumption of Sophie's fluency with the Bard has strong ties to how knowledge is structured as uniquely white. If basic Western intellectual discourses result from bi-directional interaction between races and nations, then there is no actual legitimacy to an

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<sup>4</sup> Kathakali is a traditional art form of Kerala. Philip Zarilli describes that in Kathakali, the "actor-dancers create their roles by using a repertory of dance steps, choreographed patterns of stage movement, and an intricate and complex language of hand gestures for literally 'speaking' their dialogue with their hands as well as using face and eye movement to express internal states" (58).

<sup>5</sup> Indian english, is a hybrid variety of English used in India.

entire modern educational system promoting itself, and rationality as primarily and organically white. Indeed, culture can be understood as hybridization, where the notion of purity becomes just another function of Western hegemony. The new status that English language enjoys in contemporary India is in effect, whiteness without privilege, a whiteness made visible as a subverted performance of the past colonial legacy. Scholars of whiteness studies such as Alfred J. López claim that “if whiteness has been made to see itself, or more accurately to see itself as others see it, have seen it, it has now reached a moment of crisis” for no longer is it able to portray itself as either benign or “normal” (in the sense of constituting a norm) and thus whiteness must now reckon with its own history of aggression and hegemony (14). Roy’s movement towards rendering whiteness visible is to challenge its invisibility and its unspoken claims to an essential superiority in linguistic aesthetics.

White Sophie Mol’s presence in Kerala and her interactions with Rahel and Estha alludes to white feminists who can be the logical starting point for white transitions into larger understandings. Critiques of white masculinity proliferate throughout *The God of Small Things*, as Kari Saipu loses his mind and must be guided by his Malayalee wife. At the heart of the plot, Kari Saipu is removed from the scene—a clear commentary on the inability of whiteness to survive. His constant self-questioning shows his primary task is to understand his role, not to direct and guide the local population. He, as the symbol of whiteness’ future in Kerala, must in the end make a willing, deathly sacrifice. The physical appearance of women, as narrated by Roy, addresses contrasts in local and white femininity as opposed to Womanist constructions. Ammu is depicted as being sensuous and her affair with Velutha undeniably associates her with sexuality, but her quiet, almost demure persona suggests a spiritual purity traditionally associated with white women. Naturalized in most women characters of the text are ethnic markers such as curly hair and olive skin. This places local female standards of beauty on par with white ones, not as merely mimetic. Unlike white Margaret, Ammu is not depicted as the traditional type of wife, subservient and loyal. The social version of traditional femininity is dramatized even more when Roy describes Ammu’s life in Assam: “she wore backless blouses with her sari and carried a lame silver purse on her chain. She smoked long cigarettes in a silver cigarette holder and learned to blow perfect smoke rings” (Roy 300). These inversions more than anything else call attention to the problems of routinely assigning psychological and physical characteristics to any single gender or racialized group. It also calls attention to variance, to the ways group

members routinely don't fit stereotypes. What is also telling is the way the text portrays all its women as resisting social norms. White Margaret marries Chacko, divorced Ammu finds love in an outcaste, Baby Kochamma decides to live out her life as a spinster, Mammachi sets up her own business and finally Rahel exerts her voice to narrate the tale. All these women are contributors to the crucial struggle for female empowerment.

Another interesting merger of gender and racial critique is found in the text's life and death choices. When viewed through the phenotypic selection, the narrative shows the survival and reproduction of white people are not privileged over that of non-whites. This is a direct inversion of colonial ideologies that reward white women for their affiliations and alliance to white men with survival. Margaret and Joe, the only white couple in the text, do not survive as Joe is killed in an accident. Margaret appears to be nurturing and spends her time in taking care of Sophie, aligning her to concepts of white womanhood as Madonna-like and spiritually pure. She is depicted as being extraordinarily pale, with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes. In control of her own life, Margaret tries to exercise power over the choices she makes and decides that her relationship with Chacko was not successful. As an employed woman, she is able to take care of herself and her child after Joe's death. Margaret embodies Richard Dyer's notion of white women positioned between privilege and subordination. However, her subsequent disintegration and Sophie's death reveal the lack of presence of white women in authoritative roles and positions which, consequently, do not signal a feminine version of white power structure. Margaret never enjoys a lasting union with Joe and Sophie's death contrasts with Rahel's survival and her subsequent reclaiming of her voice. Dyer alludes to the metaphorical significance of happy endings, of unions, in his descriptions of white women and what they signify. Dyer says white women are symbolic of home; reunion with her is an allegorical reward for and the purpose of successful imperialism and colonial efforts (34). In killing the prominent white males in the text, Kari Saipu and Joe, and their inability to survive with their love interests suggests that such an imperialistic understanding, however tragic, should end in death. Margaret is the only white subject that survives her days in Ayemenem but it is clear that her subjectivity is no longer based on fictitious and exploitative hierarchies as she returns to England.

"Tomorrow" is the word that closes *The God of Small Things*. Rukmini Nair claims that in a tragedy there is no tomorrow whereas in a fairytale "tomorrow always hovers around the corner" (17). Although Roy's text needn't be assessed as a fairytale, the evocation of



future through *tomorrow* at the end of the text encourages a deeper analysis of the term's contextual significance. In *The God of Small Things*, whiteness symbolically dies with Kari Saipu and Sophie Mol, and Rahel reclaims her voice, but Ammu's eventual mental deterioration and Velutha's death shows that the local culture is not given absolute agency. Patriarchy, as depicted by the policemen, survives as does the continuance of the Western-based civilization, signified by Rahel's narrative voice employing the English language, albeit a dislocated one. The survival of English suggests white culture, as opposed to white supremacy with its syntax and texture shaped into a new hybrid existence. Comrade Pillai, with his imported white political ideology, also lingers, but as a threat that has lost its former bite. This is signified when he is presented as "slapping himself all over to get his circulation going" (Roy15). His altered behavior patterns and continuance suggest the threat of glorified systems of cultural and racial ideologies may still resurface and dominate with perhaps new racial or ethnic sources. Western media invasion through television—Hulk Hogan and Bam Bam Bigelow—dispersing a world of white abstract ideas and mental constructions also survive and, presumably, the likes of Baby Kochamma and Kochu Maria chose to reside there. What changes, however, is knowledge and choice, the possibility of a neo-ideology outside the dictates of "love laws," as represented by Rahel's creative output that commemorates the death of Sophie Mol. Rahel's text is narrated through the eyes of a child and respects Sophie Mol's "choice to be human," to join the twins in their rebellion against adult rules (Roy 180). Sophie's death suggests that privilege is not the most worthy or life-sustaining human goal.

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## **GANDHI AND THE INDIANS' MALAISE IN SOUTH AFRICA: DISILLUSIONMENT WITH THE BRITISH EMPIRE?**

*Belkacem Belmekki*

It is useless to deal with the experience of the Indian community in South Africa without referring to the person of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a distinguished Indian intellectual and leader. Setting out the circumstances that led this Indian law school graduate to enter the South African scene requires, first of all, a sketchy description of the experience that the Indian community went through in that part of Africa by the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

People from the Indian Sub-continent started pouring into South Africa following an official request for workforce made by the Natal authorities to the Indian Government by the late 1850s. In fact, by the 1850s, the white settlers discovered the fertility of the South African land and the favourable climatic conditions for the cultivation of sugar, particularly in the Natal region. The only hurdle that they faced was the shortage in labour, as a Natal local newspaper, *Mercury*, stated in 1859: "The fate of the Colony hangs on a thread and that thread is Labour" (Huttenback 128). This situation was due to the fact that few local Africans were willing workers (128). According to Professor Narendra Bhana,<sup>1</sup> this unwillingness to work in agriculture on the part of the Black Africans could be attributed to the fact that agricultural work was regarded as a female activity in the African culture, particularly the Zulu culture.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, to fill this labour shortage, white South Africans turned to the people of the Indian Subcontinent, knowing that the latter were a hardworking people who had already filled labour shortages else-

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Narendra Bhana is a South African historian of Indian descent. He currently teaches at the University of Durban in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> N. Bhana adds that the Zulu males were traditionally involved in grazing cattle and defending the tribe against foreign attack. N. Bhana, 'South African Indians: the Past, the Present and the Future' in <[http://www.ipooa.com/south\\_african\\_indians.htm](http://www.ipooa.com/south_african_indians.htm)>.

where in the British Empire (Huttenback 128).

The first group of Indian labourers to arrive in South Africa took place early in the 1860s, after a long period of negotiations between the Natal Government and the colonial Indian Government.<sup>3</sup> The latter was too reluctant to allow "Her Majesty's Indian subjects" to travel to Natal for work without clear-cut guarantees on the part of the Natal Government as to their welfare. As a result of these negotiations between the Calcutta authorities and Natal Government, it was agreed that the Indian workers were to be respected and treated decently.

In this respect, the Natal Government passed Law 14 of 1859. This law made it possible for the colony to introduce immigration of Indians as indentured labourers, with the option to return to India at the end of the five year period of their work contract in which case a free passage would be provided. This law also provided for the indentured Indian labourers to prolong their work contract for a further five year period that would make them eligible to settle permanently in the colony. Added to that, these labourers were also entitled to a gift of crown land and full citizenship rights (Pahad). On the other hand, Law 14 of 1859 set up a "Coolie<sup>4</sup> Immigration Department" presided by a "coolie immigration agent." The latter, besides keeping a register of Indian immigrants and assigning them to employers, would be in charge of the welfare of the Indian workers, and made sure that the clauses of the agreement between the Natal Government and Calcutta authorities were fulfilled to the letter (Huttenback 128-129).

This huge influx of the indentured Indian workforce in South Africa<sup>5</sup> had an immediate and positive impact on the economy of Natal; as corroborated in an article from the *Natal Mercury* in 1865:

Coolie immigration ... is more essential to our prosperity than ever. It is the vitalizing principle. It may be tested by the results ... Had it not been for coolie labour, we should not hear of the springing coffee plantations springing up on all lands and of the prosperity of older ones being sustained through the agency of East Indian men (129).

In fact, to back up this statement with data, the same article mentioned that the South African sugar export increased from £26,000 in 1863 to £100,000 in 1864 (Pahad).

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<sup>3</sup> These negotiations lasted for 3 years (between 1856 and 1859). *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> The word "coolie" means an unskilled and cheaply employed worker in Asia. In the South African context, it was used to refer to a person from the Indian subcontinent or a person of Indian descent.

<sup>5</sup> According to R.A. Huttenback, between October 1860 and February 1861, about five vessels left the Indian ports of Madras and Calcutta for Natal, carrying 1,029 male adults, 359 women and some children, and between 1863 and 1866, 2,814 more male adults disembarked in Durban (Natal), *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Even the South African authorities at that time bore witness to the immense contribution of the indentured Indian labourers to the economic development of their country. For the sake of illustration, it is worth quoting the 1901 coolie immigration agent who admitted that “the employers realized the indispensability of Indian labour” and added that “if Indian labour was withdrawn the country would at once be simply paralyzed” (Pahad). Another example was a statement made by Sir Liege Hulett in 1903, then Prime Minister of Natal Colony, that “Durban was absolutely built by the Indian people” (Pahad).

Indian labourers were not very well paid; yet the pay they received was significantly a considerate one when compared to what they used to receive back home (Bhana).<sup>6</sup> Apart from salaries, these indentured labourers were well looked after in terms of feeding and sanitation, as stipulated in the clauses of the agreement between their government and the Natal authorities. Therefore, in such favourable conditions, many indentured labourers preferred to remain in South Africa upon the expiry of their contract. In fact, upon the expiry of the initial five year contract, the Indian labourers had to choose between two offers: either a free passage back to India or a piece of agricultural land whose value was equivalent to the fare incurred by a passage to India (Bhana). Of course, most Indian labourers opted for the latter offer as owning a land was something that could never be dreamt of in the Indian subcontinent (Bhana).

A U-turn in the Indian status in South Africa occurred by the end of the 1860s when a new wave of immigrants from the western coast of the Indian subcontinent, particularly from Gujerat, disembarked in Durban. These new immigrants, who came at their own expense, were overwhelmingly Muslim traders. They were attracted by the tremendous opportunities of wealth that South Africa offered.

This new wave of immigrants sought to settle permanently in South Africa. They brought with them their wives and children and formed Indian communities in the Natal towns, which gradually spread to other South African towns. These immigrants did not content themselves with staying around the coastal areas; in fact, once setting foot in Durban, they decided to go northwards, namely towards the hinterland (Pahad).

These newcomers, often referred to as “passenger Indians” or “Arabs,” engaged in commerce, a thing that white South Africans had never thought would happen. Their efficiency in this field made them excel in the market very quickly, and most of the time they

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<sup>6</sup> Professor Narendra Bhana stated that the indentured labourers were given a monthly stipend of two British pounds.

outdid the white South African traders (Pahad). As a result, more customers, whether whites or Black Africans, were attracted by the efficient service and competitive prices often offered by the Indian traders (Pahad).

In such conditions apprehension soon spread among white traders who saw their Indian counterparts as a source of threat and so a potential danger. In fact, this apprehension was not only expressed by the white traders but also government officials, the press and the ordinary white citizens. Reflecting this situation, E. Pahad quotes two magisterial reports in 1884-1885 stating that:

A few more Indian stores have been opened ... during the year, and two European stores have been closed for want of support, the Indians having entirely absorbed the petty trade ...

and

Complaints continue to be made of the increasing number of Indian traders ... These people render it impossible for small European store-keepers to make a living. (Pahad)

To top it all, by the end of the nineteenth century, Indians had already outnumbered South Africans of European descent. According to R.A. Huttenback, by 1894, there were about 43,000 Indians as opposed to only 40,000 whites (Huttenback 130). This apprehension resulted in a swift change of attitude towards Indians, indentured labourers as well as traders. This metamorphosis of attitude was well illustrated in an article published in the *Johannesburg Star*:

Apart from the question of his loathsome habits, the coolie is not an immigrant to be encouraged. He lowers the standard of comfort, and closes the avenues of prosperity to the European trader. ... The Asiatic is ... a menace to the European's life, an obstacle to his commercial progress ... (Huttenback 140)

Hence, accusing the Indian traders of unfair trade practices, white traders lobbied their government to come up with a stratagem to put an end to this competitiveness by issuing laws that would restrict Indian immigration to South Africa and restrict Indian traders. Accordingly, a set of legislative laws was passed that flagrantly discriminated against Indians. These discriminatory laws sought to deprive Indians of all rights, social, economic as well as political. For instance, to restrict Indian immigration, the Natal Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act in 1897 which imposed an educational, health, age and means test, against Indians other than indentured workers, seeking admission to the country (Pahad). Obviously, this act stopped all further immigration of free Indians into the colony.

Another infamous act was the Franchise Act of 1896, which

disenfranchised Indians under the pretext that the right to vote was to be denied to anyone whose home country did not have its own parliamentary representation (Judd 226).

Besides this discriminatory legislation, Indians were also subject to day-to-day hardships. The best example to illustrate this was the imposition of a curfew on “coolies” in 1896 (Huttenback 131).

This anti-Indian legislation took place initially in Natal, and then propagated to the other colonies that made up South Africa, namely Cape of Good Hope, Orange Free State and Transvaal. In fact, wherever they went, Indian traders, and at certain times contract labourers,<sup>7</sup> aroused the jealousy of the white traders, a thing that prompted swift reaction from the latter as well as their colonial governments. Yet, these restrictions were less harsh in Natal and Cape of Good Hope than in Orange Free State and Transvaal. The reason for this was the fact that the former were British colonies and the British Colonial Office in London had been insisting on the good treatment and respect of “Her Majesty’s Indian Subjects” (Pahad). In this respect, R.A. Huttenback stated that “any attack on a particular group of the queen’s subjects by other members of the British family struck at the very roots of the imperial philosophy” (Huttenback 133).

Another reason for the different reaction to Indian progress in the British colonies and Boer Republics was the fact that the former appreciated Indian contribution to their thriving economy, and that discrimination against Indians was prompted only for the sake of protecting the whites’ economic interest (Bhana).

Added to that was the fact that the British colonies had to take into consideration the public opinion in Britain when it came to their treatment of the Indian subjects, and were responsible to the Colonial office in London. The latter objected, most of the time, to attempts at discrimination against “her Majesty’s Indian Subjects” (Bhana).

On the other hand, that was not the case in the Boer Republics, which were under no outside influence. They could deal with the Indians whichever way they wished.

The source of anti-Indian attitude in the Boer Republics was not only brought about by the fear of Indian domination. As a matter of fact, the Boers, mainly those fervent Christians, feared for their religion and regarded Indians as another version of Arabs who chose to come to South Africa with the intention of spreading Islamic teach-

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<sup>7</sup> R. Oliver and A. Atmore stated that even less skilled Dutch and British workers considered the Indian indenture worker as a serious threat, as the latter was a disciplined and uncomplaining worker. R. Oliver and A. Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, Cambridge University Press, 4th edition, 1996, pp. 179-180.

ings, the way the Arabs had done in many parts of Africa few centuries before (Bhana). Thus, these Boers felt duty-bound to protect their "own" country from Islam. For the less religious Boers, anti-Indian sentiment was driven by their feeling of superiority over dark-skinned people. Being so, Indians were regarded as an inferior race, hence not worth living alongside the Boers (Bhana).

In a word, as the Indian community expanded in South Africa, their initial friendly welcome soon grew into a hostile one. The whites, who regarded themselves as a "superior" race, could not afford to ignore a serious warning, namely, the growth of a so-called "inferior" race that could dominate the country. Moreover, being alarmed by the Indian traders' high performance, the white traders increased pressure on their government to obstruct this emerging community. As a result, everything turned sour for the Indians as they were gradually restricted by a series of new legislative actions.

Therefore, it was against such gloomy backdrop, very unfavourable to the Indian community, that Gandhi, a young Indian attorney, made appearance on the South African stage by 1893. The South African experience, as will be seen further down, would change the course of Gandhi's life forever as, in the process of defending the cause of his fellow-countrymen there, he would grow into a strong and charismatic leader. This experience would, indeed, teach this western-educated intellectual the art of leadership.

Gandhi was appalled by the predicament of the Indians in South Africa. His first encounter with discrimination based on the colour of the skin occurred to him shortly after he set foot on the South African soil. It was while on his way on board a train, from Durban to Pretoria to defend a case in court, that Gandhi found himself sacked from a first-class compartment by a white person, and then beaten up and violently thrown off the train, though he had a first-class ticket in hand. This was a shocking moment for this Indian intellectual. This incident, which gave a first-hand glimpse of the indignities and colour-based discrimination and injustices that the Indians were subjected to in South Africa, was to serve as a catalyst that would make this intellectual take the lead to campaign for the Indians' civil rights in that part of the British Empire. Reflecting, later on, on this incident, Gandhi wrote:

The train steamed away leaving me shivering in the cold. The creative experience comes there. I was afraid for my very life. ... Should I go back to India, or should I go forward, with God as my helper, and face whatever was in store for me? I decided to stay and suffer. My active nonviolence began from that date. And God put me through the test during that very journey. That was one of the richest experiences of my life. (Dear 20)

Indeed, this shocking incident marked the beginning of a long campaign, which would last for more than 20 years, during which Gandhi challenged peacefully the existing arsenal of discriminatory legislation put in place by the white minority which held the reins of power in the country.

In the wake of the train incident, Gandhi took the initiative to campaign against this institutionalised racism. Besides the creation of a newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, he helped set up, in 1894, a political association, the Natal Indian Congress, to help organize and unite the members of the Indian community there. In doing so, he laid a great deal of emphasis on the “necessity of forgetting all distinctions” that divided Indians and exhorted his fellow countrymen to see themselves as Indians rather than as Hindus, Parsis, Muslims, Gujaratis, Punjabis, and so on (Gandhi 105).

In the earlier phase of his activist movement, Gandhi resorted to conventional methods, brandishing Queen Victoria’s Proclamation of 1858 as his people’s Magna Carta (Read and Fisher 146). He believed that the best way to change things was the use of passive resistance. In fact, until 1906, Gandhi had employed a very passive form of protest which was characterized, in the main, by petitions and propaganda. In this respect, Gandhi remarked in his autobiography that one of the key features of the recently founded organization, namely the Natal Indian Congress, was propaganda, whose aim was to “acquaint the English in South Africa and England and people in India with the real state of things in Natal” (Gandhi 126).

Nevertheless, in the course of time, Gandhi realized that this passive method of resistance was useless in that current context and would lead to nowhere. Drawing upon the ideas of some western intellectuals such as Leo Tolstoy, who held the belief that non-violence is the best way to counter evil, and Henry Thoreau, whose famous essay on civil disobedience argues that people should not allow governments to overrule their consciences, Gandhi decided to scrap passive resistance and developed the strategy of non-violent resistance, which became famously known as Satyagraha (meaning the force of truth). He believed that passive resistance was a method of the weak and that the adoption of non-violent resistance was the “moral dedication of the strong” (Fox 135). In light of this, he urged the oppressed Indians to peacefully and respectfully challenge the discriminatory measures imposed by the whites (Judd 227).

According to Richard Fox, the basic strategy of the Satyagraha was non-cooperation, and later on, involved civil disobedience, which required, among others, picketing registration places, refusing to pay



fines and accepting imprisonment (Fox 134).

In other words, this Gandhian political philosophy was characterized by the use of all peaceful techniques, without resort to any form of physical violence, in order to destabilize the opponent. In fact, the main objective of the Satayagraha was to defeat the oppressor by setting them an example through restraint and passivity for the ultimate purpose of convincing them of the righteousness of the oppressed (Judd 227-228). Reflecting the peacefulness of Gandhi's movement, Denis Judd pointed out that this Indian intellectual went to the extent of encouraging the members of his community to "follow the Christian precept of turning the other cheek in the face of physical aggression" (Judd 227). Furthermore, according to Anthony Read and David Fisher, Gandhi urged the Satayagrahi campaigners to regard prisons as "His Majesty's hotels" (Read and Fisher 150).

This change in method, i.e. from passive resistance to non-violent resistance, was also due to a radical change in attitude towards the British Empire. In fact, Gandhi, hitherto a staunch defender and supporter of the British Empire and the ideals for which it stood, became disappointed at the fact that the British stood cross-armed and watched passively what was happening in South Africa. Indeed, Gandhi's recourse to Satayagraha by 1906 represents, in the words of Denis Judd, the "beginning of the end of the romantic and idealized perception of Britain and Britishness" (Judd 229)

Actually, Gandhi's about-turn regarding the British Empire was prompted by the reluctance of the British imperial authorities to recognize the justice of the Indian community in South Africa. This reluctance was more obvious to Gandhi when, at the announcement of the formation of the federal union of South Africa as a dominion within the British Empire—whose constitution should be approved by London—all his efforts at drawing the attention of the British officials to the Indians' cause met a dead-end. Describing Gandhi's disappointment, Anthony Read and David Fisher wrote: "Sick at heart, Gandhi felt betrayed by the empire he had loved" (Read and Fisher 150).

Gandhi was disillusioned with the British and, in his opinion, the case of the Indian community in South Africa represented a challenge to the very principles of the Empire which the British themselves failed to meet. After all, the famous statement contained in Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1858, that all imperial subjects were to be entitled to equality and fair treatment within the Empire, proved to be a set of empty words.

Gandhi's change of heart as regards the British, and hence Western, culture and civilisation can be reflected by the fact that he

changed his way of dressing. The fact of putting aside the western-style three-pieced suits he used to wear and putting on instead—and for the first time since childhood—Indian traditional garments, was a clear sign of his determination to turn his back on everything that represented British culture (Judd 229). Commenting on the impact of this conversion, Richard Fox stated that the new image was so “radical and unfamiliar” that the Reverend Charles Andrews, who was one of Gandhi’s closest Christian friends, failed to recognize him (Fox 13).

Indeed, having previously extolled western education and advised his community to learn the English language instead of having leisure, he now turned into, as put by Denis Judd, a “persuasive and consistent critic of Western education, Western materialism and Western industrialisation” (Judd 230).

Gandhi’s disappointment with the British institutions and administrators made him revoke the statements he had previously made to his fellow countrymen regarding the “superiority” of the British culture and the “inferiority” of the Indian culture. Therefore, he urged the Indians to cling to their traditions and advised them self-help as well as self-reliance.

To conclude, it is worth quoting Anthony Read and David Fisher’s statement which summarizes Gandhi’s change of heart:

What Gandhi was advocating was not the violent overthrow of the British Raj, but a complete reversal of all its values and practices, including education, medicine and industrial development. (Read and Fisher 150)

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**THE CONVERSION OF “PAUL”:  
Cultural, Religious, and Sexual Negotiations in  
Alex Sanchez’s *The God Box***

*Ángel Daniel Matos*

**ROOTS OF TENSION**

In August of 2011, as I stepped into a classroom to attend my first meeting as a doctoral student in English at the University of Notre Dame, I was greeted by the smiling faces of my graduate studies director and his secretary, and a crucifix perched prominently on one of the solid white walls. It was at this moment that the Catholic nature of the university transitioned from the ephemeral into the concrete. Although I was aware that Notre Dame is a religiously affiliated university, I was oblivious to the extent to which the religious character of this institution influences everything from its physical structure to its administration. Catholicism, understandably, is found in every corner of the campus, and if the crucifixes in the classroom are not enough of a reminder, the mini-posters within the library’s computer lab telling me that “Jesus Saves... so should you” (regarding the saving of my work in the computer) will be there to jog my memory.

From the religious vocabulary scribed on the chalkboard that I witness before each of my cultural studies classes (which the previous professor forgets to erase each and every time), to the administrative emails peppered with religious quotations that I receive on a daily basis, I am constantly forced to revisit a part of my life that I thought I left entirely behind many years ago. I was reminded of the times I would go to mass every Sunday with my great-grandmother, Ana, and how I would silently nod my head down and pretend to pray even though I really did not have a well-developed notion of what prayer actually constituted. I recalled the times that I would close my eyes during the night, and discuss all of my fears, expectations, and worries to a higher power, and I would sleep soundly knowing that my words and thoughts were being heard. I recalled hearing

the priest citing passages from the Bible, passages that stated that the thoughts and desires that were surfacing in my life were clearly wrong and immoral.

My relationship with the Catholic Church began to dwindle at the age of sixteen, during the same time that my sexual identity began to take shape. It was hard enough to admit that my sexual inclinations were not attuned to the opposite sex, and the clear stance of the Church towards homosexuality made this admittance even more difficult. To add yet another layer of complexity to this struggle, I am Puerto Rican, an ethno-cultural sector predominately known for its penchant towards family values (*la familia*) and chauvinistic attitudes. Needless to say, I felt (and to some extent, continue to feel) that my identities as a gay man, as a Puerto Rican/Latino, and as a Catholic could not coincide and manifest equally within my life, and therefore, I felt the intense need to leave behind one of these identities in order to let the others thrive. I think Catholicism was the natural victim for this elimination, not only because some of its ideals went against feelings that I deem natural, but because my increasing immersion in academia led me to value rationality over faith (although I am not arguing that faith and reason cannot coincide).

However, despite the supposed elimination of the Catholic factor from my life, there are two things that have become apparent: a) Although I no longer adhere to Catholic doctrine, it is impossible for me to escape its influence due to the prominence of the faith in Puerto Rican—and arguably, all Latino—communities; and b) Although I initially thought that by leaving aside my identity as a Catholic man I would be easing the tension between my identity as a Latino and as a gay man, the truth is that this tension is as strong as it used to be.

Ostensibly, the struggles that I face with my many domains of identity are not unique, and according to discussions that I have had with people who share similar backgrounds, trying to balance a Latino, gay, and Christian identity may seem not only daunting, but downright impossible. The struggles and tensions between these three domains are deeply rooted in notions and ideas that extend beyond the individual, forcing one to undergo a series of personal and negotiations; in other words, if the individual is dealing with finding a balance between faith, sexual identity, and race, he/she must put great effort into identifying a sense of self, and a sense of how he/she fits within a particular communal context with specific socio-cultural demands. Although I thought my negotiation between these clashing forces was over, my presence within the flagship of Catholic institutions within the United States has obliged me to reconsider this negotiation once more. Is it possible to achieve any degree of

conciliation and appeasement between a gay, Latino, and Christian identity? What are the personal, social, and cultural effects of the tensions present within these three domains? More importantly, if the conciliation between these domains is impossible, what are the moral and social consequences that surface by trying to transgress this supposed impossibility?

In order to address these questions, I will explore the manifestation and clash of Latino, Gay, and Christian identities within Alex Sanchez's *The God Box*, a young adult novel published in 2007 dealing with a teenager's struggle to find common ground between his Christian background, his inhibited Mexican-American heritage, and his emerging homosexual inclinations. It is expected that by understanding the mechanisms and negotiations of these points of conflict within the novel, one can come to a greater (or at least more enlightened) understanding of how these forces can clash and manifest within the lives of Latino gay youth in contemporary American society. This is not to say that the tensions present within *The God Box* are representative of the case of all Latino gay youth, or that a full understanding of the novel's tensions can lead to a full and encompassing comprehension of this socio-cultural sector in actual life. Rather, my exploration and analysis of the novel is a small but significant step into an academic venue of Latino gay representations in contemporary young adult fiction—an area that has remained virtually unexplored from a literary, cultural, and academic stance. In turn, this exploration and analysis is also an attempt at deeply scrutinizing a fictional approach towards a cultural conciliation that possibly mirrors how negotiations between race, sexuality, and religion take place in actual life. I will proceed to trace a brief cultural context of the novel, and I will then proceed to perform close readings of the novel in order to identify and scrutinize the aforementioned tensions and negotiations.

### (CULTURAL) CONTEXT

Alex Sanchez, a man of Cuban and German descent born and raised in New Mexico, is one of the most prominent and well-known writers of contemporary gay young adult fiction. When his first novel *Rainbow Boys*—which deals with the trials and tribulations of three gay teenagers as they try to assimilate within the heteronormative context of high school—hit the market during 2001, few were aware of how the novel would forever shift the landscape of gay teen fiction. Not only did it become an *Amazon.com* top-seller during November 2001, but it also went on to obtain the “Best Book for Young Adults” award from the *American Library Association* in 2002, and the “Young

Adult's Choice" award from the *International Reading Association* in 2003. Needless to say, Alex Sanchez not only paved the way towards the recent boom in the area of gay teen fiction, but some scholars such as Thomas Crisp go as far as to argue that when taking the reviews, discussions, and awards of *Rainbow Boys* into consideration, it becomes apparent that the novel is "not only defining the genre of gay adolescent literature, [it] simultaneously work[s] to create the genre as well" (9). Although Sanchez's novel was not the first to deal with gay teens and the issues they encounter (the first being John Donovan's *I'll Get There, It Better Be Worth the Trip* published in 1969), it is partially responsible for the recent boom of gay teen literature and its inclusion within the classroom.

Since the publication of *Rainbow Boys* in 2001, Sanchez has written a total of seven other young adult novels that feature gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals as either protagonists or major characters within the texts: *Rainbow High* (2003) and *Rainbow Road* (2005)—sequels to *Rainbow Boys*; *So Hard to Say* (2004); *Getting It* (2006); *The God Box* (2007); *Bait* (2009); and *Boyfriends with Girlfriends* (2011). Each novel is characterized by its tackling of a particular issue that predominates the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (henceforth LGBTQ) community, including but not limited to AIDS, coming out of the closet, religion and homosexuality, sexual abuse, bisexuality, and of course, youth and sexuality. Keeping in mind the charged nature of these topics, and that Sanchez obtained a Master's degree in guidance and counseling, it should come as no surprise that all of the novels tend to be perceived as didactic and moralizing—even when compared to the traditional standards of children's and young adult literature in general. It is my belief that this didactic nature is what creates a degree of resistance when it comes to these novels being analyzed from a critical and academic stance, for the overt lessons and instructive nature present within the narration tends to overshadow any sense of literariness and cultural value that it may actually possess. This overshadowing can be attributed to other factors, such as elitism, as Kenneth Kidd discusses in "Queer Theory's Child and Children's Literature Studies":

The establishment of children's literature studies as an academic enterprise—through and as evidenced by its professional organizations, dedicated journals, MLA division, PhD programs, and so forth—has improved its status and separated it from other fields. I think academic elitism is at work too; while queer theory is far from established in the academy, it enjoys higher status than children's literature studies, perhaps because of its affiliation with theory more broadly, which has tended to overlook children's literature. (185)

However, this is a problem that can generally be perceived when approaching any mass-market children's or young adult text from an academic and critical perspective. Although these genres of fiction can provide major insights into culture and the human condition, especially since individuals are exposed to these texts in their formative periods of their life, they simply do not possess the academic status that other forms of literature have.

Since the materialization of a literary market for teenagers and adolescents during the late 1950s, the value of young adult literature has been greatly focused on utilitarian purposes. In other words, the worth of this literary genre is measured in terms of its educational value and the development of certain morals and values within its readers. In *Children's Literature in the College Classroom*, Daphne Kutzer establishes that the traditional method used to evaluate and judge children's literature is to ask whether or not the book teaches anything to the child. Though this may be particularly true in the case of children's literature, the notion becomes problematic as we enter the realm of young adult literature, which is targeted towards readers who have not only a larger vocabulary and greater sense of the world, but are also facing more "adult" issues than those presented in children's literature. According to Christine Jenkins, the genre of young adult literature is generally fixated on "fiction with a young adult protagonist that is centered on the developmental and life phase issues associated with adolescence and is created for and marketed to a teenage readership" (298). Additionally, Dawn Savage points out that young adult literature is aimed at teenagers who are making a transition into adulthood, thus this literature also has ulterior purposes, such as informing, comforting, or inspiring teens (32).

However, I would like to point out that at this point and time, the notion of young adult literature being aimed solely at teenage readers has been shifting, especially with the advent of literary/cultural phenomena such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series. Leaving aside disputes of whether or not these works of fiction can, or should, be approached as Literature, it is needless to say that the popularity of these book series is fueled by a substantial number of teen and young adult readers/fans, to the point that these novels have transcended to an adult readership. Thus, even though young adult fiction may seemingly possess little value from a literary stance, it would be questionable to contest its cultural influence and significance.

In the case of gay young adult fiction, I can speak from my own experience, and the experience of many of my peers, that we tend to read this genre of fiction as adults (despite its apparent simplicity



and didactic nature) because it allows us to experience childhood and adolescence in a way that we were never allowed to when we were younger. The LGBTQ individuals depicted in this genre of fiction have their first kisses and sexual experiences as teens, they go out on dates, they hold hands in public, they come out to their parents, and they actively transform their oppressive high school environments into spaces of liberation and freedom. Most readers of this fiction in their mid-twenties or older were rarely given the chance to experience these things until a much later period in their lives. In other words, it can be argued that many older readers of gay young adult fiction (such as myself) tend to live vicariously through the lives and the actions of the characters in these texts.

Kutzer adds that the methods used to evaluate children's literature are rarely used in the case of adult fiction; "adult" literature is evaluated according to its ability to provide a platform in which both the individual and society can be examined and analyzed critically. Yet, this dichotomy slowly became blurred with the eruption of young adult literature, for even though novels within the genre might have an inherent lesson, they also present diverse perspectives of the individual, and more importantly, of the individual within society. During the late 1960s, and especially after the publication of the S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967), a sub-genre known as "the problem novel" arose within the genre of young adult literature, which, according to Jenkins, deals with a young adult's confrontation with a social or cultural issue, and is told from a teenager's first person or limited third person viewpoint (299). In due course, the term "problem novel" became synonymous with the term "young adult novel" due to the fact that most fiction published after *The Outsiders* followed a structure in which a teenager coped with a social ill or "problem" (i.e. alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, homosexuality, child abuse, etc.). Alex Sanchez's novels can very well be lumped into this particular category, especially given their didactic nature. However, classifying Sanchez's novels as "mere" problem novels undermines the rich cultural insights that they provide to contemporary readers, regardless of age.

Despite being didactic and instructive, Sanchez's novels are groundbreaking in terms of their contributions to the genre of gay Young Adult literature and the "coming out" novel; however his novels are barely recognized for their other innovatory element: they are some of the few gay young adult novels to include major Latino characters who also happen to be affiliated with the LGBTQ community. Sanchez's novel was not the first gay young adult novel to include a major Latino/a character within its plot. According to Michael Cart

and Christine Jenkins in their discussion of Young Adult literature with LGBTQ content titled *The Heart Has its Reasons*, R.J. Hamilton's *Who Framed Lorenzo Garcia?* and Gloria Velasquez's *Tommy Stands Alone*, both published in 1995, were two of the first Young Adult novels to include a gay Latino/a protagonist (121). Nonetheless, what distinguishes *Rainbow Boys*'s Latino character, Jason Carrillo, from the characters portrayed in the previous texts with Latino gay characters, is the positive light in which the character is portrayed, and the fact that the character is fully developed throughout the entire *Rainbow Boys* trilogy. On one hand, the main character in Velasquez's *Tommy Stands Alone* is unable to cope with the pressure and rejection fostered by his family; thus, he attempts to commit suicide as a final solution to his dilemma. On the other hand, although Hamilton's protagonist is shown to be well-adjusted, the character lacks development simply because he is part of a much larger ensemble of 'mystery-solving' teenagers. Jason Carrillo, however, is not only a star basketball player, but he eventually becomes a role model for both other GLBTQ characters in the series, and of the novel's readers as well.

Despite the welcome and refreshing presence of Latino LBGQTQ characters in the works of Sanchez, the presence of racial minorities in gay teen fiction, and in gay fiction in general, is underwhelming, to say the least. Some of the most popular novels with major LGBTQ characters, such as Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* (2003), David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003), and the late Perry Moore's *Hero* (2007), all project an ostensibly white middle-to-upper-class context. To complicate matters even more, novels such as Nick Burd's *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2009), which have minor Latino characters within their plots, project such characters as tormented, broken, and unyielding. Brent Hartinger, author of the acclaimed gay YA fiction series known as *Geography Club*, points out the following in his blog column *Ask the Flying Monkey* found at the gay media and entertainment website known as *AfterElton.com*:

[*Geography Club*] came out in early 2003. By the second week, it had already gone into a third printing. Since then, there's been an absolute explosion in gay teen lit... It's been a wild ride, but sadly, racial diversity is still somewhat lacking in the genre. I asked my friend, the teen lit guru and *Booklist* columnist Michael Cart, and he could only think of one black gay male character: the co-protagonist of E. Lockhart's *Dramarama*. As for Latinos, apart from Alex [Sanchez]'s work, he mentioned Nick Burd's *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* and Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood*.

Along the same lines, in *Gay and Lesbian Literature Comes of Age*, Michael Cart reiterates that there is a serious lack of ethnic minorities and bisexual and transgendered characters within the genre. Interestingly, this lack is found not only in young adult fiction, but in most texts and media which include LGBTQ characters. According to the *Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Discrimination (GLAAD)* in their *Where We Are in Television Report: 2011-2012 Season*, this lack of racial diversity can be found in both broadcast and cable television shows:

In regard to LGBT people of color, figures also dropped with 15% of LGBT characters being racially diverse, compared to 19% last year. Of the 33 regular or recurring characters counted on broadcast, three are Latino/a, two are Asian/Pacific Islander and none are Black. The only new LGBT regular or recurring LGBT character who is not white this year is Santana Lopez, who came out as lesbian this past season on *Glee* (Fox). The drop in LGBT people of color on broadcast television this year is attributed to the cancellation of *The Whole Truth* (ABC) and the departure of Dr. George Huang from *Law & Order: SVU* (NBC). (14)

Despite this lack of ethnic diversity in gay texts and media, Cart applauds the development of the depiction of gay and lesbian characters themselves in the literary gay young adult genre, noting that they are no longer portrayed as individuals destined to live isolated lives that are full of negative journeys towards acceptance and social integration (1356), but can this notion really apply to the case of Latino characters in this genre of fiction? Cart also argues that coming out (i.e. revealing one's sexuality to friends or family) is a "tired" plot within the literature; however it is important to bear in mind that this is mostly true for novels that present the "typical" White gay teenager living in middle-to-upper-class contexts. Nevertheless, it would be somewhat dubious to assume this when analyzing the portrayal of gay ethnic minorities within the genre, particularly in the case of Latinos, who continue to have repressed and socially isolated lives in these narratives.

To pose the question metaphorically, how can gay literature with minority characters (e.g., Latinos) evolve and "come of age" when the characters haven't even come out of the closet, and continue to pay retribution for their sexual identity? How do other domains of identity, particularly race and religion, affect the affirmation or suppression of this sexual identity? Has gay teen fiction truly come of age when taking other cultural and societal domains into consideration? Perhaps some answers to these questions can be found by turning our attention to Sanchez's *The God Box*.

## TENSION TRIANGULATED: *THE GOD BOX*

As mentioned before, Sanchez's novel *The God Box* was published in 2007, and it was his sixth young adult novel published concerning depictions of gay youth. Not only is this novel more "mature" than his previous publications in terms of style and content, but it also adds the arguably convoluted and controversial dimension of religion within a young adult text. Throughout most of the novel, the reader can detect that the element of religion adds a noticeable degree of charged tension to the narration and the relationships between the characters. Furthermore, this novel in particular presents—albeit understandably—a greater sense of didacticism to the point that it seems preachy (and due to the fact that many of the characters in the text are active preachers of the Bible and Christianity).

In essence, the novel highlights the struggle between ethnic identity, religious belief, and gay identity via its protagonist Pablo, a Mexican-American teenager who prefers to be known as "Paul" amongst his peers, due mostly to the fact that he believes that by embracing his identity as a Mexican, he would hurt his chances to fully integrate into American culture. Going by Paul instead of Pablo goes unquestioned until he encounters Manuel Cordero for the first time in the novel, the "new kid in school," who happens to be gay, Mexican-American, and Christian, and has no problem embodying all of these aspects simultaneously:

"Paul?" Manuel locked onto my eyes, as if peering inside me, with a look that was part mischief and part something else. "Not Pablo?"

"Paul," I said firmly. Although my birth certificate actually did say Pablo, I didn't want to be constantly reminded I was from Mexico. I wanted to be American; I didn't want to be different. (Sanchez 2)

At first glance, it seems that Pablo rejects aspects of his Mexican-American heritage, particularly when mingling with his American peers, as a way of achieving complete assimilation within the infamous American melting pot. Although he eats and cooks Mexican-inspired foods, and although he lovingly refers to his grandmother as *abuelita* throughout the novel, Pablo actively rejects prominent socio-cultural markers that would identify him as Latino, including his obvious Latino-influenced name and his choice of language—seeing as he refused to maintain and keep up his knowledge of the Spanish language because he was ridiculed by his peers for speaking it as a child. Even when Pablo is addressed in Spanish by either Manuel or his grandmother, he refuses to respond in that language, going as far as to repeat the same phrase once again using an English translation, as evidenced in a text-message exchange between him and Manuel:

"After bedtime prayers I flopped into bed, still feeling kind of down, till my cell phone chirped with a text message from Manuel: *Feliz Navidad!* I texted him back: *Merry Christmas to you too!*" (Sanchez 168).

By avoiding an embodiment of his ethnicity, most of Pablo's struggles in the novel are concerned with his attempt to suppress his sexual inclinations towards other boys—and his increasing attraction to Manuel Cordero—while remaining faithful to the Christian values and doctrine that have offered him comfort and solace, particularly since the death of his mother at a young age. Pablo is an active reader of the Bible, a member of his school's Bible club, and he attends mass weekly with his father, who happens to be a recovering alcoholic. Most of his thoughts and actions are lived according to the scriptures, and he is constantly trying to live through the example that Jesus has set for him. To further illustrate the depth of Pablo's faith and devotion to God, he goes as far as to materialize his faith through concrete practices such as a WWJD bracelet and a God box—the object on which the title of the novel is based. The letters on the rubber band that Pablo wears are an acronym for "What Would Jesus Do?," and he wears the band as a way to remind him to approach the world as his God would. Furthermore, the band serves as a way of keeping his faith intact in moments of doubt and crisis, as Pablo will begin to lightly snap the band against his wrist whenever he is having "impure" or "sinful" thoughts. The eponymous God Box, on the other hand, is a ritual that Pablo performs to concretize his prayers: whenever he has a wish, desire, or hope, he writes it down on a piece of paper and places it within the box, as a way of symbolically placing these prayers into God's hands. The most prominent wish that Pablo repeatedly puts in the box asks God to take away his sexual feelings and attraction towards the male sex.

Pablo's stoic Christian attitude towards life is starkly contrasted with the turbulent and virtually uncontrollable sexuality that is awakening and maturing within him. One can observe that Pablo is constantly having sexually-natured dreams of other boys, a fact that deeply disturbs him mostly because the Catholic ideology that guides his life ultimately condemns the "lifestyle" projected by his dreams. Bernardo García, who conducted a study on the development of Latino gay identity based on the perceptions and experiences of ten gay men, succinctly depicted the unstable relationship between Catholicism and Latino communities. Although Pablo is not described as Catholic within the novel, García's findings do shed light on the roots of tension in Pablo's life:

Catholicism is widely known for denouncing homosexuality as sinful, which is also reinforced by the Latino community. A man's homosexual

behavior may very well be known within a family but there is a tendency, within the culture and its institutions like the Church, to deny that homosexuality exists. At times, homosexuality may be met with silent tolerance as long as the man continues to play out his expected cultural definition of masculinity. (33)

It is precisely this sense of silence which causes most if not all of the problems that Pablo faces in the novel. He is aware of his homosexual tendencies, but he approaches them as if they are treatable through prayer, and in other cases, as if they were non-existent. The preoccupation he has for his own soul overbears the feelings that he has towards people of his own gender, and soon enough, this vow of “self-silence” extends to other areas of his life, particularly his relationships with his friends and family. He begins to lose interest in his girlfriend, a person whom he admits he loves, yet with whom he avoids sexual contact using his faith as the basis for such avoidance. As his loyalty and attraction towards his girlfriend dwindle, and as his silence and moments of awkwardness with her manifest, his attraction towards Manuel begins to intensify; soon, every touch and every glance on Manuel’s behalf begin to put Pablo in a state of confusion and frenzy.

However, as his attraction to Manuel increases, so does the tension that exists between Pablo’s faith and sexuality. When his feelings towards Manuel begin to manifest, Pablo seeks advice and solace from a middle-grade health book, where he reads a passage that indicates that it is perfectly natural for boys to feel attraction to other boys during puberty, but that this is simply a phase that wears off as boys continue to mature. After reading that passage, Pablo states: “I drank from that promise like from some spring in a desert of doubt. And just as I’d tried to bury the fact that I was Mexican, I stuffed the possibility I might be gay into a box deep inside my heart” (Sanchez 9).

What is important to note from the passage above is that both homosexuality and Mexican-American identity are being depicted as traits that must remain suppressed and hidden from the world, but that nonetheless reside deep within the person’s core. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that both socio-cultural domains must remain stifled in order to allow other domains of identity to thrive: the gay Mexican-American must be closed within a box in order to allow the Christian American to prosper. The God box represents the futility of this suppression and in turn highlights the novel’s main didactic yet timeless message, which reminiscent of William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, reflects the advice that Polonius gave to Laertes before setting off on a boat to Paris: “This above all: to thine own self be true” (Act I, scene 3, 78). Despite Pablo’s attempts to “pray away the gay,”

and despite placing plea after plea within the God box, his feelings towards Manuel remain as intense as they were before: "there remained one thing I'd prayed about in a million different ways, giving it up to the Lord over and over again. Yet no matter how many times I entered it into the God Box, the things still hadn't gone away—the issue I felt Manuel would open the box and see" (Sanchez 50).

It is clear that Pablo underwent a deliberate self-whitewashing and de-gaying process in order to assure his assimilation within a heteronormative American context, and Sanchez goes at great lengths to ensure that acceptance of one's sexuality is closely tied to the embracing of one's ethnic and cultural heritage. It seems that the more Pablo tries to become an authentic "American" Christian, the more he loses grip and control over his ethnic and sexual suppression. As Pablo states while dealing with this containment, "How could I choose between my sexuality and my spirituality, two of the most important parts that made me whole? It seemed so unfair, like some cruel joke" (122). As pointed out by Mark Akerlund and Monit Cheung, who conducted a study on gay and lesbian issues among African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, "even if the coming-out process is portrayed as a positive step for gay men and lesbians, it is always perceived as a difficult process for people of color to form a healthy gay/lesbian identity while simultaneously maintaining a positive ethnic identity" (279). There is a completely different side of the spectrum revealed when taking into consideration the repressed lives that gay Latinos live through this very day, and the undeniable role that heteronormative values within these communities due to religious and patriarchal influences. As pointed out by García in his study of the development of a Latino gay identity, the difficulty of this process, and the tension created by the clash of sexuality and race, may often lead individuals to feel as if they are facing an ultimatum between multiple domains of identity:

A recurring theme in these models of identity development is the need for minority gays and lesbians to find validity in each community, both ethnic and gay/lesbian, and the need to integrate both identities as well. One pressure many gay minorities face is choosing between one identity group over another, which can lead to valuing apart of one's identity while devaluing another part. (5)

It seems as if Latino characters—as exemplified by the case of Pablo and many other characters in Sanchez's novels—feel as if they must negotiate between their identity as members of the LGBTQ community and as members of a particular Latino community. If unable to achieve a balance between these two identities, it is only natural to assume that one identity will dominate, and perhaps eradicate, the other. In addition, it can be deduced that religion would also be



included within this negotiation, thus creating a triangulated tension that must be dealt with.

Interestingly, while Paul focuses his energy on suppressing his ethnicity and his sexual desires, Manuel does the exact opposite: not only does he flaunt his sexuality unabashedly, but he also shows a great deal of pride in his Mexican heritage; in other words, he seems to be an exception to the tension between sexuality and ethnicity that was discussed earlier. Furthermore, Pablo is at first unable to understand how Manuel is able to embrace both his religious beliefs and his out and proud identity as a gay man:

Inside my head I tried to picture Manuel at our Bible Club. How could we discuss Holy Scripture with someone avowedly homosexual in our midst? [...] And where would all this lead? The words of Second Corinthians rang in my brain: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*. Except that Manuel claimed he was a believer. (Sanchez 15)

It is made explicit that Pablo is unable to recognize how someone can be both gay and Christian, for his views are founded upon the premise that both of these domains of identity are unable to coexist within a single individual, and upon the stereotype that all gay men are atheists. But, in the midst of all of this confusion, Manuel ultimately becomes the gay guru who helps Paul cope with these opposing forces in his life. It is also quite clear that Manuel is Pablo's foil: Manuel is passionate and outspoken while Pablo is reserved and inhibited; Manuel is progressive and creative in his thinking while Pablo is conservative and traditional.

What characterizes Manuel significantly is that although he has achieved a balance among the many domains of his identity, he has only done so by deviating from traditional approaches and perception of these domains in the first place, especially as pertained to the domain of religion. Manuel is a Christian who attends mass and who prays, but he attends an "inclusive" church that fosters no negative views towards homosexuality. Furthermore, his trust in God, the Bible, and the church are based on more than just belief, but rather, on the donning of a skeptical perspective in which everything and anything could and should be questioned. His arguments within his Bible study club are not based on the perpetuation of ideologies, but rather, on close readings of the language and context of the Bible and deep rhetorical analyses of religious propositions.

An illustration of Manuel's skepticism of traditional Christian beliefs, and his ability to perform close readings and insightful analyses, can be seen in the fact that he refers to God, much to Pablo's chagrin, as both a *he* and a *she*. Besides hinting at the very progressive ideologies that the novel itself intends to perpetuate, Manuel's analyses



serve to help Pablo realize that religion, in and of itself, is subjective and contradictory at times:

"I wish you'd stop that," I told him over pretzels at my house. "The Bible says God created man in *his* image, not *her* image."

"But," Manuel argued, "doesn't St. Paul say in Galatians that in Christ 'there is neither male nor female'? Why should we portray God as some old bearded guy, or even a man at all? Since we don't have a pronoun for a Supreme Being so infinite that it's called the 'I am,' why not give equal time to calling God 'she'?"

I didn't know what to answer. Was Manuel nuts or a genius? He made my brain feel like a pretzel, all twisted up inside.

[...] 'I think we've created God in *our* image, instead of the other way around. It's like we've built this little box and tried to cram the infinity of God into it, too afraid that if we let him out, she might challenge us too much. Then we'd have to crucify and kill him.' [...] "Hey, wait a minute. That story sounds familiar. I think I read about that actually happening once, about two thousand years ago. (Sanchez 70-71)

We see that the more that Pablo spends time with Manuel, the more he is twisted and knotted like a pretzel, assuming a shape that was quite different to the one he assumed at the beginning of the novel. Although Pablo initially believes that there could be no conciliation between homosexuality and Christianity, an increased exposure to Manuel's perspectives and insights begin to influence him to the extent that he cannot categorize Manuel's ideas as either intelligent or insane. But it becomes clear at this point that Pablo begins to lose his perspective of homosexuality and religion as a dichotomy, and begins to view these opposing identities as two ends of a continuum. It is through Manuel's example that Pablo begins to achieve conciliation between his multiple identities.

Another important character who plays a role in Pablo's social and cultural negotiation is none other than his *abuelita*, donning the persona of the wise, eccentric, and insightful character who is always a step ahead of everyone else. *Abuelitas*, the term of endearment usually directed towards Latina grandmothers, usually have a very important position in family hierarchies, for not only are they in charge of the household and the glue that keeps the family together, but they are generally viewed as the gatekeepers and safeguards of the rituals and practices that are valued in Latino cultures. The motif of the *abuelita*, as projected in literature, film, and in real life, consists of many expectations and factors: she is supposed to know all of the family recipes, she is the family's resident historian and story-teller, and she is the source of the best wisdom and advice. More importantly, the *abuelita* is the source and sentinel of tradition: she is the

anchor that keeps the family ship in its place and prevents it from drifting into unknown cultural waters.

Pablo's grandmother resembles the traditional abuelita in many aspects. She is constantly cooking traditional Mexican food for her family, she has a strong relationship with God, and she is an avid user of the Spanish language. As a matter of fact, Pablo's grandmother is the only person who can get away with referring to him as *Pablito*, a name that not only uses the diminutive as a term of endearment, but that is also overtly Latino-oriented. However, Pablo's abuelita diverges from customary depictions of Latina grandmothers in the sense that she greatly deviates from tradition in many aspects, and embraces notions that are both liberal and progressive. A divorced woman, Pablo's abuelita refuses to go to church due to the ostracism she faces as a divorcée, and she develops her own special relationship with God which consists of prayer, dialogue, and constant debate with the Lord. Similar to the case of Manuel, Pablo's abuelita refuses to accept Christian doctrine on faith alone, and she deems that faith must be challenged and contested in order to be validated.

Interestingly, although Latino gay men are typically shunned by their family members and Latino/a friends, Pablo's abuelita is absolutely open-minded and accepting when it comes to homosexuality. When she meets Manuel for the first time, they instantly bond and begin speaking in Spanish. Although she knows that Manuel is gay, as evidenced by his attitude, his overt interest in Pablo, and other indicators such as his piercings, she grows fond of him and to some extent cares about him. Pablo is curious to know why his abuelita's attitude towards homosexuality is so embracing and accepting, and it is then that she offers a powerful testimonial that creates a significant shift within Pablo's perspectives:

"You know, when I was growing up, I never even knew the word 'homosexual'—not till I left your *abuelito* and moved to Monterrey with your papa, and tried to find a job. No one would hire me"—she wiped her hands on her apron—"except the owner of a hair salon. I was so grateful to him. Then I began to hear gossip that he was a homosexual—and how supposedly sinful that was. But I thought, *If this man is so bad, why was he the only one willing to help me?*" She tapped the old, seasoned wooden spoon on the stewpot. "I think that unless people are told to believe homosexuality and God are in conflict, there is no conflict." (Sanchez 170-171)

The abuelita's experiences embody a shift from a traditional to a progressive perspective, and they also shed light on the sources of conflict that exist not only in the novel, but presumably, within many Latino communities as well. I do not mean to discredit the difficulty of conciliation between a gay and a Christian identity, but it must

be pointed out that the abuela makes a tantalizing argument when presenting the conflict between these two domains as an ideological construction, or a disrupted view of reality. In the case of both Manuel and Pablo's abuelita, they offer critical analysis and scrutiny as a solution to blind faith. They argue that it is not simply enough to have faith based on what we are told; in due course, faith must be actively challenged if truth is ever to be found. As the abuelita lucidly points out, perhaps we can ease the tension between the domains of religion and sexuality by trying to realize that the tension is simply fueled by our belief in it; in other words, belief materializes the tension, but the tension does not necessarily have to materialize the belief.

Despite the abuelita's assertion of a non-existent conflict between religion and homosexuality, this apparent tension increases exponentially as Pablo develops intense feelings for Manuel. During a climactic scene in the novel, Pablo and Manuel are at a movie theater; their hands continually rub against each other as they are reaching inside the bag of popcorn simultaneously, the atmosphere charges with sexual tension and anxiety, and as soon as they are about to disrupt this tension with a kiss, Pablo's fear takes over him. He runs away, leaving Manuel behind. After Paul runs away, Manuel becomes a victim of a brutal and merciless gay-bashing, and is left in a coma for several weeks:

Paramedics had rushed Manuel to the emergency room. His left knee was shattered and three ribs were broken from being struck by a tire iron. One rib punctured his right lung, and a chest tube had to be inserted to reinflate the lung. Most seriously of all, his skull had a fracture that had left him unconscious and may have caused brain damage. His right eye had also been hurt, so badly that he may lose vision in it, perhaps even need to have it removed. (Sanchez 183)

The fact that Manuel was gay-bashed becomes a very suggestive element within the novel, opening the possibility of Manuel having to face some sort of retribution for embracing his Latino and Christian identity while succumbing to his "deviant" sexual desires. Even more so, this element can also be interpreted as an embodiment of martyrdom, in which the only way Pablo is going to come to terms with the existent tension between his cultural and sexual identities is through Manuel's close encounter with death. If Manuel were to die in this novel, a strong message would be conveyed in terms of the embracing of a Latino, gay, and Christian identity; nonetheless, Manuel survives the attack and recovers greatly with the aid of Pablo. Interestingly, the gay-bashing becomes the pushing force that moves Pablo to come out to his closest friends and family, for he realizes that the ideological tension that was guiding his decisions was also becoming a source of violence. Pablo's coming out magically becomes

the impetus of Manuel's awakening, and when he eventually rouses from his coma, he is kissed by his Prince Charming, Pablo. Although it may seem clichéd, we must admit that in the case of this novel, the truth did set both of them free.

Thus, this literal awakening also represents the symbolic awakening of Paul's sexual identity, and the concluding steps towards his cultural, religious, and sexual negotiations. However, this negotiation does not take place in the overshadowing of one domain of identity over the other, but rather, it takes place by negotiating how each domain is approached individualistically. It all comes down to the classic conflict of the individual versus society: whether it is better to comply with unwritten social demands or personal desire. The experiences, ideas, and people that Pablo faces throughout the novel help him realize that the tensions and conflicts he was facing were only concretized because his belief served as a materializing agent. In due course, the concluding chapter of the novel includes an affirmation on Pablo's behalf, an affirmation that serves as a conciliatory testament to his multiple identities as a gay man, as a Christian, and as a Mexican-American:

I'm on that new path now, learning to love and accept myself as God created me. After all my prayers for change, uttered and stuffed into my little box, God did change me—just not the way I'd wanted. I still don't understand why I'm gay, but now I accept what I always knew inside my heart: It's just how I am. [...] One other big change is that I've started going by Pablo once more, instead of Paul, and I've started speaking Spanish again. Those are small steps in reclaiming my Mexican heritage, but huge piece in making me whole. (Sanchez 247)

An embrace of his sexual and religious identities facilitated an embrace of the Mexican-American identity that he desperately tried to keep at bay. It is fascinating that Pablo describes his Mexican-American heritage as a "piece," a separate unit that attaches to others to create a functioning whole. If we are to view his sexuality and his religion as other pieces as well, we can ostensibly say that the overshadowing of one identity or another will lead to an incomplete being. Thus, Pablo realizes that these pieces are not only important, but vital, to his happiness and his existence. According to the ideologies and lessons inherent within this novel, Latino Gay Christians do not have to negotiate what domains of identity they will or will not keep, but rather, they must negotiate how these domains will be approached, and how their own respective views of these domains contrast with the views of society. Therefore, Gay Latino Christians must be willing to negotiate, and ultimately transgress socio-cultural parameters if they ever intend on becoming a whole, as in the case of Pablo. Interestingly, this novel does not conclude with the typical

"happily ever after" solution that is expected in most children's and young adult texts. Manuel does survive his attack, and Pablo begins to embrace his multiple domains of identity, but note that the text does not conclude with Pablo's complete and finalized acceptance of his sexuality and heritage. As Pablo points out, he is "learning to love and accept" himself, indicating that the transgressive process he is undertaking is arduous, gradual, difficult, but nonetheless necessary. And with Pablo's hand firmly grasping Manuel's, the novel comes to a close, but Pablo's negotiations will ostensibly continue to take place well into adulthood, and perhaps for the rest of his life.

With the identification of the pieces necessary to make him whole, and with the aid of people who have transgressed societal norms on their own terms, the conversion of Paul into Pablo takes place. It is not surprising to see so many parallels between Pablo's story and the story of Paul the Apostle in the Christian New Testament: a person who originally doubted, and to some extent, persecuted disciples of a specific belief, is struck with an immense light that completely changes the way he perceives and approaches the world. And, in both cases, the conversion of their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions entails a change in their name, the element most closely associated with their sense of identity and being. It is safe to assume that the similarities between the characters' names, their journey, and their ultimate conversion are not coincidental, particularly when taking into account the religious nature of the novel. Both the Biblical passages and the novel highlight the necessity of contesting norms and ideologies that are taken for granted in order to achieve an enlightened and informed understanding of the so-called tensions that dominate our lives.

Admittedly, Sanchez's novel is didactic, moralistic, and somewhat pedantic in many aspects, but it embraces these attitudes with the hope of achieving an emancipatory effect. It depicts liberation via the destruction of ideological boundaries, and rather than celebrating one identity by masking another, it strives to create a leveling effect for all domains of identity. Furthermore, if it were not for the presence of Sanchez's work, the representation of Latino gay communities in the realm of young adult literature would be seriously diminished; one can go as far as to say that it would be virtually non-existent. In most, if not all of Sanchez's work, Latino gay characters seem always to struggle in terms of defining and intermingling their respective identities as Latinos and as homosexual men, or they simply struggle to have a voice in a world that metaphorically tries to keep their mouths covered. Perhaps gay young adult literature still has a long way to go in terms of the representation of racial minorities, but similar to Pablo

towards the end of the novel, Sanchez work has definitely pushed these representations “on that new path.”

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**JUAN DE MIRAMONTES'S *ARMAS ANTÁRTICAS*,  
EPIC, AND THE CATECHETICAL TRADITION  
OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENT AND THE  
COUNTER-REFORMATION**

*Mark DeStephano*

**J**uan de Miramontes y Zuázola's *Armas antárticas*, an epic poem probably written during the years 1609 to 1614, has generally been understood by the few critics who have studied it to have been modeled on the European literary epics of the later Renaissance period. Most recent studies by Nina Gervassi-Navarro (1999), José Antonio Mazzotti (2001), and Paul Firbas (2006) locate the poem within the genre of "pirate" and/or "creole" literature in the Hispanic-American context, as the work treats, in large measure, of the struggle between the Spanish conquistadors and the English corsairs Francis Drake, John Oxenham, and Thomas Cavendish. In her study, Gervassi-Navarro remarks that "(These works) are also about Catholicism battling against Protestantism, precisely at the time when—as a result of the Counter-Reformation—this battle had taken center stage among European States" (54).

This essay will develop Gervassi-Navarro's insight, and will demonstrate how and why the *Armas antárticas* puts the epic genre at the service of the Council of Trent, and is not only a thrilling story of Catholic heroism, but also a catechetical work aimed at the target audience of Spanish warriors. Miramontes has written a Counter-Reformation tract that describes, in great detail, what is expected of the model Catholic sailor and soldier, who the "enemy" is and why, and what theological principles are at stake in the struggle. Studied from the point of view of the Counter-Reformation, *Armas antárticas* is seen to be much more than a heroic tale about confronting the English and Dutch heretics; it exemplifies, in language that is markedly that of the Counter-Reformation, precisely how and why the Spaniards are admirable servants of the Catholic Church militant. What is more, *Armas antárticas* attests to Miramontes's remarkably profound knowledge of Tridentine theology as well as to his understanding of the cultural



goals of the Council, which give birth to the Counter-Reformation. H. Outram Evennett summarized those Counter-Reformation cultural goals as follows:

These two aspects of counter-reformation piety—the efforts of personal ascèse, the ‘disciplined life of religious regularity’, and the recourse to the covenanted channels whence flowed divine Grace *ex opere operato*—are seen once more to come together ... The revival of the sacramental life, the spread and development of powerful new techniques of meditative prayer and eucharistic devotions, the driving urge towards outward activity and good works as a factor in personal sanctification, all deployed, as it were, within the framework of Tridentine doctrine. (40)

Just how the decrees of the Council would be implemented and integrated into the cultural life of the nation was the task and prerogative of each Catholic monarch.

None of the European Catholic monarchs was more zealous in the adoption of the decrees of the Council of Trent than Philip II of Spain (r. 1554-1598), who promptly obeyed the decree of Session Twenty-Five of the Council by ordering the promulgation of its decrees. Although in his 1969 study of the Counter-Reformation, historian A.G. Dickens argued that Philip did not publicize the decrees of the Council for a full year, this opinion was refuted by Henry Kamen in 1997, when he noted that Pope Pius V formally issued the conciliar decrees in June 1554, and that on July 12—two weeks later—Philip promulgated them as Spanish law (104). He was the first European monarch to do so. Kamen further explains that Philip’s acceptance of the papacy’s policies was not complete, in that he published the decrees of the Council in matters of faith and Church discipline, but refused to relinquish the Crown’s supremacy over the Spanish clergy (104).

The Spanish king vigorously instituted the reform measures agreed upon at Trent throughout his realms, and in the American colonies, through the Council of the Indies. J.H. Elliott observes that, particularly during the 1560s, Philip turned his attention to the Council of the Indies and sought to impose the order, discipline, and conformity decreed at Trent on the entire Spanish missionary enterprise (128). This was especially significant in that Pius V had made a special concession to Philip, allowing him to establish a religious “*Patronato*” in the Indies, which declared that the Church and the State were to share the mission of evangelization in the New World (Elliott 128). Philip further strengthened the authority of the Spanish Crown in the Americas during the 1570s by establishing the “*Estado de las Indias*,” an all-encompassing governmental system which was to implement Madrid’s policies, especially in matters religious, without deviation (Elliott 129-130).

Fully aware of the advances the Protestant heresy was making in the Netherlands and France, and wishing to protect his own realm, Philip had already instituted a series of laws between 1558 and 1559, which forbade Castilians from studying outside of Spain. Furthermore, in accordance with the “Decree on the Choice of Books” of the Eighteenth Session of the Council of Trent, those works judged to be heretical were to be purged from the land and schismatic Spaniards were to be extirpated; foreign books were to be stopped at the borders, an order that proved difficult to enforce. The Holy Office was to lead the campaign against both Judaizing and Protestant heresy.

Philip had made it clear to his officials that the propagation of the purest form of the Roman Catholic faith was to be the centerpiece of the colonial Spanish enterprise, and was in no way to be compromised for reasons of economic advantage (Lea 191). In 1570, by direct order of the king, the Holy Office established a seat at the capital city of the Viceroyalty of Peru, which, according to Miramontes’s poem, had been named for the river valley where it was located, “Rihac” or “Lima,” and was also called the “City of the Kings” (la “Ciudad de los Reyes”) in honor of the Three Magi (75g-h). Miramontes had served for twenty years as an officer in the naval fleet that had patrolled the coasts from Chile to Panama in search of heretical English and Dutch corsairs (Firbas, Introductory 22). Born in Spain, he had distinguished himself in his military service, and in 1604 Miramontes was awarded the title of “Gentleman Harquebusier of the Viceroy’s Guard” (“Gentilhombre arcabucero de la guarda del virrey”), a promotion that led him to settle in Lima in 1607 (Firbas 2006: 18-19).

In his dedication of the *Armas antárticas* to don Juan de Mendoza y Luna, the Marquis of Montesclaros and Viceroy of Peru from 1608 to 1615, Miramontes clearly states his purpose in writing the poem: “(... but) I take courage in my intention, that the deeds of the most valiant Spaniards in conquering, subduing, and defending this kingdom, which they performed in the service of Your Majesty, deeds worthy of their nation, not be lost in the darkness of oblivion, whose memory silence buried” (“mas cobro ánimo en mi intención, que fue no quedasen oscurecidos en las tinieblas del olvido los hechos de muchos valientes españoles que en conquistar, quietar y defender este reino hicieron en servicio de su Majestad obras dignas de su nación, cuya memoria sepultaba el silencio”). Thematically, the epic of twenty cantos of *octavas reales* (strophes of eight hendecasyllables rhyming ABABABCC, DEDEDEFF, etc.) is divided into four parts: (1) the Conquest and Civil Wars (I-II); (2) the Pirates, Drake and Oxenham (III-X); (3) the Loves of Chalcuchima and Curicoyllor (XI-XVII); and, (4) the Population of the Straights and the Pirate Cav-

endish (XVIII-XX) (Firbas 2006: 32). Miramontes organized the poem in such a way as to be a fine Counter-Reformation catechetical work, not in the sense of a formal *cartilla*, or list of doctrines, but rather as a literary work through which Tridentine decrees might be communicated to soldiers and sailors of the Spanish empire. And while colonial Spanish officials worked closely with ecclesiastical authorities to create educational and catechetical programs that would bring the indigenous peoples of the empire into the fold of Christ, of equal importance was the work of the civil authorities and the Inquisition to strengthen the faith and keep the New World free of the schismatic doctrines of the Protestant Reformers.

*Armas antárticas* addresses seven essential aspects of the Counter-Reformation cultural project: (1) the supremacy of God's Will as that of the Creator of everything and the provident guide of history; (2) God's choice of Spain as the pre-eminent Catholic power in the world and the defender of the Catholic faith; (3) affirmation of the Spanish monarchs as the rulers who had been charged with the defense of the Catholic faith; (4) condemnation of Lucifer, who wishes to destroy the Church's work, especially in the New World; (5) demonstration of God's desire to save the indigenous peoples; (6) anathematizing of the Protestant heresy; and, (7) the teaching of doctrine, especially as it was expressed through the decrees of the Council of Trent. Miramontes's work, which in large measure is a recounting of the history of the Viceroyalty of Peru, remains quite faithful to historical fact and chronology.

In his presentation of the will of God, Miramontes addresses a variety of issues. In numerous instances, he reminds his listener that God favors the Spanish cause and prospers Spain's civil and ecclesiastical work, especially because of its efforts to bring the faith to the peoples of the New World (548;884;892;1521). God has given the Indies to Portugal and Spain for evangelization (349), yet Miramontes echoes a haunting Spanish question: If Spain is the champion of the proper cause, why does God allow the English corsairs to be successful, especially if the booty they capture aids the cause of evil? (696;762). God has even allowed the destruction of Peru (1206). In true Tridentine fashion, these doubts are answered in theological terms. We cannot know the will of God, nor is our will God's will; we must trust in His goodness (240;1508-1509;1545-1546). It must also be pointed out that, in numerous instances, Miramontes conjectures that God has not fully punished Drake and his associates because the English have shown extraordinary kindness to their defeated nemeses. Drake neither executes his enemies nor even sinks their ships, and, very often, even cures Spaniards who have been

wounded in battle and captured! (682-684;693-695;1585). Spanish warriors are taught the examples of how God punishes the Incas, who refused to accept the true faith, as well as how He destroys the rebellious Spaniards who seek to overthrow the proper order because of their own avarice and pride (31;50-61). Even the great conquistador Pizarro, who served the Crown well with the sword, became too confident and was punished by God with death by the sword (62). Likewise, we hear the positive example of Esteban Trexo, who gave thanks to God for granting him victory (931). The conclusion, which is vigorously affirmed by Canon XI of the Thirteenth Session of the Council, rings in the words of naval commander Pedro de Arana, who searches for the heretical corsairs so as to destroy them, if this be the will of God, and following the example of God's strengthening of Joshua and Moses in the Hebrew Scriptures (1655-1656).

Much of Miramontes's art as a secular Counter-Reformation catechist is evident in his ability to embed numerous Tridentine theological doctrines in discourses of the poem's characters. Closely examined, we find that he has carefully included most of the principal teachings of the Roman Catholic faith that have been deemed essential for salvation. For example, early in the epic the poet explains that the Spaniards sought to impart to the Incas an understanding of God as the Creator of all things:

Following Evangelical doctrine,  
 first they instituted peace  
 and then of the revealed divine faith  
 gave clear, holy, and detailed teaching,  
 saying that He who illumines everything,  
 by whom the high heavens were created  
 from the void, the starry firmament,  
 the light, the fire, earth, sea and wind ... (19)

In an interesting Counter-Reformation image, Miramontes proclaims that the same God sent His Son as a "Vicediós" ("Vice-God"), as well as Peter, who occupies the "Holy Chair" and also the king of Catholic Castile to bring the faith to all lands (23). God endowed human beings with reason and understanding (185) and yet their own ambition, pride, greed, and violence bring about the loss of peace and the destruction of the land, which, in turn, disturbs the proper worship of God (182;185). In a clear reference to the very decree of convocation of the Council of Trent, Andrés Hurtado de Mendoza, third Viceroy of Peru, declares that only peace and justice give rise to progress (187). The only legitimate war, he announces, is that which is fought "... that all should adore the Christ God as the king of glory" (188). Wars supporting the faith are just, however the current civil wars between ambitious Spaniards who are jockeying for power

are an affront to God Himself (188-189). As Pizarro's bloody death reminds us, violence begets violence (119). Only careful worship of God can help to us think and act properly.

One of the most important affirmations of the Council of Trent was that of the efficacy of good works, as opposed to the Reformers' teaching that salvation came *solá fide*—through faith alone. On many occasions Miramontes insists on this central Counter-Reformation teaching of Chapter Seven of the "Decree of Justification" issued by the Sixth Session of the Council. God provides human beings with situations that are opportunities to perform good works, and through them, to cooperate with God's plan of salvation for them. The poems reminds us that even the birds sing in praise of God, and so, Spanish warriors must do their part in fighting against the enemies of God's Holy Church (550-551). Marshal Ballano urges his men to make their good deeds be memorable, by fighting against the enemies of the Catholic King and the Holy See (563). In the name of their Catholic monarch, Philip, the English heretics must be punished (565). Let all true Spaniards shout, "¡Santiago, y cierra España!" and take to the battlefield with trust in God (566).

*Armas antárticas* also frequently reminds soldiers that we must always be prepared for death. In the first cantos, the poet recalls that the mission of the Spaniards in the New World is to preach Christ—true God and true man—, who has been sent by the Father to bring His grace and His light, and to free all peoples from death (24). Commander Valverde invokes the God of the Red Sea, who chose to save the seemingly insignificant Hebrew people and make them His own Chosen People (29-30). Miramontes offers the case of the Dominican preacher Vicente Valverde, who constantly preaches the sufferings of Christ (25), and later presents the inspiring story of Father Costantino of the Holy Office, who died a martyr at the hands of the heretics (501-503). Yet this glorious martyr is given the gift of eternal life immediately, the best that we can all hope for, as we are all come from ashes and to ashes we shall return (493;503). Therefore, let all Spanish warriors first confess their sins, do penance, and then head off to punish the schismatic English (547). No catechism could have offered a clearer teaching of Chapter V of the "Decree on the Most Holy Sacraments of Penance and Extreme Unction," which was issued at the Fourteenth Session of the Council.

Another significant doctrinal area addressed by Miramontes is that of the pernicious quest by Lucifer to undermine the work of the Holy Catholic Church, especially in the New World. Lucifer has sought to usurp God's glory (1516) and he now makes use of the English queen and her corsairs to attack the faith (282). The poet explicitly

mentions the ruin caused by England's Henry VIII, who, because of his pride and avarice, brought schism, war, furor, and death (200). Henry's apostate realm is the home of Drake, who, although a mighty warrior, is driven by heretical thought (199-203). In their misguided arrogance, the English and Lutherans burn Catholic churches everywhere and are like bloodthirsty wolves seeking to prey on innocent Catholic settlements throughout the New World (500;552;1194). Drake sows even greater disaster by urging his underlings, John Oxenham and Thomas Cavendish, to wreak havoc on the Spaniards and their faith (748;1611-1613). Following the great call of the "Decree Regarding the Opening of the Council of Trent," Miramontes makes it clear, time and again, that Spaniards are called to combat heresy, extirpate it, and punish the offending parties. God punishes the schismatics by having the sea swallow them and allowing thousands of them to be slaughtered in battle (455-456;472;1559;1697). The Spaniards' indignation and hatred of the Lutherans, he declares, is justified (853-854).

For this reason, Spain and its monarchs—the defenders of the Catholic faith—must decisively defeat the heretics, especially in the New World. God provides His help in this great task, as the Spanish warriors are bearers of Christ's standard (17-18;724;1527). For this, they were baptized in Christ, and now they are called upon to proclaim their faith in God and in the Holy Roman Catholic Church, to both of which the warriors resoundingly assent (1582-1583). The warriors are missioned to help their king establish the Catholic faith throughout his realms, for, indeed, the king—the *Señor Natural* of the realm—commands all of his vassals to join in this holy struggle (725;1526;1660). Had not Pope Alexander VI given the New World to the protection of Spain and Portugal, first by a Bull of 1493 and then, more formally, through the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494? This is why Magellan sailed the globe, just as he had explained to Emperor Charles V of Spain (241). His successor, Philip, must fight not only the English heretics, but even the nefarious French, who deal illicitly with the faithless schismatics (1529). The Council of Trent speaks directly to this conflict.

Reviewing the structure of *Armas antárticas* in the light of what has been presented, Miramontes's Counter-Reformation plan becomes clear. He first discusses the supremacy of God's will and teaches that human beings must be obedient to it, both in the ecclesiastical and the civil order. God has punished the infidel for his lack of faith and his crimes against the Natural Law, and the Spaniards have been sent to bring the true faith to the indigenous peoples, whom God wishes to save. English corsairs, most notably Drake and Oxenham, have

joined with African slaves to foment rebellion against the Spanish Empire throughout the New World. Their evil deeds must be opposed. The section on the loves of Chalcuchima and Curicoyllor is written with one specific apostolic purpose; all of the Indians have joined together in a great meeting, at which point Rumiñave, an old Inca sage, prophesies: "... the high personages you have seen here / will be an illustrious and important nation / that will adore Christ the Word as God-Made-Man" ("... los altos personajes que aquí has visto / serán de una nación ilustre y grave / que por Dios Hombre adora al Verbo Cristo") (1142). The pure, natural love of the two young people demonstrates the potential of the Incas to be easily introduced to the Catholic faith. Finally, these good people and their lands must not be abandoned to the destruction, heresy, and damnation of the English corsairs, who, as agents of Lucifer, seek to bring the indigenous peoples to their everlasting perdition.

*Armas antárticas*, then, should not be judged simply as a minor heroic work of the "pirate" genre, but, as we have seen, should rather be considered as what might arguably be the key exemplar of Counter-Reformation epic in the Hispanic-American context. Miramontes has created the ideal Counter-Reformation literary masterpiece that joins history, Tridentine doctrine, Spanish nationalism, and Roman-Catholic militancy in a way that reaches an audience that might very well be poorly catechized, namely, the soldiers and sailors of the Spanish empire.

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## “DEUX ARCS ALTERNÉS”: REFRAMING SPATIAL AESTHETICS IN ASSIA DJEBAR’S *OMBRE SULTANE*

*Pamela J. Rader*

When Scheherazade, with the help of her sister Dinarzade, tells stories to survive her thousand and one nights with the sultan, her nocturnal narrative performances reinscribe the narrator as architect of the mythic and multi-layered realm of the history of storytelling. The various versions and translations of the tales from the Arabian Nights call further attention to the *absence* of a singular version of the collected tales. Moreover, the narrative phenomenon of *A Thousand and One Nights* becomes at once a locatable, albeit mutable, regenerative text for redesigning narrative spaces: the canonical Arabic text, containing frame narratives, resists containment in its various editions and translations and becomes a text of alterity. In Assia Djebbar’s *Ombre Sultane*, the evolving, imagined dialogue between the co-wives, Isma and Hajila, becomes the process through which telling unveils itself.<sup>1</sup> With Scheherazade’s tales as the maternal text, Djebbar revives the tradition of storytelling and, more significantly, she rewrites the tradition to inaugurate a necessary change in the community of women. Djebbar’s novel not only reflects an attained dialogue between women, for women, but it establishes an intertextual discourse between feminine storytellers and their framed narrative spaces, as determined by the masculine eye. While many readers and critics have discussed the importance of space in Djebbar’s narrative, few have touched upon the alterity of spaces beyond the pairing of inside/outside, veiled/unveiled, saying/said, narrating/narrated, and observing/observed.

Drawing on the gaze, Djebbar’s earlier collection of short stories, *Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement* (1984), conjures Delacroix’s eponymous tableaux, “Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement” (1834; 1849), where the women are observed by a male eunuch, and

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<sup>1</sup> The French title could be translated as the shadow (ombre) of the sultana, or sultane’s bride, underscoring the play of light and the shadow as a veil. Here, light creates an illusion of form and matter as a shadow, which marks an absence of light.

Picasso's paintings where the servant is absent. In "Between the Harem and the Battlefield: Domestic Space in the Work of Assia Djebar," Victoria Best reads Djebar's oeuvre as a "reconstitution of female space," which I would argue as a push for alterity, making feminine subjectivity possible; the short prose pieces propose both plural and alternative spaces where women are no longer observed through the Orientalizing male eye, as upheld by Délaacroix's tableaux (875-876). Building on the allusions to Délaacroix and Picasso in Djebar's a collection of short stories, I propose not to reiterate scholarship on painterly representations of the masculine gaze, but to proffer how Djebar's use of epigraphs frames and evokes a prism of imagistic genres: the painters, Eugène Fromentin and Pierre Bonnard, the ethnographic work of Germaine Tillion, and the poetry of Victor Hugo. In addition to epigraphs, a fusion of literary and painterly aesthetics executes the blue prints of feminine subjectivity inside and outside the harem and hammam interiors.

While Isma's role as storyteller—in Djebar's *Ombre Sultane*—clearly alludes to the narrated thousand and one nights, she takes on the dual role of Scheherazade and Dinarzade, as the modern, French educated Algerian woman. Initially, she must be both sisters as well as both narrator and muse. Embedded in Isma's conjoined role is the complex perspective she constructs in not just appropriating the classic frame tale into a dialogue, but in weaving her Western and Muslim traditions. If the novel testifies to Isma's gaze, then her emancipated condition and westernized aesthetics color her vision; it is through this prismatic, complex lens she reveals her reclaimed sexuality, her memory of women from her childhood, and her representation of Hajila, her co-wife. The narrated text is infused with references to French authors—of canvas, ethnography, and verse, accentuating the importance of seeing through and observing light.

Turning to the first page, one pauses to read the words of Nabis painter Pierre Bonnard, "Jamais la lumière ne m'a paru si belle" (Djebar 7). "Never did the light seem so beautiful to me" (Blair). The painter's lines forecast the importance of light to the women living inside the harem walls. A few pages later, Djebar cites the Ravensbruck survivor Germaine Tillion's observations from *The Harem and Its Cousins* (1966). The selected passage describes the "high, windowless walls surmounted by broken glass" around the fortress-like house (Blair 5). Impregnable, such a compound, or vigilantly enclosed harem, suggests a trespass to those who attempt to enter, and a transgression to those seeking to leave. In such a restricted and restrictive space, light then becomes the welcomed visitor for the unvarying days of the women of Isma's childhood. Isma recalls,

“C’est pourquoi chaque parente sortant de sa chambre voulait profiter, pendant la recontre du patio, de la claret déversée du ciel comme d’une rémission ultime” (Djebar 88). “That is why, as each of them left her chamber for these meetings on the patio, she wished to take full advantage of the light of heaven, as if this were an ultimate reprieve” (Blair 78). This patio concealed beyond windowless walls breaches architectural confinement, and pardons structural opacity.

The metaphorical dialogue between natural light and interior spaces continues in the epigraphic lines from Victor Hugo’s *Les Orientales*,—they remain untranslated in Dorothy Blair’s English edition—but perhaps more importantly foregrounds the Orientalizing French poet’s gaze. Hugo’s lines read, in both the original and Blair’s edition, “La lune était sereine et jouait sur les flots/La fenêtré enfin libre est ouverte à la brise/La sultane regarde.” Here, beginning part III of the novel, the moon is calm and plays on the tide; it is not Hugo’s moon, but its light shines playfully on the water. The window from which the sultan’s bride watches is finally open to the breeze. An open window allows for both the air currents to enter the enclosure and the bride’s unimpeded, nocturnal gaze on the moonlit water. Hugo, like his countryman Délaçroix, frames the harem dweller through the male gaze, while the observed woman’s gaze is directed at an illuminated sea-sky horizon. Djebar’s inclusion of Hugo’s lines of the immaterial—reflected light and moving air—suggests a kind of opening of and a movement toward that alternative, non-phenomenological space of the narrating and narrated voices.

Not only do the epigraphs abet in developing the skein of motifs of light and windows, but also the author’s quoted selections infuse and engage a French literary and artistic tradition which shapes the text in progress: an imagined dialogue between the educated, bourgeois, multilingual, married-for-love first wife, Isma, and the shanty-town, dialect-speaking, reputedly traditionalist second wife, Hajila. Just as Dinarzade conspires with Scheherazade, as the former keeps the sister awake thus alive, Djebar’s novel relies upon and foregrounds the collusion of women wherein Isma simulates an on-going dialogue with Hajila. While Isma may portray herself as a liberated, westernized woman, she would be hypocritical to dismiss her freedom without recognizing her role in finding Hajila for her husband; Isma’s freedom comes at the price of Hajila’s imprisonment. For Isma played matchmaker to her husband by choosing Hajila as his second wife before leaving him; she expresses her complicity: “Or tu continues mon trajet de vie, je t’avais déléguée” (Djebar 89). “In fact you are continuing my path through life, which I assigned to you” (Blair 80). “Mon trajet de vie” suggests spatial alterity through an

invisible, imagined, progressive movement through time and space, and through shifting pronouns of "tu" and "je"—life's path hints at something other than stasis here: a visible, public line. Isma's lines underscore the potential for redesigning space—in the psychological and phenomenological realms—that do not reinstate an architectural succession of walls that encase and contain women within demarcated spaces. Here, Isma redefines the narrative boundaries by inscribing both an ontological and outwardly linear path that exceeds the frame, allowing the object of the gaze to depart from the containing frame as the acting subject. Djébar's Isma becomes the narrative's architect of a new, boundless space of alterity, pushing the DélaCroix-Picasso evolution of visual representation into a more assertive literary representation for feminine subjectivity.

As the narrator Isma returns for her daughter Mériem, she prioritizes the girl's well-being and her future path in an attempt to reverse the initial abandonment. The opportunity to reclaim her daughter stages another prospect: to present Hajila with a choice to defy and leave the husband. In offering this second wife an alternative, Isma recognizes her hand in Hajila's condition. The novel acts as a testimony to Isma's collusion in both Hajila's imprisonment and survival. A woman seeking to aid a co-wife as a sister wittingly pays homage to Dinarzade, the sister who sustains Scheherazade's survival through narrative. A dialogue between the narrating Isma and narrated Hajila is bridged by the thematic blueprints of spaces outlined by light and liberated by windows and, at times, doorways.

Since Isma acts as the narrator-storyteller, taking on the roles of both Scheherazade and Dinarzade, we, the reader-listener, eavesdrop on Isma's one-sided dialogue with the narratively "observed" Hajila; moreover, the reader experiences the novel's illusory—and eventual—communion between Isma and Hajila. According to Benjamin, in his *Illuminations*, "The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he makes it the experience of those who are listening to the tale" (87). In other words, the storyteller narrates her own experiences or those of others, implying that narrated experiences underscore a kind of shared authorship between the story's characters and narrator, its speaker and listener as well as the text and reader. Granting Hajila's imagined perspective a place on the printed page, Isma proposes a strategic, chiasmic co-authorship that suggests that without the narrated there would be no narrator; the narrator's words on the printed page transcribe or reflect the thoughts of the narrated.<sup>2</sup> Isma's collaborated

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<sup>2</sup> In her book, *Journeys Through the French African Novel*, Mortimer views the novel as a reconstruction of that dialogue between two women in DélaCroix's painting (149).

narrative recalls the significance of Hugo's moonlight, which would not be reflected without water.

In her alternating first and second person singular narratives, Isma portrays herself as a non-traditional, Western educated Algerian woman who marries for love. She recounts and remembers a host of stories about herself and other women from her earlier years, assuming the guise of a modern Scheherazade. With the exception of Isma and the newly emancipated Hajila, the women in *Ombre Sultane* are culturally cloistered as objects of male desire, but, like Scheherazade, they inscribe desire in the telling and sharing of stories in a community of women. A young Isma hears—and more importantly retells of—an anonymous feminine voice's plea, “‘Jusqu'à quand, ô maudite, cette vie de labeur? [...] Il faut que nous subissions encore, eux, nos maîtres, et dans quelle posture— la voix sursaute, l'accent se déchire en rire amer—, jambes dénudées face au ciel!’” (Djebbar 112). “‘How long must I endure this life of drudgery, cursed that I am? [...] We still have to suffer them, our masters, and in what an attitude!—the voice quivers, interrupted by a bitter laugh—‘with our bare legs stuck up in the air!’” (Blair 102). As a cultural insider, the Muslim girl child hears her elder matrons' uncensored thoughts and feelings of fatigue and suffering, as well as bitterness and resignation in the laugh of the quaking voice. The husbands are the masters for whom the women work in the kitchen and to whom they surrender their bodies in the bedroom with their “bare legs stuck up in the air.”

While the narrator, as co-protagonist and co-wife, cannot join these voices, she does escape a life of domestic toil. Unable to efface the women's expressed drudgery or bitterness and incapable of loosening their shackles, Isma interprets her freedom in narrative form to retell and share what women say to women. Perhaps the Westernized, print-literate Isma is able to retell with more authority and clarity because she has access to both the traditional world of women and the modernizing heterogeneous world of men and women. With a greater resemblance to the male nomad, she moves comparatively freely, subverting her role as a Muslim wife and Algerian woman when she leaves her husband. “‘Et l'homme sans lieu se transporte chaque nuit de couche en couche, ce chassé-croisé rythmant sa vie de male, de vingt ans à soixante, ou à soixante-dix’”(Djebbar 100). “‘And the man, with no fixed abode, conveys himself each night from bed to bed, this chassé croisé continuing throughout the life of the male, from the age of twenty to sixty or seventy’” (Blair 91). The common noun (man) refers to all husbands who are represented as nomads governed by procreative desire; the nameless, polygamous Islamic man wanders from bed to bed and from body to body in the harem. Isma

further underscores her difference from the framed traditional women, such as her mother in law, when she imagines telling her daughter: "Nos corps déménageront de lieu en lieu, riche ou dépouillé selon le cas" (Djebar 33). "We shall move from place to place, sufficient in ourselves, rich or not, as may be" (Blair 24). For women, nomadic wanderings hint at a bodily freedom (underscored by the French text) only possible outside the traditional harem. To inscribe one's own path and to author one's desires, the freedom to move one's body is necessary. Like Scheherazade, her literary sister, Isma narrates from the perspective of a former captive and wanderer: "Mais je crains désormais tout voyage. Je désire m'enfoncer, à mon tour. A ma manière, me revoiler. . . Reculer dans l'ombre; m'ensevelir" (Djebar 166). "But I'm afraid of anymore travelling. I too want to put down roots. To wear the veil again, in my own fashion... To retreat into the shadows; bury myself" (Blair 156). While the figure of the storyteller often assumes the role of the wanderer or even the stranger from afar and perpetuates the voyage motif in her narratives, Isma returns home to narrate Hajila's freeing and elects to put down roots with her daughter. However, for Isma, emancipation means—perhaps paradoxically—not needing to run away, but being able to stay.

The novel acts a call for a change where one woman, Isma, acknowledges her responsibility to effect change for another woman; women have the power to undermine the culture of fear and rivalry between women by imagining bonds of sisterhood. While Isma acknowledges her initial role as matchmaker to her husband and Hajila, she holds herself accountable for imprisoning Hajila. The first wife seeks out the second wife in order to thwart the matrilineal tradition of matchmaking, in which mothers would "give" their daughters away. Furthermore, the narrator directly addresses the problematic role of the matrons in Algeria's Islamic culture. For example, Isma who lost her mother prematurely resents the silence between women, "De tout temps les aieules ont voulu nous apprendre à étouffer en nous le verbe. 'Se taire, recommandaient-elles, ne jamais avouer'" (emphasis mine, Djebar 94). "From time immemorial, the matriarchs have tried to teach us to stifle our voices. 'Keep silent,' they used to recommend, 'and never admit to anything'" (emphasis mine, Blair 85). The matriarchs' desire to teach their daughters the self-reflexive verb "se taire," to keep quiet, perpetuates not only silence and self-censorship, but rivalry and wounding. In addition to preserving silence, Isma blames mothers for teaching their daughters to fear, and finds autonomy and reprieve as a motherless daughter. As with the metonymic ink of writing, Isma hints at the voice's various forms and its potential for alterity: to imagine a world where gender does

not inscribe one's place and where one owns one's body.

The narrating Isma rereads the tattooed faces of traditional women as marks of complicity and complacency, "Et je me mets à penser, véhémement: aucun tatouage ne me marquera le front ou le menton! Je n'ai pas connue de mère qui puisse me transmettre sa peur!" (Djebar 157). "And I begin to think, passionately, 'No tattooing will ever mark my brow or chin! I never knew my mother, so she could not pass on her fears to me!'" (Blair 147). The absence of a mother releases Isma from an inheritance of inscribed tattoos on the forehead or chin, creating an alternative space for Isma and her daughter, Mériem. Although motherless, Isma the mother refuses to relinquish parenting to her daughter's father or the traditional harem women.

If daughters do not inherit their mothers' fears, the younger, modernizing women—that is to say those who equate marriage with romance and love—may scorn the maternal figure's submission to the man. Younger women may resent male domination and lash out against their mothers. The daughter of Isma's cousin, having witnessed her mother's nightly submission to her father, criticizes her pregnant-again mother in front of the other women, "Non, c'est de ta faute, Mma! De ta seule faute! Si au moins, chaque nuit quand l'homme t'appelle en tapant de sa babouche le sol, tu n'accourrais pas vers lui, si tu ne te levais pas!" (Djebar 143). "No! It's all your own fault, Mma! You're the only one to blame! You could just refuse to get up and hurry over to the man when he bangs his slipper on the floor to call you every night!" (Blair 133). Isma compares her memory of this narrated incident as a physical throbbing pain that bruises her: "comme une palpitation en moi, une froissure" (Djebar 144). Instead of expressing compassion for her mother, the young woman participates in the cycle of women wounding women, in hurling and hearing those insults. This episode reminds the reader of a preceding explanation, at the end of part one and debut of part two, where a seemingly distant interpolated authorial voice explains that the Arabic word, *derra*, means both woman and wound, "Car, sur nos ravages, l'homme a droit à quatre femmes simultanément, autant dire à quatre... blessures" (Djebar 100). "For in our land, the man has a right to four wives simultaneously, as much as to say, four . . . wounds" (Blair 91). Wounding, like tattooing in this context, marks the body of women and contains them within traditions' walls; ink and blood will spill in order to reconstitute and reconfigure feminine subjectivity.

In imagining a dialogue with Hajila, Isma metaphorically breaks the wounding silence between women; she designs a dialogue between her co-wife as a blue-print for opening up alternative spaces



that break the wounding cycle. The first wife presents herself at the home of the second wife where the two women meet for the first time. Even in the younger woman's presence, Isma addresses Hajila affectionately in her narrating mind. "Toi, ma fille et ma mère, ma consanguine : ma blessure renouvelée (ainsi les mots ne mentent jamais)" (Djebar 157). "You, my daughter, and my mother, my half-sister; my re-opened wound (so words never lie)" (Blair 147). Perhaps Isma's interest in Hajila could be misconstrued as a sororal or a maternal one, but in breaking the silence, Isma becomes Dinarzade, the sister who awakens, literally and figuratively. Later, in the public yet intimate space of the Turkish baths, Isma offers her co-wife a duplicate key that will permit Hajila to leave the apartment. The key metonymically unlocks the doors of the harem compound whose "high, windowless walls surmounted by broken glass" are otherwise inescapable. Permitting passage into the streets the key also allows Hajila to take an alternate path of wandering, where she can inscribe her desire for anonymity and space. Although the key frees Hajila to depart, it does not allow her to stay.

While *Ombre Sultane* appropriates the framing literary dialectic between Scheherazade and Dinarzade, it arguably foregrounds and even characterizes setting. For, in addition to the framing dialogue between Isma and Hajila and the skein of Orientalizing epigraphs, the novel proposes figurative veils in the narrative where enclosed spaces conceal and reveal cultural designs in architecture and ornamentation. Isma, acting as author-narrator, crafts the literary form to circumscribe the verboten exterior of the city's high-walled streets and the enclosed interiors of the harem. In *Scheherazade Goes West*, the Moroccan Islamic feminist Fatima Mernissi looks to her grandmother's definition of the harem as "a traditional household with locked gates that women were not supposed to open" (1). Although *Ombre Sultane*'s co-wives live in an Algeria slung between the West's "modernizing" influences and the traditional, Koran-inspired law, they prefer the streets and views of the sky to the confining marital interiors. For example, Hajila arrives in her new apartment, an enclosed space, and gravitates to the illuminating balcony and windows that permit sunlight. While her mother inspects the enormous kitchen, Hajila finds herself on the balcony, staring out at the town, sky, and sea; using the familiar "tu" (or you), Isma speaks to and for Hajila: "Ce tremblement qui t'habitait depuis l'enfance, s'épuiserait-il enfin là, à cette fenêtre!" (Djebar 23). "Would you finally find a reprieve, there, at that window, from the turmoil to which you had been a prey since childhood?" (Blair 15). Recalling Hugo's nocturnal observer, Hajila takes refuge in the kitchen whose balcony's vista serves as a haven

until the man's cough signals for her to join him in the bedroom on his conjugal mattress.

While mothers may have a voice in their daughters' marriage, the man remains the perennial architect of the women's gender role and their place in the traditional harem. The apartment's plan maps out the wife's various domestic duties where the kitchen highlights her male inscribed gender role as nurturer and cook and the bedroom circumscribes her role as the man's concubine or odalisque. Therefore, the latter space outlines the husband's domain, rendering this woman powerless and objectified. Underscoring Hajila's lacking autonomy, Isma frames her co-wife's thoughts: "Tu étends ton corps près de son corps. Tu prends soin de ne rien frôler. Dans le noir, une main tâte tes seins... (Djebar 29). "You lie down with your body beside his body. You are careful not to brush against anything. A hand fondles your breasts in the dark . . ." (Blair 20). Isma's Hajila does not find safety in the darkness of the bedroom nor does she desire the Man, her husband, who, ignoring her struggle, rapes her: "La conclusion approche, tu reprends la résistance" (Djebar 66). "The climax is near, you resume your resistance" (Blair 58). More than ever, she desires to be wandering the streets without the veil. In order to escape the pain and horror of rape, Hajila tells herself: "Non, rappelle-toi les rues, elles s'allongent en toi dans un soleil qui a dissous les nuées; les murs s'ouvrent; arbres haies glissent" (emphasis mine, Djebar 67). "Think of the streets, they stretch out within you, bathed in the sunshine that has dissolved the storm clouds; the walls open; trees and hedges glide past" (emphasis mine, Blair 58). Below the dissolving clouds, the public sphere of the streets acts as a path that stretches away from the present (Hajila's rape) and provide an escape from the enclosing walls that define her "wifely" duties. Hajila escapes psychologically in remembering past and imagining future excursions; Dinarzade and Scheherazade escape death in merging their loyalties to each other with their imaginative resources. Unlike Hajila, Scheherazade's bedroom experience proposes the power of voice and narrative, which eclipses the sultan's power to kill.

Indebted to the sisters' narrative legacy that ends the sultan's misogynist killings, Isma reminds her readers that, as she undresses, the bedroom need not be a space for Hajila's rape and Scheherazade's life-saving tales, but it can be a site for owning and inscribing one's own desires as a woman: "Sous la poussée d'une calligraphie nocturne, les épaules, les bras ou les hanches se délient" (emphasis mine, Djebar 45). "Shoulders, arms, hips are released, obedient to the scenario of the night" (Blair 37). However, returning to the original text, Isma's narrating voice highlights a written, calligraphic ("calligraphie")

space—which suggests a fluidity of lines, or a loosening of the body for her desire—the graphic act of creating letters now inks shoulders, arms and hips of the desiring body onto the printed page; her body becomes defined by her own feminine gaze, and not by the husband or the Orientalizing western male onlooker.

While she seems to adapt to traditional coverings of dress during the day, Isma repeatedly adopts the first-person plural pronoun (we) and depicts the night as a stage where the couple acts upon mutual desire. "Une même paresse nous submerge. Je m'attarde pour ma part à des précautions courtisane. La précipitation, la ferveur de l'impatience se bannissent. Dans l'enlacement, chacun de nous prend son temps" (Djebar 45). "We sink into an identical languor. I, for my part, take my time, a courtesan dallying in foreplay. No precipitous haste, no urgency of passion. We exchange slow caresses" (Blair 37). Here, the female narrator underscores the staying power of the present: she dallies in the moment without thoughts of escaping time or space. Moreover, Isma's bared recollections of the couple's entwined bodies evoke the calligraphic, arabesque curves of the odalisque.

The Turkish prefix, *oda*, meaning room, links the odalisque etymologically to her sexualized function in an enclosed chamber; the patriarch's harem then confines and defines the odalisque's body.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, such a body that provides pleasure must remain out of view from other men and from the Orientalizing West's gaze. Behind the bedroom doors, Isma removes the veil and her woolen attires, and revels in the curves of her almost nude form, "mes coudes, devant les seins masqués de dentelle, redessinent deux arcs alternés" (Djebar 76); "my elbows trace alternating arabesques in front of lace-covered breasts" (Blair 67). Whereas the female nude highlights the form's curves and outline, the veiled, cloaked bodies are silhouette, shadow-like forms. Naked, she authors the lines on both the printed page and on her womanly form. Silently exclaiming to herself, "'Dehors... et nue!'" (Djebar 40), Hajila experiences naked-ness ("nue") when she removes the veil. Through Isma's voice, veil-less and outdoors ("dehors"), Hajila observes forms differently, "Choses et personnes se diluent en taches à peine colorées. Un vide se creuse où ton corps peut passer, sans rien déranger" (Djebar 49). "Objects and people dissolve into shapeless, colorless blobs. Spaces open up through which your body can pass without disturbing anything" (Blair 41). The narrative weaves the two women's different readings of forms

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note the remnants of Orientalism in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which explains the Turkish *oda* as a room or chamber; in residual colonial terms, the odalisque is an exotic sexually attractive woman or her likeness in art.

and nakedness. Instead of drawing attention to juxtaposed contrasts, the complementary narrative strings vocalize strategies for unveiling women's respective desires. Isma authors her self—that is to say her life and body. Moreover, she creates the potential for Hajila to write herself into the exteriors, walking the streets below her kitchen balcony.

Isma infuses the text with the arabesque, odalisque, the patio, and hammam of Moorish design, which she refashions to liberate the women from the man's harem and the Orientalist's exoticizing gaze. To highlight or frame desire is to give the heavily cloaked feminine body form which arabesque lines permit. While her narrative may even tempt the Westerners' views of the harem as "an orgiastic feast where men benefited from a true miracle: receiving sexual pleasure without resistance or trouble from the women they had reduced to slaves," Isma outlines a design where women—such as herself—receive pleasure as well (Mernissi 14). Nineteenth-century painters, such as Ingres, Delacroix, and Gerôme, have depicted the figure of the odalisque under the gaze of the voyeur, which, as Mernissi confirms, contributes to Western men's fantasy of the harem and its slave-like odalisques. In her sensual night scenes, Isma authors her own sexuality, which appropriates the odalisque as a desired object and replaces it with her body as a desiring subject. She further individualizes the Muslim woman's sexual experience and creates potential for an experience that has been shamed and silenced by the locked harem doors of the past. Comparing herself to the odalisques of the harem, Isma frames her desires to be at home in her body and in her country—to put down roots.

In the penultimate chapter, Isma recalls and quotes the painter-writer Eugène Fromentin whose painterly influences echo of Delacroix's tableaux from the Maghreb. Thus Djébar, through the persona of Isma, continues the self-reflexive skein of the French male, exoticizing gaze upon the "Orient." Yet while men's perspectives are incorporated in to the text, the narrative does not stifle the women's gaze or voices. "Un grand cri s'éleva (je l'entends encore aumoment où je t'écris), puis une clameur, puis un tumult..." (Djébar 168). "A great shout arose (I can hear it still, as I write to you), then an outcry, then an uproar..." (Blair 158). At a moment when Hajila finds herself walking, a car strikes her; she will live, but loses "the man's" child in her womb. Isma internally recites Fromentin's observations as if they were her own, showing how her mind has been shaped by French literacy. Perhaps the words of the traveler-cultural outsider grant Isma access—Algerian by birth and Westernized by education—and enable her to take up her roots again.

The author, with help from her narrator, continues to refashion the framing trope of allusions to literary and cultural referents from both the mythologized East and West. In joining her voice with Hajila's, Isma not only remembers her literary sisters' collaborative narrative power, but she also casts light on women's ability to emancipate each other. Djébar's text reminds women—religious and secular alike—to create sororal bonds that eclipse the perpetuating internal and external cultural influences of feminine rivalry.

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## HISTORY AND MEMORY IN *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD* AND *ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE*

J.D. Isip

Remote times have a great attraction—sometimes mysteriously so—for the imagination.

Sigmund Freud, from *Moses and Monotheism*

Plantation workers are gunned down mercilessly by the army; years later, no one can remember how many workers were killed, or if the event even took place. For generations, an Indian tribe worships small, stone idols, calling them “the little grandparents”; years later, the “gods” are on display in an Arizona museum—among pottery and masks (*Almanac of the Dead* 32). History and memory, in Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, exist in a state of flux; they assign purpose and meaning to some lives while, simultaneously, draining the same from other lives.

The past is at once curse and blessing, and the future is both certain and uncertain. It seems that both García Márquez and Silko, in their novels, suggest that neither history nor memories provide an absolute or reliable truth about the past and the future, but are, instead, constructions of the individual—constructions used to benefit and, in many cases, sustain. I will show how the characters in these novels manipulate history and memory to serve their own purposes and, finally, I will attempt to make a connection to what García Márquez and Silko, through their novels, wish for their audience to learn about the nature of history and memory—specifically, that García Márquez and Silko caution a total trust in either because both are subjective constructions.

## Melquiades and Yoeme

García Márquez and Silko use almost all of their characters to show how easily history and memory may be altered; even the characters who seem to exist outside of self-serving motivations manipulate history and memory in ways that ultimately do more harm than good. The gypsy, Melquiades, is the memory of Macondo in *One Hundred Years*, and the boisterous old Yaqui, Yoeme, is one of the memories in *Almanac* (along with Seese and Sterling). According to Melquiades and Yoeme, there are no mistakes in history—everything happens for a reason and every event, no matter how terrible, was “meant to be.” Both novels feature indecipherable texts which are supposed to “explain” what every event is leading up to—the texts are lost memories. For the characters in *Almanac*, that text is Yoeme’s collection of notebooks, the almanac; for the people of Macondo, that text is a collection of papers left by Melquiades. At the beginning of *One Hundred Years*, Melquiades tries to explain to the Buendía patriarch, José Arcadio Buendía, that the magnets which the gypsy has showed him will not work to find “gold” in the earth; the scene is a hauntingly accurate picture of the later generations of Buendías continually “looking for gold” with the wrong tools, including Melquiades’ own manuscripts, which only provide a prophecy of their extinction (*HY* 1-2). Michael Wood explains this text as the memory of Macondo:

[...] A hundred years is the scope and term of Melquiades’ manuscripts, a prophecy designed to serve as a past, a kind of occluded and externalized memory, everything the family ought to remember but won’t (Wood 74).

Melquiades is, indeed, the living memory of the people of the people of Macondo, and García Márquez makes sure that this metaphor is not lost on the reader. When the town falls under a “memory sickness,” José Arcadio, once again, attempts to use the wrong tool for the job—and it is Melquiades who must restore the memory of the town (*HY* 48-49). The machine José Arcadio is working on is only a substitute for the real thing, the *real* memory, Melquiades:

The memory machine gets only the most fleeting allowance of narrative time because [...] it is suddenly rendered redundant by the arrival of [...] Melquiades. [...] Hence the neat splicing of subject matter whereby work on the memory machine is so smoothly replaced by Melquiades suggests that he, rather than José Arcadio’s intended construction, is truly the memory machine (M. Bell 130).

García Márquez, in this scene, seems to make a distinction between true and false memories. José Arcadio is attempting to restore memories by ways of “constructing”—which seems to reflect how history is defined for most of the Buendías, who take opportunity

after opportunity to “construct” history; Úrsula, Pilar and Remedios all construct the intricate web of lies about lineage which leads to the birth of the child with the pig’s tail (*HY* 416). It is Melquiades (who has no infidelity to hide, no messy tie to the bloodline) who restores the memory of Macondo.

Yet, for all of his restorative powers, Melquiades is careful throughout the novel only to reveal *so much* in an attempt to save the people of Macondo from themselves—as he so often does—quite literally—with their patriarch, José Arcadio. Melquiades’ acts as not only memory, but a filtered memory—a memory, not unlike the memory of those who have experienced trauma, a memory that is selective for the good of the people:

Melquiades has magically concentrated his century of events into an instant as *protection*, a means of keeping knowledge from his characters and saving them from knowledge (Woods 50).

History, for the people of Macondo, ultimately spells out their own destruction. Melquiades does his best to slow this realization down by filtering the memory of the town and keeping the whole truth hidden until the final chapter when no action will be able to change the course of events, and everything, painfully, makes sense (*HY* 416-17). Through Melquiades, in contrast to the Buendías, it seems that García Márquez is suggesting that Melquiades’ construction of history is at least more useful (if not more *truthful*) because he is an objective outsider.

In *Almanac*, Silko seems to suggest the opposite—that the better construction of history is the history told by “the people,” the history told from their memory:

The stories of the people or their “history” had always been sacred, the source of their entire existence. If the people had not retold the stories, or if the stories had somehow been lost, then the people were lost [...] within “history” reside relentless forces, powerful spirits, vengeful, relentlessly seeking justice (*AD* 315-316).

Where Melquiades provides memory through a protective filter, Yoeme, in *Almanac*, provides memory through a war-like filter, setting up an “us against them” mentality. Yoeme interprets all of history as leading to a destruction of the *other*, the European. Her “memory” is skewed, and even the events which paint natives in an unfavorable light, are explained away as having a connection with the evil Europeans:

Yoeme alleges that Montezuma and the Aztecs were equal to Cortés and the Europeans in ‘blood worship’: ‘Those who worshiped destruction and blood secretly knew one another (Jarman 159).



However, Yoeme is not free from influence like Melquiades seems to be; Yoeme is not outside or objective. Sara Spurgeon suggests that Yoeme's lust for revenge and redemption, which paints the "memory" of Lecha, especially Zeta, and the others, is really only a version of a European mythology (*AD* 131):

Even those native characters who retain some knowledge of what Indian cultures were like before the arrival of Europeans view the struggle in which they are engaged through the lens of the Anglo myth of the savage war, with the whites playing the part of the barbaric Others who must be eliminated at all costs (Spurgeon 107).

To Yoeme, "the white man had violated Mother Earth," and the memory of this violation would encourage her people to rise up in an inevitable dethroning of the *other* (*AD* 121). Lecha tells Zeta that Yoeme's old notebooks, "don't just tell you when to plant or harvest, they tell you about the days yet to come—drought or flood, plague, civil war or invasion" (*AD* 137). Yoeme's "memory," just like Melquiades', is planted in both the past and the future. Just like Melquiades, Yoeme foretells a future of destruction, but the destruction is of the *other*, of the Europeans, "You may as well die fighting the white man" (*AD* 580).

Melquiades seems to exist in *One Hundred Years* as a focal point, someone to keep an eye on when the lies and contradictions force a reader to go back to the family tree provided in the front of the text (of newer versions of the novel). Melquiades provides objective grounding and *true* memory, but, perhaps because he is objective, he also seems to lack the desire to attempt to alter history. Yoeme, on the other hand, understands history as inevitable, the same as Melquiades, but she still attempts to play an active role in her history; she may be flawed and biased, but she uses her constructed memories to inspire Lecha and Zeta—she gives them purpose by creating a history where they each play a pivotal role.

Through Melquiades, García Márquez seems to suggest that the better "history" comes from the memory of an objective observer; Silko, through Yoeme, seems to suggest that the only worthwhile history is the one that comes from the (biased) memory of "the people." Both, however, seem to agree that "history" is only a version derived from any number of memories, a construction.

### Úrsula and Seese... and Silko

Though García Márquez and Silko both reveal history and memory to be fallible, neither of them deny the usefulness of constructions of history and memory that build self-worth and strength for individual

characters. Úrsula and Seese both seem haunted by their memories and, as a result, their histories are colored by an anxiety and/or fear of the past; yet, each of them take surprising and courageous turns, in spite of their haunted memories. Úrsula's memories materialize in two seemingly comic instances towards the beginning of *One Hundred Years*. She does not want to have sex with José Arcadio because she remembers (or thinks she remembers) the son of her aunt and José Arcadio's uncle who was born with a pig's tail (*HY* 20). She also creates a history around "that pirate" Sir Francis Drake that, again, has comic overtones: "Therefore, every time Úrsula became exercised over her husband's mad ideas, she would leap back over three hundred years of fate and curse the day that Sir Francis Drake had attacked Riohacha" (*HY* 20). It feels right to laugh her off at first, but it becomes apparent throughout the novel that she, more than any of the other characters, is the soul and lifeblood of Macondo—which seems to be consistent with García Márquez's women in his novels:

García Márquez has often stated his belief that women symbolize stability and judiciousness, while men tend to be more given to adventure and extravagance. The following quotation from García Márquez shows, in his own words, what he calls 'the historical view which I have of the two sexes': 'Women uphold the order of the species with an iron fist, while men go through life dedicated to all of the infinite folly which drives history (Deveney, Jr. 38).

It is Úrsula who quickly begins to rewrite the history of Macondo the village into Macondo the boomtown: she single-handedly grows the population by finding a route José Arcadio had failed to find (*HY* 35-6), she creates the successful pastry and candy animal business (53), and she takes down the would-be dictator, Arcadio, with a lash (105).

Of course, no matter how much history Úrsula creates, she cannot seem to avoid the sadness over having set into motion the destruction of Macondo by marrying José Arcadio. One scene, in particular, illustrates both her growing strength and the inevitability of the history she has set into motion. She goes to visit her son, Colonel Aureliano Buendía, before he is executed:

Facing the impossibility of finding anyone to intervene, convinced that her son would be shot at dawn, Úrsula wrapped up the things she wanted to bring him and went to the jail alone (123).

García Márquez uses a line often repeated by Úrsula to show the futility of her efforts in the face of history when the Colonel tells her how surprised he was at how the town had aged:

"What did you expect?" Úrsula sighed. "Time passes."  
"That's how it goes," Aureliano admitted, "but not so much" (124).

Both characters speak as two who are resigned to “let things be” but all of the action leading to this scene shows them as forces attempting to change history; both cannot control history, but, in a last attempt to provide his mother strength and comfort, Aureliano suggests a way to control her memory of that moment: “Don’t beg or bow down to anyone. *Pretend* that they shot me a long time ago” (125, emphasis mine). What Aureliano suggests happens to be what Úrsula had been doing all along—pretending that the destruction of her family and Macondo was not, as she knew from the start, imminent.

Seese also seems to “pretend” for much of her introduction in *Almanac*, and, like Úrsula, she starts off as laughable and contemptuously so—to the point that we see her the same way the maid, Elena, sees her—she is “trash” (AD 46). She convinces herself that David loves her and will take care of her and Monte. She follows up one fantasy after another, replacing David with Eric. She is a drunk and a drug addict who has lost her child—but it is the way that she clings to the memory of her child, the way that she refuses to close the book on his history that begins to redeem her. Janet St. Clair points out that

Although Seese’s child is both conceived and kidnapped while Seese is in her usual cocaine-and-alcohol fog, she is the best mother in the novel: she at least feels keenly the loss of her baby (149).

Seese finds the strength to get free of Beaufrey and successfully finds Lecha, whom she believes will be able to find her missing son, Monte. All the while, she remembers her missing child, and the memory fuels her to attempt to rewrite her sad history (AD 110). In one scene, she literally rewrites history: she is typing up Lecha’s notebooks and, rather than opening her long-hidden stash of cocaine, she uses her memory of Monte to add lines to the almanac (595). In the moment she overcomes her addiction and adds her son to an ancient record, thus figuratively and literally changing history. Virginia Bell states that

In her capacity as Lecha’s secretary, Seese uses Lecha’s counter-chronicle to mourn her lost child and thereby keep herself from using more cocaine. When Lecha gives her handwritten notes to enter in the word processor, Seese enters her own recollection of a dream about her son instead [...]. By transforming her data entry into poetic remembering, Seese transforms the almanac from a multi-tribal Indian historiographic compilation into a lyrical recording of her own grief and loss (25-26).

In regards to the larger themes of history and the interpretation of history through memory, this “recording of grief and loss” seems to go right to the heart of both *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Almanac of the Dead*. The history of the fictional town of Macondo is strikingly similar to the early history of García Márquez’s home

country, Colombia; Seese's lost child has an even closer tie to Silko, as Sandra Baringer points out:

Silko lost custody of her youngest child in a contested divorce trial just prior to embarking on the writing of *Almanac of the Dead*. This circumstance resonates with the disruption of maternal relations that informs the entire novel (115).

If Silko, like her character, Seese, "records her grief" in the *Almanac*, then, like Seese, she uses her memory to rewrite history. While pointing out the unreliability of history and memory, both García Márquez and Silko may also be constructing history and memory, like Úrsula and Seese, as a healing agent (even if they all understand that it is a placebo).

### **Macondo and Laguna**

Though García Márquez and Silko both acknowledge the usefulness of "history" and "memory," both authors seem to suggest that history and memory are only useful to those who understand the unreliability of the terms "history" and "memory" (which, as you may have noticed, are interchangeable as both are mere constructions). History and memory can and will be used as weapons, and the only choice for every character is to be either the victim or the one wielding the weapon. García Márquez takes a real-life event (the UFC strike of 1928) and fleshes it out as a clear parable for the results of apathy, capitalism, and unionization and a collective loss of memory:

In [Chapter 15]—you will recall—we hear about how three thousand banana plantation workers on strike are gunned down by the army, an event which is modeled on a real event, the massacre of banana plantation workers which occurred at 1:30 am on 6 December 1928 in Ciénaga, Colombia, on the orders of General Carlos Cortés Vargas. In real life, as García Márquez found out to his amazement, 10 years after the actual event, when he visited the scene, nobody could remember exactly what happened (Hart 117).

John Krapp says that the trouble, in *One Hundred Years*, really begins prior to the arrival of the Banana Company (i.e. the UFC):

In the case of their reaction to the Civil Wars and the Conservative occupation of the village, the remaining Macondones' volitional apathy causes them to be represented by others in a manner increasingly at odds with their best interests (415).

The Banana Company massacre starts as what García Márquez writes as a "kind of hallucination" and what "seemed like a farce" (*HY* 305). The ways García Márquez describes the incident, here, seem to suggest the unreliability of even our own memories; he

shows José Arcadio Segundo questioning the reliability of the moment as it happens. José Arcadio Segundo's trauma is intensified when he seems to be the only person with a memory of the event and the official word of the incident basically describes it as a figment of his imagination:

What makes the [train station massacre of the workers by the Banana Company soldiers] so significant in a discussion of apathy and identity is the absolute certainty with which the Macondones who had no involvement with the Banana Company come to accept the official version of what happened at the station: 'there were no dead, the satisfied workers had gone back to their families, and the banana company was suspending all activity until the rains stopped' (Krapp 417).

What is truly bizarre and suggests that neither memory *nor* history is sufficiently reliable is the fact that García Márquez's parable has created yet another distortion of history. José Arcadio Segundo sees three thousand people die at the train station in *One Hundred Years* (HY 308). Readers find out that the event is based on the 1928 UFC incident. Now, simply by writing a parable, García Márquez has completely changed the memory of the actual event; according to Eduardo Posada-Carbo, many people believe that "three thousand people" died at the UFC incident and

History became legend. García Márquez reveals to us now that the apocalyptic massacre described in his book did not occur in such dramatic dimensions; but now 'the legend has been adopted as history' (396).

Like the Banana Company incident, the entire plot of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* seems to allude to a national memory that is more hallucination than reality and a history that is almost certainly a farce. García Márquez manipulates history to make us question whether or not we are being manipulated by our own history, and he plays with memory to suggest that our own memories might be playing with us. Essentially, García Márquez is asking the reader whether the reader is in control of history and memory, or if he is simply the victim of someone else's version of history and memory.

Silko, in *Almanac of the Dead*, also seems to focus on an ultimate question of whose version of history and memory do we finally believe. We are introduced to Sterling in the first chapter of the novel and throughout the novel he acts as no more than a distraction and almost always a victim of his circumstances (AD 22). His storyline, though appealing (since he seems to be the only truly "good" character in the novel), is not integral to the plot (or, rather, plots). Of course, just like the Native Americans, Sterling has been banished from his home, but, in the end, he is allowed to return. His return is a significant allegory

for the return of the tribes predicted in the almanac

Sterling's return to the Laguna reservation can be viewed as marking his spiritual and cultural 'arrival,' that is, as a moment that 'ends' his forced migration (Muthyala 379).

Silko, through Sterling, suggests an ability to regain memory and, by doing so, rewrite the present—rewrite the history of the future. Sterling's entire adventure revolves around his running away from the memory of his past. He wants to forget the movie crew and the Stone Snake and lose himself in other people's histories—first the adventures of "historical" heroes/outlaws like Jesse James, Geronimo, and Dillinger (*AD* 40-41), and then in Seese's stories. He wants to forget and move forward as he has read is the process:

In his hopeless perusal of pop psychology magazines, Sterling reads that doctors advise depressed people to put their past behind them, to forget what is dead and gone and focus only on the present (Spurgeon 119).

But Silko insists that only by remembering, only by returning will he be able to truly move on, and so he does. Sterling closes out *Almanac of the Dead* by canceling his magazine subscriptions and anticipating the future foretold by the stone snake. He gains control of memory and history and is finally able to use them rather than be a victim of them.

It seems that, ultimately, the point of each novel is not simply that history and memory are mere constructions, but that those who do not understand the nature of history and memory are destined to be victims of someone who *does*. In addition, our constructions of history and memory, when we understand them, have the power to benefit and sustain us. Yoeme tells Lecha the story of the four children traveling with the almanac, their constructed history, "You see, it had been the almanac that had saved them" (*AD* 252)—and, it seems, both books are aimed at *saving* people (i.e. Columbians, Native Americans, the authors themselves, any other reader) through two more constructions of history/memory.

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## DISCONNECTION: ADVERTISING AND EDITORIAL CONTENT IN THE *HOUSEWIVES LEAGUE MAGAZINE* (1913-1916)

Monique Mironesco

### Introduction

The editorial content of the *Housewives League Magazine* published between 1913 and 1916 provides an interesting parallel with the contemporary food movement. During the 1910s, the Housewives League, led by Mrs. Julian Heath, started a public campaign for “clean, sanitary, and wholesome food” in response to what they conceived to be unsanitary conditions on farms, in grocery stores, and in markets. Their campaign took them into the public sphere, even as they invoked their roles as housewives in the private sphere as their central identity. The League was instrumental in promoting what they called green or municipal markets, the equivalent of contemporary farmers’ markets. The members of the Housewives League used their identities as wives and mothers, as nurturers of the family, the home, and their accepted realm—the private sphere—to seek changes in the nation’s food system—a very public demand indeed. In seeking wholesomeness, they weren’t stepping out of their traditional boundaries. In demanding access to farmers’ markets, they were asserting their collective might as newly organized consumers—realizing the importance of united purchasing power. As this transformation, both in the public and private spheres was taking place, however, the disconnections between the editorial content of the *Housewives League Magazine* and the advertising copy became apparent, causing a rift among League members, leading to its eventual demise.

### **Public vs. Private Sphere: an Artificial Dichotomy**

By the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most middle-class and elite women, especially in rapidly urbanizing areas, were no longer producers. They had become consumers. “Why has consumption been understood economically as a private act by self-interested individuals rather than politically as a site for collective action?” asks Wendy Wiedenhoft (281). This question justifies the necessity of the League and its work. For example, in July 1915, the Housewives League organized a lobbying group to defeat three milk bills in Minnesota aimed at reducing the quality of milk sold. They banded together with small farmers to argue against the bills which were based on the interests of the large dairy dealers to the detriment of consumers and small dairy farmers. They argued that consumers and small farmers were not being treated fairly by the proposed bills. This action exemplifies the fluidity of the dichotomy between public and private. Members of the Housewives League of Minnesota were down at their state legislature, lobbying their representatives, noting their power as consumers, as well as their political clout as citizens, even if they were not able to vote. Due to the success of their lobbying efforts and to continue this work, the Minnesota Housewives League created a legislative committee as reported in the national magazine, sparking a political consciousness in Leaguers across the nation. The magazine often reported that the League itself attracted women who had never before taken part in public work and the magazine was only too happy to give an account of their political activism and victories. These events show that the middle-class women the Housewives League was aimed at mobilizing were able to move from one sphere to the other, justifying their actions by the notion that their public work was in fact reinforcing the private sphere.

Equating political activity only with the public sphere or voting negates the importance of alternative forms of political participation. Elite women allied with powerful male state actors and they created their own opportunities even though they did not yet have the right to vote. Nevertheless, women were involved in political various forms of political activity (Wiedenhoft 283). As “Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has demonstrated with his concept of ‘habitus,’ in practice social actors are not always self consciously aware of how they structure the social world” (Wiedenhoft 283). The Housewives League members clearly understood the importance of political participation even as their leader, Mrs. Julian Heath, refuted the importance of suffrage for women. Indeed, they did not necessarily view effective political participation as being tied to voting. One article in the magazine outlined an important decision of the U.S. District Court for the Southern

District of New York as affecting all housewives. The article states that “every housewife has a direct, personal interest in the decision recently handed down by Judge Hough” (Whittier 39). Even judicial decisions, clearly a domain of the public sphere, the article argues, are related to women’s everyday, ostensibly private sphere lives.

The members of the League used their private sphere identities as mothers and housewives to effectuate changes to the nation’s food supply. Similarly to members of other consumer leagues, as argued by Wendy Wiedenhoft in her 2008 article “The Politics of Consumption,” the Housewives League used “its initial forays into the *public* realm [to] serve as a forward position from which women could redeploy their organizations for *political* ends” (emphasis in original; Clemens 189; Sklar: 1995a, 1995b in Wiedenhoft 289). Local politicians recognized the power of the Housewives League and its organized members. One Buffalo, NY politician cried out: “I’d rather see the ‘De’il hi’self’ coming after me than the Housewives League...!” (Servoss 41). Clearly, women in the public sphere were to be feared by men for their power, their influence, their energy. This view is at odds with Mrs. Heath’s decidedly public actions of testifying to the legislature, and traveling the country making public appearances and speeches about League activities and promotion of her anti-suffrage views. Ironically, she used a very different reasoning to argue for her anti-suffrage stance. Mrs. Heath, as quoted in a February 15, 1909 *New York Tribune* article, asserted during a testimony to the New York state legislature in Albany, NY, that “women had done nothing where the chance had been given them, and that therefore nothing could be expected of them were the chance [to vote] given them in this [New York] state” (*New York Tribune* 1). Mrs. Heath saw nothing amiss with her own public, and clearly very political role in testifying to the state legislature and her anti-suffrage viewpoint, all the while the content of her testimony asked for women to continue to be kept out of the public sphere altogether since, she argued, were they to be allowed to claim their role as citizens, they would not know what to do with it.

At the same time as Mrs. Heath was testifying against suffrage, some of the other League chapter presidents were writing about suffrage in connection to the home. Mrs. Bisland, the president of the Bronxville chapter of the League wrote: “women can take their place in a community shoulder to shoulder with men and help materially in the building of the nation, city, home or village; and it seems to me that right here in the Housewives League we can prove our ability” (Bisland 26). Mrs. Bisland, a suffragist herself, associated being a woman, a housewife, a mother, and a Leaguer as integral to building a nation. She argued that the roles were part of one another and that

it was her responsibility as a woman that encouraged her to work for the benefit of her family, her community, and her nation.

Other League leaders were less fearful of suffrage as yet another step in the modernization of women away from their primary role as housewives and mothers. As a matter of fact, various high-ranking politicians such as the governors of North Carolina, Montana, New York, Michigan, and Kansas, all wrote editorials in the fourth anniversary edition of the *Housewives League Magazine* in support of general League activities, praising the membership for their tireless efforts in reforming the nation's food system. The governor of Kansas, the Honorable Arthur Capper, argued that the home was an important "unit of citizenship" and that without it as a foundation, the nation's institutions would not exist (Capper 15). Kansas was a progressive state since it first gave women the right to vote in school board elections in 1861, gave women the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887, and passed a constitutional amendment to the Kansas state constitution granting women suffrage in 1912 (Ruthsdotter 2010). While Capper's view can certainly be read as a precursor to the "family values" argument of contemporary conservative pundits, allowing women some form of citizenship in order to placate their demands for suffrage, in its historical context, it can also be read as a way for women to use that partial citizenship to make demands for more.

The notion of political opportunities has been used by social movement scholars to "explain *why* social movements occur rather than understand the intricate processes of *how* collective action is accomplished (Wiedenhof 282). The Housewives League intended to clarify this issue with their magazine, letting their members know that one of the fundamental principles of the Housewives League was to make history by making women aware of their "real economic function as the dispenser[s] of wealth of the world" (Heath 17). The president herself claimed that the League had professionalized housewifery and that the awakening of women's economic importance affected the entire world of commerce due to the changes in relationships among husbands and wives, as well as wives and industry (Heath 20). This had not been accomplished by individual housewives working individually in obscurity, but by the collective power of what Mrs. Heath called "pioneering women." She acknowledged that there was still much to learn, but called on the members to be "tolerant and patient, *radical and yet conservative*, keeping always our principle—a square deal for all" (my emphasis; Heath 20). This call for being both radical and conservative at the same time echoes the dualism of her stance both on suffrage and on the place of women in the public sphere. She wanted women to be experts in the field of housekeeping. She

wanted to radically change the nation's food system through political and legislative means, but she was also adamant that the only way for women to do that appropriately would be through the private sphere of the home.

The Housewives League members saw themselves as responsible for the well-being of the nation. Taking an essentialist view of their roles as mothers, they argued that they were responsible for mothering the entire world, including their servants among other "less fortunate" groups (Heath 10). For example, one article takes a market-based view of the "servant problem" and argues that a housewife should run her home like a business and view this predicament as a labor problem. This view invokes the expertise of home economics as a model for running a household. However, Heath goes on to argue that servants should not be overworked and should be given holidays and reprieves from the constant drudgery of their labor. A democratic model of the home, modeled after the American system of government is also endorsed in the same article. This maternalism is evident in many of the writers in the League magazine. It is the elite women's burden to care for their less fortunate sisters. While this article appears in an early issue of the magazine (April 1915), less than one year later, a lengthy article describing the marvel of a new science called eugenics, or what they called "the science of being well-born" (Wallin 50) in relation to those "less fortunate sisters" makes apparent the original intent behind the first article. As long as the servants are living in one's home, they are sheltered from the horrors of the tenements where their families are likely to live. Were they to go back there permanently, in the League's view, they would become likely candidates for sterilization to prevent them from procreating excessively.

The shift of middle class and elite women's roles from producers to that of consumers occurred due to rapid industrialization and urbanization throughout the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The inherent dichotomy of this change for this particular class of women, as with the public/private split was unlikely to be fluid. Beyond a few examples of various extraordinary women of the time, there was very little flexibility in identity. The rigid boundaries of these distinctions, as with those of race, class, gender, etc, did not move freely. Working-class and rural women of course, were still very much producers, since what they called "economic progression" had really only touched the lives of middle and upper class, mostly urban, white women. The magazine argued that "food production had been taken out of the individual garden spot, and pasture and kitchen, where it had been carried on in the past, and transferred gradually into the wholesale

manufacturing plant—the packing house, the great bakery, the canner” (Marshall 4). While women had made this “progress” in their lives, it was also argued that they had gone a bit too far afield in asking for suffrage. The Housewives League was a potential instrument for bringing them back to the private sphere where they belonged. This was occurring at the very same time as the League was asking them to take up legislative issues with their local government, accompany food safety inspectors into packing plants, food distribution centers, grocery stores, and other types of markets to inspect for sanitary and wholesome conditions.

While the public and private spheres were never really separate, a connection was created between the two through the establishment of “home economics” as “another outlet for public female activity ... since home economics ... provided the illusion that women had not really left the domestic sphere ” (Rutheford 68-69). Women were able to work in the public sphere while appearing to remain in the private one, since their political concerns were related to their roles as wives and mothers in providing wholesome food for their families. Even before suffrage in the United States, with the rise of various magazines catering to the housewife such as *Good Housekeeping* for example, the status of housewife was starting to become elevated to that of a profession (Pugh 18). Much was made of the fact that women spent 90% of the household income on goods for the home, so advertisers, manufacturers, as well as politicians were on notice to listen to their demands. Marriage itself was touted as a partnership of husband and wife, producer and consumer. This argument went even further, with one writer in the December 1915 issue of the magazine arguing that “trade begins and ends in the home... The whole United States—its industries, its agriculture, its mines, its railroads, its wealth... is based on the purchasing power of the home” (Miller 21). A world war was raging in Europe, the American economy was suffering in numerous ways, women were trying to achieve suffrage in many parts of the world, but this writer, along with Mrs. Heath, the Housewives League’s eternal cheerleader, argued that many of the nation’s economic problems were being solved by housewives through their collective and organized purchasing power. Again, this raises the question whether collective economic action necessarily translates into political consciousness, but I argue that the context for the imminent suffrage vote enabled some of these women to turn their activism as housewives into concrete political gains only a few years later.

The ideals behind the Housewives League were again taken up by militant housewives during the Great Depression as a way to organize consumer actions, barter networks, and lobbying groups. As

they had during World War I, the Great Depression activist housewives argued that “the homes in which they worked were intimately linked to the fields and shops where their husbands, sons, and daughters labored; to the national economy; and to the fast growing state and federal bureaucracies” (Orleck 149). Through this understanding, the politicization of women and mothers began to transform women from thinking of themselves purely as consumers with economic power to viewing themselves as political actors. Annelise Orleck argues that the housewives’ activism had a great “impact on the consciousness of the women who participated. Black women [and others] learned to write and speak effectively, to lobby in state capitals and in Washington D.C., to challenge men in positions of power, and sometimes to question the power relations in their own homes.... The very act of organizing defied traditional notions of proper behavior for wives and mothers...” (Orleck 160). The housewives during the Great Depression as well as those who came before them did not necessarily think of themselves as feminists, but they did understand their position as economic and eventually political actors, and fought in the public sphere for their rights as keepers of the private sphere.

## Advertising

Processed foods were advertised toward the end of each issue of the *Housewives League Magazine*. In the first issue, there is one single ad for baking powder. By the last available issue, there are advertisements for various products ranging from Scott paper towels, to condensed soups, to prepared cookies. In the September 1915 issue, there is also an open letter to the membership from Mrs. Heath, the president of the League herself, endorsing Ryzon Baking Powder—a product made by the General Chemical Company. In less than one year, the advertising space increased from one single page in the January 1915 issue to 3 full page, 4 half page, and 8 quarter page advertisements in the November 1915 issue. The content of the advertisements were mostly variations on a theme of wholesomeness, purity, and most importantly for modern women: convenience. However, the advertisements weren’t the only space given over to the corporations’ interests. In each issue, some space was given to a spokesperson for various food manufacturers in order to praise the virtues of their products. For example, in one issue, the precursor for margarine, called “Butterine,” was discussed. Housewives were admonished to care for the product in specific ways to ensure its continued sanitary and hygienic conditions.

Housewives were to use advertising and other types of informa-



tion, such as those found in the Housewives League publication and activities, to learn how to become better and more effective consumers since the home was no longer considered a center of production (Rutheford 71). For example, Christine Frederick, the 1929 author of *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, a tome directed to advertisers in an effort to help them understand female consumers, argued that women should remain in the home, and that advertisers should play a pivotal role in teaching them how to consume more effectively. The feminist social commentator Charlotte Perkins Gilman had argued long before, in a 1912 article, that advertising was the “ceaseless, desperate effort to compel patronage” (Gilman in Rutheford 76). Clearly her feminist (and seemingly anti-capitalist) view was at odds with Frederick’s who had been writing about the wonders of advertising for women in various outlets for years.

The *Housewives League Magazine* understood the burdens of business placed on the small dealers and/or farmers. They knew that these small outlets would be unlikely to spend money on advertising either in their publication or elsewhere and they chastised advertisers for encouraging consumers to convince people that they were “getting something for nothing” through their advertisements. At the same time as they argued against large corporations in their editorials, they sold more and more advertising space to big companies and gave them their seal of approval or Mrs. Heath’s endorsements as recommendations for their products to members of the League throughout the country. This disconnection remains central to the controversy over Mrs. Heath’s resignation and perhaps even to the dismantling of the Housewives League as an agent of change for the American food system on behalf of women and families in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The League greatly contributed to the industrialization of food production/processing by using the purchasing power of its membership to patronize certain brands over others, and even branded merchandise over bulk products. The League president encouraged advertising in her editorials saying that the “unintelligent consumer” thinks that the advertiser is trying to put one over on her. Conversely, the intelligent consumer looks upon advertising as the manufacturer’s open letter to her, and sees ads as educational, *if* they have integrity. It is unclear, however, how the intelligent housewife was supposed to discern between scrupulous and unscrupulous advertisers. In Mrs. Heath’s view, educated housewives knew that advertisers were likely to put their best foot forward, and were likely able to discern between editorial and advertising content. In one article, she addressed advertisers directly, describing the potential of housewives

as educated consumers. She argued that it was the advertisers' job to inform League members of their products' benefits. In conjunction with her endorsements of certain products, Mrs. Heath, as president of the Housewives' League seems to have been intent on shaping consumer demand to meet the magazine's advertisers' needs.

Mrs. Heath addressed her readership again regarding the benefits of advertising in the August 1915 issue of the magazine. In it, she reiterates the importance of women's economic power as organized consumers. She argues for the protection of the home as "woman's greatest contribution to economics" (Heath 15). At the same time as she essentializes women's roles in the home, she also outlines the notion that there is no "typical woman": she doesn't exist. Heath recognizes that women come from all walks of life and may have different perspectives but for her, one perspective remains constant: women should be the keepers of the home in as professional and educated manner as possible.

This address seems to be the beginning of the end of her tenure, since she was subsequently charged by the attorney general of New York with corruption charges for taking money from advertisers who would get the League's endorsement of their products in return. Even while embattled though, when she was faced with the "peach situation" of 1915, whereby a bumper crop of peaches was going unsold at the docks, she went there with a few associates to investigate in the middle of the night. It turned out that the retailers were at fault; being unwilling to buy peaches in bulk for fear that they would go unsold since they thought "modern" women were too busy to spend time canning peaches as they had in the "old days." So while Mrs. Heath's trajectory as a disgraced president of the Housewives League is certainly worthy of notice, it's also important to see how that particular path exemplifies the complexity of women's identities as much more than housewives, even in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the one hand, Mrs. Heath is advising modern women to get back to their respective kitchens. In addition, she is a fearless activist on behalf of changing what she viewed as an inefficient and dishonest food system. On the other hand, she is not beyond being corrupted herself by manufacturers who end up paying for her, and therefore the League's, endorsement.

## Conclusion

It seems fitting to end this essay with the demise of the *Housewives League Magazine* in 1916. Any documented trace of the magazine ends with the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the magazine of

December 1916. This timing is suspiciously similar to the disgrace of Mrs. Julian Heath, who was asked to resign by members of the East Orange, New Jersey Housewives League for endorsing the Ryzon Baking Powder company as a result of receiving remuneration for that endorsement in the magazine. *The New York Times* covered the story from late 1915 until July 18, 1918 when the New York state attorney general finally asked Mrs. Heath to step down as president of the League. In actuality, her fall was not related to the dual roles she lived, as a public person advocating for the private sphere. Indeed, her fiery orations, whether ethical or not, proved that she had the power to politicize thousands of women all over America in relation to food. She categorically refused to resign and defended her role as an educator of housewives all over America, saying that while the League didn't have the names of every single one of their members, she was quite sure that the League was an economic force to be reckoned with since it was 800,000 women strong. Whether this figure is accurate or not is certainly open to debate. However, while Mrs. Heath may have argued that the League was an economic force, I contend that it was also a political force pushing for changes in the food system during times of economic scarcity. Women had to make do with less in order to feed their families good food whether it was due to World War I food scarcity, or whether it was due to other economic factors.

During the current economic recession, we are also trying to make do with less, and perhaps it would behoove us to look backward in history to the Housewives League and take examples from their political playbook. As consumers, we need more direct access to fresh farm products, so that both the producer and consumer can reach a fair price. As citizens, we need to demand change in the global food system and distribution process that puts small farmers and consumers at a disadvantage for the benefit of large agribusiness corporations using taxpayer-financed, government-sponsored agricultural commodity subsidies. The Housewives League was able to find alternatives to their food system, and we should too. A century separates us, but the issues we face now are clear echoes of the same from 100 years ago.

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