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Courtesy of the Ancient Coin Forum.

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ENSAYOS / *ESSAYS*

ADAPTACIÓN Y PUESTA EN ESCENA DE MARTA THE DIVINE / MARTA LA PIADOSA DE TIRSO DE MOLINA

Glenda Y. Nieto-Cuebas

Marta la piadosa,¹ escrita por Tirso de Molina cerca de 1615² y publicada por primera vez en 1636 en la *Quinta parte de comedias del maestro Tirso de Molina*, ha sido representada numerosas veces en y fuera de España. Como se sabe, la misma ha sido puesta en escena en diversos teatros internacionales a lo largo de varios siglos. Charles Ganelin y Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez documentan las siguientes adaptaciones: la primera, de Pascual Rodríguez de Arellano, *La beata enamorada*, la de Dionisio Solís, que se representó a principios del siglo XIX, la de Calisto Boldún y Conde (1866), la de Jaime Capmany (1973), la de Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez (1971 y 1995).³ También se pueden encontrar la del director mejicano Raúl Zermeño (1986) y la adaptada por César Oliva Olivares (2001), ambas representadas en el *Festival de Drama del Siglo de Oro* de El Chamizal.⁴ A pesar del notable recorrido por diversos escenarios, *Marta la Piadosa* no se había traducido, ni adaptado, para el público anglófono. Afortunadamente, esta labor fue llevada a cabo por el dramaturgo, historiador y traductor Harley Erdman, quien junto al Departamento de Teatro de la Universidad de Massachusetts-Amherst produjo *Marta the Divine*; una versión de *Marta la piadosa* en inglés que se destaca por su atrevida, cómica y original adaptación. Ésta se estrenó en la Universidad de Massachusetts-Amherst, en

¹ Las citas en español de *Marta la Piadosa* provienen de la edición bilingüe de Harley Erdman.

² Sobre la discusión de la posible fecha de composición, véase García 11-14.

³ Otra adaptación no mencionada arriba es una de 1980, producida en Rusia por el director Jan Frid. Esta versión fílmica es discutida por Veronika Ryjik en el artículo *Tirso de Molina a los ojos de los rusos: Una versión cinematográfica de Marta la Piadosa*.

⁴ Para una detallada descripción de la trayectoria de estas adaptaciones, véase: Ganelin, *Art of Adaptation* y *Recasts and Reception*; Pedraza Jiménez, *Una versión neoclásica de Marta la Piadosa: La beata enamorada de Pascual Rodríguez de Arellano*; y Erdman, *Introducción a Marta the Divine*.

noviembre de 2009, y posteriormente se representó en el festival de El Chamizal, en marzo de 2010.

Este ensayo se enfocará en exponer algunos aspectos de la adaptación y puesta en escena de *Marta the Divine*. Téngase presente que por razones de espacio se han señalado ciertos límites específicos, que son exponer algunas renovaciones dramáticas que se logran en la misma y cómo se corrigen los “desequilibrios estructurales”⁵ de la versión original sin tener que recurrir a la usual “amputación” que han elegido otros adaptadores. Es importante discutir estos elementos dramáticos porque los mismos detallan cómo *Marta the Divine* participa dentro de la tradición de la recepción de *Marta la Piadosa* y además se inscribe dentro de un diálogo,⁶ entre adaptadores y críticos, sobre los problemas estructurales de la misma.

De *Marta la piadosa* a *Marta the Divine*

Como ha notado Henry W. Sullivan, el título original en español, *Marta la piadosa*, proporciona un excelente ejemplo de anticipación dramática por medio del título paremiológico, puesto que hay muchos proverbios irónicos referentes a Marta: “Marta la piadosa, que daba el caldo a los ahorcados (mascaba el vino a los enfermos, mascaba las mieles a los dolientes)”. Asimismo se halla la expresión, “mentir Marta, como sobrescrito de carta”. Al evocar a la singular Marta, añade Sullivan, Tirso pre-establece en la mente del espectador la idea de que la protagonista no era piadosa en lo absoluto (154). En efecto, Marta no es una devota religiosa, sino que finge serlo para impedir casarse con el capitán Urbina, un viejo rico y amigo de su padre. En la traducción al inglés, Harley Erdman traduce el título como *Marta the Divine* y descarta su traducción literal *Marta the Pious*. En este caso no se alude literalmente a la piedad de Marta, porque la traducción de la palabra piadosa en inglés *pious* hubiera pre-establecido una idea errónea en la mente del público. Hoy este término podría resultar arcaico y poco sugestivo. Por tanto, el término *divine*, escogido para describir a Marta, insinúa el carácter “piadoso” de la protagonista, sin aludir a una palabra que hubiera interferido

⁵ Véase Pedraza, *Nota 9*.

⁶ Para Ganelin, “[a]daptations of classical drama make it clear that the bridge-building process is a ‘sharing meaning’ that opens the past to the present, that frees the language of the text from its original constraints so that it appears to us similarly yet differently than as spoke to its original audience. In the case of Tirso de Molina every adaptation in some way becomes a dialogue with Tirso and with Tirso’s work; it is as well, to reiterate the idea, an act of interpretation via adaptation, a reconsideration through reworking” (*Tirso* 71).

con la verdadera naturaleza dramática y cómica⁷ de la obra.

La palabra *divine* no sólo alude a la santidad de Marta, sino también a la exquisitez y al carácter travieso que define su personalidad. Esta Marta anglófona demuestra seguir el modelo *tirsiano* de la Marta hipócrita, lista y melodramática que es capaz de hacer lo que sea por conseguir el amor de su galán, Felipe. Llama la atención por las tácticas que opta en público para evitar casarse con el viejo Urbina: la hipocresía religiosa y las mentiras dirigidas a su hermana. Todas las que contrastan con su actitud en privado, la que comunica al espectador y desde donde el público⁸ comparte sus mentiras. Al enterarse de las intenciones íntimas de Marta, los espectadores se ríen de su beatería hipócrita y celebran el engaño hacia el padre, Don Gómez; viejo codicioso a quien le importa más la dote de sus hijas que la felicidad de las mismas. Es cierto que la caracterización del personaje de Marta logra el agrado y complicidad⁹ del público pero, contrario a la obra original, en la puesta en escena Marta no alcanza opacar a su hermana, Lucía. Debido a que en esta adaptación ambas hermanas dominan la escena casi por partes iguales: Marta como protagonista y embaucadora, y Lucía como antagonista de su hermana y víctima de Felipe. El que finge estar enamorado de ella para evitar que ésta descubra que él se ha metido en su casa bajo una falsa identidad y, además, para que no lo acuse a las autoridades por haber asesinado a su hermano.

Travestismo y colaboración activa del público

En *Marta the Divine* la presencia escénica de Lucía se acentúa mayormente porque su papel fue interpretado por un histrión (Sam Bosworth). Este fue el único personaje femenino personificado por un actor junto a otros tres personajes masculinos representados

⁷ El carácter cómico de *Marta la Piadosa* ha sido debatido por algunos críticos. Por ejemplo, Jane White Albrecht considera esta obra como una sátira irónica en la que Tirso critica la hipocresía y falsa piedad de Marta y la que revela la vena crítica del dramaturgo (40-43). Otros académicos han contradicho estos puntos de vista y colocan esta obra dentro de la tradición cómica de su época (Thacker, *Comedy* 268). En su artículo *Tragicidad y comicidad en la comedia de capa y espada: Marta la piadosa de Tirso de Molina*, Ignacio Arellano discute diversas interpretaciones relacionadas con la esencia lúdica y jocosa de Marta a la vez que trata los estudios que la catalogan de obra seria y tocante a temas morales que gravitan en la mentira, la hipocresía y lo trágico.

⁸ Para Jauralde Pou el público de *Marta la Piadosa* pasa a “ser narrador o espectador omnisciente, que sabe más que cualquiera de los personajes juntos” (163).

⁹ Pedraza asegura que en esta obra Tirso “abusa de la credulidad o complicidad del espectador” (*Desequilibrios* 246).

por actrices: Don Gómez (padre de Marta y Lucía), Pastrana (criado de Felipe) y Sancho (hermano de Pancho). Según Jonathan Wade:

The UMass-Amherst group took gender bending to a whole new level, which is difficult within a dramatic tradition already characterized by cross-dressing. Bosworth, whose performance stole the show, seemed to enjoy every moment on the stage, embracing his female role to the fullest... Casting Bosworth as Lucía (as well as Sabrina Gogan and Becca Keohane in men's roles) was certainly an entertaining choice that changed the terms of the play and influenced the audience's reception, but it did not appear to be a decision grounded in Tirso's work per se. In any number of *comedias*, a leading male or female character could be played by someone of the opposite sex for comic relief. In this particular production, the gender switches underlined the contemporary feel of the play and created a point of entry for modern audiences. (160)

Indudablemente, la brillante realización del actor vestido de mujer crea un ambiente de comicidad ideal para el espectador. Lucía, la antagonista/víctima, a pesar de su posición como personaje secundario domina el escenario y alcanza divertir al público por medio de los gestos y movimientos físicos que aparentan —a modo exagerado— la coquetería de una dama enamorada.

Por otro lado, el travestismo que se consigue por medio del personaje de Lucía y, sobre todo, el de las actrices que hacen los papeles de Don Gómez (Becca Keohane), Pastrana (Sabrina Gogan) y Sancho (J.L.Kaufman) evocan varias cuestiones relacionadas con la historia del teatro español: por un lado, los debates¹⁰ sobre la licitud del teatro y oposiciones que surgieron en cuanto a las mujeres vestidas de hombre en el escenario español de la temprana modernidad y, por otro, que Tirso estaba al tanto de la naturaleza dramática del travestismo.¹¹

La función inicia con dos mujeres tiradas en el suelo y llorando melodramáticamente en un escenario minimalista —acentuado por tres arcos conopiales— que subraya su presencia en la escena. En la esquina derecha del escenario yace Marta, quien lleva una túnica negra encima de su vestido rojo, y a la izquierda doña Lucía con un vestido azul, también opacado por un ropón oscuro. Después del

¹⁰ Algunos religiosos consideraron que el teatro no promulgaba las enseñanzas morales de la fe católica. Esto suscitó grandes debates entre los detractores y defensores del teatro español de los siglos XVI y XVII. Cotarelo y Mori recopila una excelente colección de textos escritos a favor y en contra del teatro hispánico peninsular en *Bibliografía de las controversias sobre la licitud del teatro en España*.

¹¹ Algunas de las obras más conocidas donde Tirso incorpora el travestismo son: *Don Gil de las calzas Verdes* (1615) y *El vergonzoso en palacio* (1611).

aparte introductorio de Marta, aludiendo al dolor de haber perdido a su hermano, se escucha el soliloquio de Lucía y es ahí cuando el público se percata de que este personaje es interpretado por un actor. Momento seguido, las hermanas comienzan a dialogar sobre la muerte de su hermano y su asesino, Don Felipe, a quien ambas aman en secreto. Esta conversación resulta sumamente humorística en la adaptación porque Lucía le pregunta a su hermana si la considera un hombre. Aquí podemos ver la versión original de Tirso paralela a la adaptación de Erdman:

Doña Lucía:

Hermana mía,
¿tiénesme por hombre a mí,
o miro con cataratas,
que por lince te retratas,
y a mí por topo? ...

(vv.80-84)

Lucía:

Do you take me for a man? You think you're
a fierce-eyed lynx, and I'm just some mole
groveling blindly in the ground?
Remember, Marta, I'm a woman too.
I mourn the innocent victim who
died for our honor.¹²

En estos versos se destaca la aserción femenina, "I'm a woman too", lo que toma otro giro en la puesta en escena. Esta aseveración no concuerda con lo que el espectador ve detrás del disfraz femenino. La afirmación de la femineidad en boca de un personaje ambiguo causará que el público se ría a carcajadas y comience a establecer cierta relación de complicidad con los personajes. En términos del espectáculo esto también añade una dimensión satírica a la obra, pero a la misma vez provoca que el público rompa la barrera de los géneros, puesto que el personaje de Lucía reta las preconcebidas nociones de género, asociadas con la delicadeza y discreción femenina, al mezclar la identidad del personaje y el actor.

Cabe destacar que en esta obra la colaboración del espectador es activa, pues es partícipe de los secretos de los personajes y ríe de sus ocurrencias. Así se crea un puente unificador entre personajes y espectadores que convierte a éstos en cómplices de los enredos amorosos entre Marta, Felipe y Lucía. Además, como ha notado Pablo Jauralde Pou, el público de esta obra entiende que la perspectiva desde la que se presenta parte del enredo es la femenina. Esta se inscribe principalmente en las artimañas y apartes de Marta, de cuyas confabulaciones solo es conocedor el público (163). En *Marta the Divine* esto se desarrollará a menor grado por medio de Lucía y, como en el texto original, cuando ambas hermanas se desafían

¹² Estos versos no provienen de la traducción publicada por Erdman, sino de su adaptación para la puesta en escena.



Figura 1. Lucía y Marta. Escena de *Marta the Divine*. Departamento de teatro, University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Foto de Jon Crispin (2009).

el público sabe que Marta está mintiendo, y se sitúa mayormente desde el punto de vista de ésta (Jauralde Pou 164). Al espectador se le hará más difícil situarse del lado de Lucía porque, como señala Jauralde Pou, así se pretendía que viéramos la obra original (164); pero sobre todo porque en esta adaptación Lucía se convierte en un recurso humorístico. En *Marta the Divine* la ambigüedad de Lucía no permitirá que el público se ubique completamente desde su perspectiva, pero sí logra divertir y escandalizar con su caracterización atrevida y preponderante.

Homenaje a Tirso

Por otro lado, la adaptación del personaje de Marta ejemplifica bien las particularidades dramáticas de Tirso. Como se sabe, él poseía la habilidad de crear protagonistas femeninos fuertes, inteligentes e ingeniosos en una época donde la mujer carecía de libertad de expresión y acción. En esta obra esto se manifiesta por medio de Marta, quien aparenta ser una devota cristiana para escapar de la autoridad patriarcal.¹³ Es precisamente la voluntad autoritaria del padre la que la conduce a mentir y protegerse bajo la máscara de

¹³ En cuanto al tema de la autoridad patriarcal en *Marta la Piadosa*, véase Thacker, *Role-Play* 68-90.

la religiosidad. Aunque parezca lo contrario, Marta no intenta ser explícitamente una beata.¹⁴ Hubiera sido lógico que lo hiciera puesto que, según Mary Elizabeth Perry, “under the cover of religion, beatas could laugh and shriek and cry. They read the gospel aloud in formal groups and audaciously present their own interpretation of it. They shared intimate experiences with males and other females, and they hugged and kissed them” (101). Sin embargo, aunque éstas gozaban de más libertades de expresión corporal y oral que la mayoría de las mujeres en la época,¹⁵ Marta evade identificarse con una orden religiosa en particular¹⁶ para evitar ser “devorada por depredadores masculinos” (Thacker, *Role-Play* 82). Bajo su disfraz de religiosa y su oposición al matrimonio impuesto por su padre, la hipócrita heroína reta la autoridad patriarcal pero lo hace con astucia y diplomacia puesto que, como apunta Halkhoree, “[t]he appeal of religion has the advantage of allowing Marta to cope with the demands of her father, the rivalry of her sister, and the pressure of social convention” (159).



Figura 2. Marta en su rol de piadosa. Detrás de ella: el Alférez, Inés y Don Gómez. Escena de *Marta the Divine*. Departamento de teatro, University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Foto de Jon Crispin (2009).

¹⁴ El mismo don Gómez lo afirma: “aunque Marta se trata / como veis, no hay persuadilla / ni razón reducilla / a ser monja o ser beata” (vv. 1091-1095). Por otro lado, Urbina lo expresa de esta manera: “ni es carne así ni pescado” (v. 1103).

¹⁵ Véase Perry 101.

¹⁶ Como ha observado Thacker, muchos críticos se han equivocado al nominarla beata (*Role-Play* 79).

El rol de piadosa le permitirá refugiarse bajo la autoridad invencible de la religión, adquirir una voz¹⁷ que no poseía antes y vencer la hegemonía patriarcal que le imponía someterse a un sistema donde la mujer era objeto de intercambio y beneficio masculino.

Indiscutiblemente *Marta the divine* celebra la habilidad de Tirso para destacar a la mujer en el escenario. Lo hace directamente por medio del personaje de Marta, e indirectamente por medio de un reparto que se compone de tantas actrices como actores. En la obra original predominan los personajes masculinos, sin embargo el carácter y destrezas de la protagonista no permiten que esa mayoría opaque su perspicacia y dominio de la escena. La adaptación de Erdman sigue estas particularidades dramáticas. Las actrices que hacen los papeles de Don Gómez (Becca Keohane), Pastrana (Sabrina Gogan) y Sancho (J.L.Kaufman) representan exitosamente personajes tipo del teatro español: caballeros de la Corte y graciosos impertinentes (considérese a Sancho y a su hermano Pancho como personajes híbridos: una combinación de caballeros antagonistas y graciosos).¹⁸



Figura 3. Pastrana y Don Gómez. Escena de *Marta the Divine*. Departamento de teatro, University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Foto de Jon Crispin (2009).

¹⁷ Para Thacker esta voz presta su autoridad a la iglesia y le permite a Marta contradecir al padre, además de dejar su marca en él y en su mundo (*Role-Play* 85).

¹⁸ Albrecht considera que los personajes don Juan y don Diego son similares a los graciosos de Tirso (41). En efecto, Erdman transfiere este aspecto muy bien en su adaptación puesto que Sancho y Pancho se perciben claramente como graciosos impertinentes que aportan a la comicidad y teatralidad de la obra.

Soluciones de desequilibrios estructurales en *Marta the Divine*

Aparte de las innovaciones teatrales anteriormente discutidas y particularidades dramáticas que corresponden a la dramaturgia de Tirso, *Marta the Divine* muestra corregir la estructura del texto original. Felipe Pedraza Jiménez discute los desequilibrios estructurales de *Marta la piadosa* y observa que todas las adaptaciones que conoce tratan de modificar problemas de organización dramática.¹⁹ Considera, además, que es necesario “amputar [las] excrescencias del original, que sin duda vinieron forzadas por circunstancias extrañas a la voluntad creativa²⁰ del poeta” (Pedraza, *Nota* 10). Entre estos, menciona tres personajes que cataloga de “ociosos”, “impertinentes” y “parasitarios” (Don Juan, Don Diego y López), y el extensísimo romance sobre la toma de la Mamora como elementos foráneos a la acción cómica (*Nota* 9 y *Desequilibrios* 244). En efecto, la adaptación de Erdman muestra también la gran preocupación de corregir estas “excrescencias”. El caso de *Marta the Divine* será uno excepcional porque, en vez de eliminar todos esos elementos dramáticos discordantes, incorpora la mayoría de ellos (sólo elimina el personaje de López, criado de don Diego) transformándolos en elementos que aportan gran dramatismo y humor a la acción de la comedia. Aunque gran parte de la adaptación de Erdman sigue la versión original, se toman ciertas libertades, tales como: destacar el papel de Inés, otorgándole una presencia dramática y cómica más notable; desarrollando la escena final en el jardín en una más climática y agradable (Erdman, *Introduction* 26). Además, el gran parlamento que alude a la expedición militar de la Mamora se preserva, aunque de manera breve. Superando así la usual “amputación” que han sufrido la mayoría de las adaptaciones.²¹

Otra de las mayores revisiones que encontramos son algunos cambios en el *dramatis personae*. Erdman adapta y transforma a Don Juan y Don Diego, dos cortesanos oportunistas que no han gozado de la aceptación de muchos adaptadores, mayormente por ser considerados personajes innecesarios y redundantes. En el caso de *Marta the Divine* estos personajes sufren una afortunada transformación y se convierten en los hermanos Sancho y Pancho, dos jóvenes impertinentes que pretendían obtener el amor a las hermanas Marta

¹⁹ Véase también el artículo de Ganelin, *Tirso de Molina's Marta la piadosa: Recast and Reception*.

²⁰ Pedraza anota que aunque ignora los motivos de los fallos estructurales, puede que el dramaturgo estuviera tratando de otorgarle un papel a todos los actores de la compañía (*Desequilibrios* 244).

²¹ Pedraza apunta que la adaptación de Dionisio Solís alude brevemente a la batalla de la Mamora. Véase la nota a pie de página en *Desequilibrios* 240.

y Lucía. Son dos figuras perversas y escurridizas que se pasean ligeramente por el escenario, llevando rumores de un lado a otro. No tienen identidad propia, hablan muchas veces al unísono y nos recuerdan a los legendarios amigos de Hamlet, *Rosencrantz* y *Guildenstern*. Erdman le otorga esa función al crearlos como personajes homogéneos representados por una actriz (J.L. Kaufman) y un actor (Zachary Smith), lo que aumenta el carácter cómico y ambiguo de la obra.

Para Charles Ganelin, el propósito de estos dos personajes ha sido servir a modo de coro griego para comentar sobre la acción y cuestionar la sinceridad de la conversión de Marta (*Rewriting* 86). Sin embargo, no todos los críticos concuerdan con que estos personajes tengan una “función dramática perceptible”, pues se ha considerado que no aportan significativamente a la estructura, ni a la trama de la obra (Pedraza, *Nota* 10). En cuanto a éstos, Pedraza confirma que muchos adaptadores los eliminan: “Solís prescinde de don Juan y don Diego y convierte a López en criado de Urbina. Rodríguez Arrellano elimina los tres, pero crea un nuevo personaje: el hijo de don Gómez, que no está muerto, sino herido, y al que llama don Juan. Boldún también los suprime, aunque utiliza el nombre de don Juan para bautizar al anónimo *Alférez tirsiano*” (*Desequilibrios* 244). Para Erdman, el proceso de modificar estos personajes no fue automático. En su primer borrador los eliminó por no tener que ver mucho con el argumento de la obra, puesto que les parecían separados de la acción. Además, a él le interesaba una interpretación más feminista de *Marta*, sin que hubiera hombres que comentaran sobre ella. Al leer el primer borrador, la directora de la obra, Gina Kauffman, le dijo que tal vez no les hacían falta los hermanos o que no podrían servir para algo. Sin embargo, él consideraba que faltaba un obstáculo hacia el final de la obra, que necesitaba otros antagonistas que amenazaran a Marta y que pudieran llevar a los viejos (Don Gómez y Urbina) al jardín (Erdman, *Entrevista*). De este modo los hermanos Don Juan y Don Diego se convirtieron en Sancho y Pancho. Personajes que para Erdman son otra manifestación del sexismo que enfrenta Marta y así apoyan la interpretación de la obra. Por otro lado, el cambio de nombres a Pancho y Sancho se produjo para suscitar un efecto cómico y para subrayar la ambigüedad barroca de la obra y además recalcar que ya no son el Don Juan y el Don Diego de Tirso, sino el Sancho y el Pancho creados por Erdman (Erdman, *Entrevista*).

Anotaciones finales

Finalmente, como ha notado Charles Ganelin, en su artículo *The Art of Adaptation: Building the Hermeneutical Bridge*, “a reworking or an adaptation is a comment upon the original work, it is an interpretation of that work, and as such, participates in the tradition of the work’s reception” (Art 38). Los cambios y transmutaciones aquí discutidos manifiestan que esta adaptación participa dentro de la tradición de la recepción de *Marta la Piadosa* y además ejemplifica claramente el proceso de diálogo que surge entre el adaptador y el texto original sobre los problemas estructurales de la obra. Consigue integrar y cambiar de manera ingeniosa la mayoría de los elementos discordantes que han sido eliminados por otros adaptadores. Además, captura la esencia cómica de *Marta la Piadosa* desafiando barreras de género y aludiendo a temas pertinentes a la época de Tirso, que a la vez son oportunos y accesibles para la audiencia contemporánea. Así pues, Erdman indica conocer el genio dramático de Tirso, lo interpreta y transfiere adecuadamente a la escena, logrando preservar el humor y la vivacidad de los personajes ideados por el dramaturgo español.

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CENSORS, CRITICS, AND THE SUPPRESSION OF NORAH JAMES'S SLEEVELESS ERRAND

Bill Harrison

In his seminal essay, "Censorship and the Imposition of Form," Pierre Bourdieu suggests that censorship, while often conceived as the literalized or "explicit" exercise of state power against transgressions of expression and thought, can also be understood as "the structure of the field itself which governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression," a secondary or parallel governance that operates beyond the legalistic repression more commonly (and reductively) conceived (138).¹ Two explicit examples of British state censorship dominate the literary history of the late 1920s: the successful prosecution of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* and the suppression of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Linked together in censorship histories, these two remarkable novels have been juxtaposed by literary critics such as Joan Scanlon and Adam Parkes. However, within a generation, the "norms of the field" of expression (Bourdieu, "Censorship" 159) permitted both works direct access to print: *The Well* reappeared in a 1949 British edition, and *Chatterley's* 1960 Penguin was a best seller. A third novel was also explicitly censored in the late twenties, one that may well be "the most suppressed novel ever published in England" ("JAMES" 716): Norah Corder James's *Sleeveless Errand*. The reasons offered for the novel's state censorship are, as we shall see, well recited but poorly documented speculation. More significantly, *Sleeveless Errand* never received republication in Britain, suggesting that, perhaps in contrast to Hall's work in particular, the secondary dynamic

¹ As noted below, there are two Bourdieu works on censorship to which I will mainly refer: first, his essay, "Censorship and the Imposition of Form," which originally appeared as part of his 1975 article "L'Ontologie politique de Martin Heidegger," and has been translated into English as part of the 1991 collection, *Language and Symbolic Power*; second, Bourdieu's 1972 study, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (translated in 1977). Written within a two year period, these works are foundational to Bourdieu's "major contribution," writes Richard Jenkins, "to the debate about the relationship between structure and action"—"the key question for social theory" (1).

of censorship, the potentially orthodox discourse of reception, plays out significantly in terms of James's work. The professional discourse and the "sanctions," to use Bourdieu's terminology, by which it prohibits or authorizes forms of expression ("Censorship" 138), affects not only the awareness and understanding of this particular novel but transforms the categorization of James's larger output as a twentieth-century author also.

The suppression of *Sleeveless Errand* in particular documents the parallel operations of both institutional arbiters of cultural expression, state and critic, and their concomitant discourses of agreement, allowance, and value. Together, criticism and censorship administer, as Richard Burt notes, the regulation of cultural expression, a cooperation that "disturbs the assumptions [. . .] that there are stable oppositions between" them (xv-xvi); this is certainly a traceable dynamic in the British reception of James's novel, which reminds us of criticism's ability, and even tendency, to serve as what Bourdieu terms, in his 1972 volume, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, "manifest censorship" (169).² For this novel, however, the prohibitory discourse of reception has a later stage, more a matter of academic literary historians who in their account and evaluation of the novel's state censorship often attribute a marginality onto *Sleeveless Errand* parallel to the government's interdiction; for example, Parkes notes that, while the novel's 1929 suppression "created some public interest, this novel did not bear on the evolution of modernism" (xi). Thus, seeming recuperations of the novel's reputation instead reinscribe the boundary deauthorizing *Sleeveless Errand* from entrance into the discourse of literary value, even at this late date.

The point of this essay is neither to establish whether or not Norah James's novel is "good" or "literature," nor to include it among once-ostracized, now-lionized twentieth-century novels such as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Well of Loneliness*, *Ulysses*, *Tropic of Cancer*, or *Lolita*.³ Instead, this essay will chart the primary, secondary, and perhaps tertiary dynamics of censorship that James's novel encounters, noting the ambivalences that a marginalized and possibly marginal novel faces as it attempts, in the United Kingdom, to gain

² Helen Freshwater, by way of Sue Curry Jansen, notes a similar parallel between what she calls overt state (or "regulative") censorship and the covert, "implicit" power of "constitutive" censorship secured by "other systems of authority" (227). See also Jansen (57-59).

³ As noted before, see Parkes and Scanlon for discussion of Lawrence and Hall; Doan and Prosser, "Introduction," and Ingram, discuss Hall alone. Dennison presents analysis of the publication of Joyce's and Nabokov's novels. Earl Hutchinson's *Tropic of Cancer on Trial: A Case History of Censorship* (Grove P, 1968) remains a touchstone for Miller scholars.

access to the kind of cultural expression best embodied by formal, physical publication and distribution. If, as Christian Metz writes, “[a]ll we ever know of censorship are its failures,” then the suppression of *Sleeveless Errand*, the novel’s apparent lack of influence, and our resulting ignorance of James and her work not only signals but reveals the modality of British censorship’s success (*Imaginary* 255).

Woman’s Novel Seized

The history of the novel’s state suppression is unique in the terms of its speed and comprehensiveness; as a matter of *de facto* post-publication censure, the British government acted in a manner that practically erased the very act of publication itself, disrupting the novel’s effective entry into what Jürgen Habermas classifies as the “public sphere in the world of letters” (29-31).⁴ On 20 February 1929, at 6:00 p.m., police began their successful seizure of 517 copies of *Sleeveless Errand* “on the ground that the novel was of an obscene character” (“Seized”): first, according to Scholartis Press publisher Eric Partridge, they confiscated the stock “of the two biggest exporting booksellers,” and then at 8:00 p.m., “two plain-clothes men” appeared at Partridge’s flat and demanded that he escort them to the press’s office, whereupon “[t]hey removed all of the copies from 30 Museum Street and noted the name of every bookseller to whom the book had been delivered” (*First* 25). According to the *New York Bookman*, “all the bookshops which had received advance shipments were raided. [. . .] Outside the small shop of a bookseller who had left a copy of the book in his window on display while he took his Thursday holiday, a guard from Scotland Yard was posted from Wednesday night to Friday morning so that no one might remove the copy” (“Chronicle and Comment” 190). Furthermore the *London Mercury* reported that “[a] review copy was traced to a reviewer: the police called imperatively at the reviewer’s house, and induced her to give up her copy. It had never been exposed for sale, and it was her property—or, arguably, pending her writing of a review, that of the paper, which had sent it to her” (“Editorial Notes” 563). “The book might have been, which it wasn’t, the most indecent book on earth,” the *Mercury* noted, yet “we are not aware of any law which forbids the citizen to possess indecent books” (“Editorial Notes” 563). The state, it seems, took a different view.

⁴ Pre-publication censorship may lead to an element of self-censorship on the part of an author, a dynamic that Marshik terms “censorship dialectic” in which an author’s compositional negotiations with “resistant readers,” those aligned with the forces of moral conservatism and state censorship, contribute “to the shaping of modern literature and the public personae of artists” (*British* 14-15).

While a transcript of the novel's prosecution survives, the actual Home Office file for the *Sleeveless Errand* action has been either lost or destroyed (Marshik, *British* 118), so the historical record of the state's intent and implementation depends mainly on the contemporary press accounts and recollections of those involved. According to the *Times* report of the 4 March 1929 Bow Street Police Court hearing one month after the seizure, the prosecution, Mr. Percival Clarke, insisted that the novel "could only have a degrading, immoral influence, and [. . .] tended to excite unhealthy passions." Clarke provided the following plot synopsis:

The story concerned a period of two days, and was told in the form of conversations by persons entirely devoid of decency and morality, who for the most part were under the influence of drink, and who not only tolerated but even advocated adultery and promiscuous fornication. Filthy language and indecent situations appeared to be the keynote of the book. ("Seized")⁵

Specifically, the prosecution protested that the book took the name of God or Christ in vain over 60 times, as in the line, "For Christ's sake give me a drink." The magistrate, Graham Campbell, concluded that the book was obscene and ordered that the 517 seized copies—of a total first edition of 750—be destroyed.⁶ Thus ended the only British edition of James's *Sleeveless Errand*.

"A very interesting novel very well written"

According to Bourdieu, "[c]ensorship also determines the form of reception," which for James's novel would be the response of

⁵ *Sleeveless Errand* tells the story of Paula Cranford, who, deeply saddened over the end of a romantic affair, decides she no longer wishes to live. As she plans her suicide (by driving a rented car over a cliff), Paula by happenstance becomes acquainted with Bill Cheland, who has just discovered his wife's betrayal. Over the next 48 hours, the pair commiserate over their bad fortune, as they tour London's demi-monde with some of Paula's somewhat dissolute friends and acquaintances. As the novel progresses, Bill and Paula form a suicide pact and share a chaste night in bed. On the way to the coast, the car breaks down in Hove, where Paula saves Bill's life by demanding he return to his wife. She then steers the repaired Vauxhall off a chalky South Downs cliff into the sea.

The novel is reminiscent of Michael Arlen's *The Green Hat* (1924) (which features both dissolute Londoners and the death of its female protagonist by automobile) and prefigures aspects of Waugh's far less sentimental *Vile Bodies* (1930) (which also highlights drunkenness, automobiles, and female drivers).

⁶ While the *Times* claims the first edition was only 500 copies, Partridge notes that there were "750 copies out altogether" (*First* 25). Pearson asserts that, as pre-orders were strong, Partridge printed a second edition of around 200 copies before the book went on sale: he estimates 785 of a total of 799 were confiscated and destroyed (66).

contemporary critics, book reviewers who determine a new work's quality and worth—or legitimacy, as Bourdieu often puts it (“Censorship” 139). These reviewers, as an institutional body, produce a professional discourse “of a duly formal nature, that is, bearing the set of agreed signs” that both authorize their discourse and determine the discourse’s formal reception (Bourdieu, “Censorship” 139). The state suppression, as the *Mercury*’s anecdote concerning the reviewer’s copy documents, clearly intended to influence and control by legal means this “field of opinion” (Bourdieu, *Outline* 168).

In actuality, one of *Sleeveless Errand*’s most significant critical evaluations took place before the novel’s printing. James first submitted her novel to her employer, Jonathan Cape, for publication. Edward Garnett, an influential figure in 20th-century British publishing known for his editorship of Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, and Ford Madox Ford, among others, gave the book a positive reading: “A very interesting novel very well written. It is a real diagnosis of the War generation’s neurotics, and the drama holds on to the end. The author’s technique is admirable” (qtd. in Partridge, *Three* 24).⁷ Although he “read it and [. . .] like[d] it,” Cape declined to publish the book, saying to James, “you see, doing the publicity work for our authors here—well, you know what some of them are like? If your book was a success, they might think you’d neglected them for your own work” (James, *Democracy* 227).⁸ Leonard and Virginia Woolf also declined to publish the novel through their Hogarth Press; after the suppression, Woolf herself called *Sleeveless* “vulgar” but found “nothing in it to raise a hair” (29). Partridge, who seems to have been aware of Garnett’s earlier judgment, accepted the manuscript and sent James a £25 advance, which, as she writes, “felt as if it were a hundred” (*Democracy* 228). Throughout this process, during which “[t]he book had been read by a number of well-known literary people,” James reports, “no one had suggested that I should make any cuts in it”—no one seemed to think that the book was or even might be considered obscene (*Democracy* 230).

While the pre-publication discourse surrounding the novel may have authorized it with a certain amount of legitimacy, the post-publication situation was far more problematic. As bibliographer Neal Pearson notes, “strictly speaking” the Scholartis edition of the novel

⁷ Pearson believes that, despite what Partridge writes, “Garnett couldn’t possibly have thought *Sleeveless Errand* was any good: his recommendation [. . .] must have been made because he saw commercial potential both in its ‘daring’ subject matter, and in the fact that its author was a woman” (64). Unfortunately, Pearson does not provide evidence for this hypothesis.

⁸ See also Howard 111-112.

“was never published” (80). The absence of *Sleeveless Errand* as a readable text, especially for reviewers, as the state made a particular effort to confiscate those often-complimentary copies, created an unusual situation for the early stages of the novel’s reception. Not only does the critical discourse, as with many state censored works, determine the legitimacy of the work in question but it also functions as one process by which the state action itself is legitimized, re-legitimized, or protested. However, the concrete effects of the suppression of those review copies seem to have delimited the very nature of this field of opinion, circumscribing a smaller socio-cultural territory in which to determine even an orthodox, conventional judgment. Although after the suppression Desmond MacCarthy praised *Sleeveless*’s edificatory value (“I know several sensible parents who have borrowed it to lend it to their children,” he insists [327-328]), only two reviews appeared: while Arnold Bennett in the *Evening Standard* thought the novel, with its realistic dialogue, “reveals a new talent for fiction” (249), the *Spectator* plainly panned the book. The *Mercury*, while criticizing the police confiscation of review copies (“[t]he police here were gagging a member of that jury which should be regarded as the safeguard of artists and the public”), asserted that “there were words in it which nobody can use in public without a risk of being charged in police court, and there were scenes in it which were outrages against decency. The author may have meant no harm, and may have thought that she was merely being frank: but there never was a censorship which would not have suppressed her book” (“Editorial” 562-563). The *Mercury*, under the editorship of J.C. Squire, could advocate conservative and reactionary opinions concerning new writing; the unsigned reviewer’s attempt to delegitimize *Sleeveless Errand* relies on both innuendo and the insistence that the undiscussed, that which must be banned, remain outside Bourdieu’s orthodox “universe of possible discourse” (*Outline* 169). Thus the suppression cannot help but be attributed to James’s own supposed naïve or superficial—but ultimately heretical—attempt at “being frank,” her taking a casual and callous attitude in matters that by their very unorthodox nature prevent identification and continued discourse.

The relatively minor attention paid to the novelistic text itself—as opposed to the political and historical conditions of the state censorship—paradoxically calls attention to those processes by which literary expression is given value. According to Bourdieu’s analysis, the standards imposed and enforced by any institutional orthodoxy, in this case the “established” world of British literary journalism, create a “manifest” or “structural” censorship in which there are

accepted, “official” ways and methods of expression (*Outline* 169; “Censorship” 138). Both the subject matter of discourse and the rules for discourse itself are determined by these rules, which also rely on an underlying “field of doxa,” that which is taken for granted and beyond question (*Outline* 169). Yet despite this absolutism, and its attendant criteria, any “recognition of legitimacy” on the part of the orthodoxy, any judgment of appropriateness or value, relies on the simultaneous “misrecognition of arbitrariness” of the very doxic standards themselves (*Outline* 168). As the rules of authorization are as much about the authorization itself as the standards by which it is awarded, a fundamental inconstancy underlies any judgment made by the British reviewing establishment.

Aspects of the American reception of *Sleeveless Errand* suggest this arbitrariness on the part of those few post-publication British reviewers. In fact, Garnett’s literary endorsement was echoed in many of novel’s reviews, particularly in the American press where more reviewers had much greater access to the text (the U.S. edition, with its changes and “deletion of only three words” [Craig 82], was, in fact, something of a best-seller).⁹ *The New Republic* thought that “the wonderful thing about” the “book is that it carries conviction” (Matthews 187), and the *New York Times Book Review* found that “[t]he prose in ‘Sleeveless Errand’ is direct, strong and frank: the conversations seem particularly apt; there is no flinching in the face of probable truth. [. . .] Miss James is an artist as well as a writer of a first novel. She arouses those ancient cathartic emotions, pity and fear, in the reader” (“‘Sleeveless Errand’”). A *New York Bookman* review panned the novel (99), but the next month the periodical printed a puff-piece praising *Sleeveless* as “an excellent counterpart to *All Quiet on the Western Front* (“Chronicle and Comment” 190). Certainly these reactions to the novel’s content, positive or ambivalent as they may be, could acknowledge some subtle differences between the American and British reviewers. Yet they also suggest, given modernism’s historical propensity for Anglophone censorship to cluster around certain cultural works, that *Sleeveless Errand*’s obscenity—that justification for both Britain’s state censorship and its professional literary evaluations—may be a more fluid, or arbitrary, criteria than the field of discourse acknowledges.¹⁰

If the three edited words that constitute the difference between the American and British editions of *Sleeveless Errand* marked the

⁹ Marshik reports that *Sleeveless Errand* sold 20,000 copies in the US, although her source is uncited (“History’s” 159).

¹⁰ In Jonathan Green’s *Encyclopedia of Censorship*, *Sleeveless* is compared to *Ulysses*, although the reasons for this are not quite clear.

border between legitimacy and obscenity, then the post-publication trajectory of the novel could be a matter of expurgation rather than suppression. Indeed, those rather more familiar with the immediate details of the novel's production and distribution see the obscenity matter as far more negligible: simple copyediting could eliminate the indecency, for as Pearson notes, "[e]ven by the standards of 1929 the language of *Sleeveless Errand* is not extreme" (65). Soon after the British suppression, Jack Kahane published (as part of a venture that would evolve into the Obelisk Press) a Paris edition of the novel that sold "like mitigated wildfire at a hundred francs a copy" (around US\$75.00 today for a first edition of over 1000 copies); he also thought that, in James's work, "[u]ndoubtedly one or two words fell under the ban of the law"—although he also believed the words could have been edited out with little detriment to the work overall (223-224).¹¹ The author herself echoes Kahane in her 1939 autobiography, the perhaps ironically titled *I Lived in a Democracy*:

[I]t was called an obscene book—simply because of the words used in it. I would have cut them out willingly if I'd been told it was necessary. But I'd never been told that. It never occurred to me that it would be considered obscene to let the characters in it use the language they use in real life. However, the Home Office apparently considered it so. (230)

According to both the author and her publishers, the vocabulary, if crude, was not intentionally obscene, and if there had been a sense that the work was to be censored, changes could easily—and might even willingly—be made. While these assertions are mainly made after the fact of the suppression, they still have some relevance for the novel's post-publication circumstances, suggesting the relative ease with which a future British edition might appear. But as it stands since the night of the Home Office's actions, the novel remains unpublished and undistributed in the United Kingdom.

¹¹ Pearson lists the following potentially offensive words: "'bloody hell,' 'balls,' 'homos,' 'whores,' 'for Christ's sake,' 'like Hell' and 'bitch' is as 'obscene' as the language gets, and while 'bloody' gets a good airing, most of the other epithets appear no more than a couple of times each in a book more than two hundred pages long" (65). Similarly, Bennett's 1929 review notes that many of the novel's characters are "of a familiar type of persons who cannot express themselves at any time on any subject without employing words beginning with 'b'" (249). *Twentieth Century Authors* suggests that "the theory is that the objection was to one word in the book" (716)—"balls." Perhaps this detail of the suppression motivated Richard Aldington to write his 1931 satiric pamphlet, *BALLS, and Another Book for Suppression*, in which he considers—as part of an overwrought sports pun—, "the Purity of our Public and private life with balls" (5).

For 'diplomatic,' not moral reasons

The *Mercury's* reaction against *Sleeveless Errand* suggests the dynamic Bourdieu delineates where censorship "is the structure of the field itself which governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression, and not some legal proceeding which has been specially adapted to designate and repress the transgression of a kind of linguistic code" ("Censorship" 138). When agents such as *The Mercury* fulfill their discursive purpose by enforcing the dominant cultural forms of discourse production and reception (as "members of that jury," to use their own words ["Editorial" 563]), no longer does state censorship need "to manifest itself in the form of explicit prohibitions, imposed and sanctioned by an institutionalized authority," for it relies on more indirect mechanisms (Bourdieu, "Censorship" 138). British censorship itself relied quite heavily on such an indirect system in the 1920s, as even government authorities would reveal.

The Conservative Home Secretary from 1924 to 1929, William Joyson-Hicks, Lord Brentford, claims in his 1929 pamphlet, *Do We Need a Censor?*, that in fact outright, explicit censorship of books does not exist in Britain: "If I understand the word rightly, censorship, whether of books, pictures, films or stage plays and like, implies a scrutiny by some central authority of the whole output, with a view to the discovery and suppression of such as offend against the standard for the establishment of which censorship is imposed" (9). Thus, as there is no government office that actively and purposefully reviews every published book, he continues, there is no censorship of books (Joyson-Hicks 9-10). However, the Home Office, under the 1857 Obscene Publications Act, has to perform "when a request for advice was received or a complaint was made," and this was the case with both *The Well of Loneliness* and *Sleeveless Errand*: both of these complaints came from the critical book-reviewing establishment (Joyson-Hicks 15). The November 1928 prosecution of *The Well* came about after James Douglas railed against the novel in the pages of the *Sunday Express*, but of course, unlike *Sleeveless*, Hall's novel had been published and widely reviewed by this time. According to a number of accounts, *Sleeveless Errand* was submitted to the Home Office by a reviewer who had received an advance copy ("Editorial" 563), and in light of the conflicting opinions concerning the book's obscenity, "[i]t has been suggested," Alec Craig writes, "that personal motives played a part in the prosecution" (81). In 1930, Partridge himself recounts that "[s]omebody in a certain newspaper (for 'diplomatic,' not moral reasons) sent a marked copy to the Home Office on the morning of the 19th February," only a day

before the police action (*Three* 25). Two years later he would claim that James's novel was sacrificed not only because "a respectable journal wished to maintain the good opinion of its respectable readers" but also because of "political reasons, 'obscenity' being a mere pretext" ("Literary" 40). However, Partridge does not detail the intrigue that may have led to the suppression, and Kahane, ever the political conservative, doubted "that such Star Chamber methods could exist in the England of our time" (223).¹²

Star chambers do suggest a more centralized and hierarchical mechanism of manifest censorship in the case of *Sleeveless Errand* than that which has been mapped hence far, and there are, at this point, suggestions that the book's suppression was motivated by more conspiratorial, state-sanctioned motivations. Other contemporaries did note the Home Office's unusually zealous moralistic, perhaps even politically suspect, activism. According to the 9 March 1929 *Saturday Review*:

[. . .] if every fussy reviewer is going to post off his copy of a new book to the Home Secretary because he does not like an episode here or a line there, then a new statute is necessary which shall firmly distinguish between the sale of literature and the commerce of filth. But we cannot look to the Home Secretary to do the work properly, for, when he has cast himself to play Hercules and cleanse the literary stables, he makes such odd mental gestures that he cannot be taken as anything but first clown. (309-310)

And the journal feared that the *Sleeveless Errand* suppression boded poorly for the nation's future: "That is life to-day in Texas, where they, indeed snoop to conquer; will it be life in England to-morrow?" (309). If the Home Office action lacked a clear and obvious target in *Sleeveless Errand*, it seemed apparent to many people that the suppression had more disturbing repercussions.¹³

There is a tension, then, between the larger mapping of the British literary "field of opinion" and the satisfaction in the logic of orthodox discourse resulting within that field. British censorship not only relied on indirect mechanisms to maintain the regulation of cultural discourse; it also enacted, almost self-reflexively in the case of *Sleeveless Errand*, those prohibitions on the indirect mechanisms themselves. In other words, British reviewers demanded that the novel to be reviewed be taken from their hands. Thus the process that Joyson-Hicks claims cannot be called "censorship" becomes

¹² See Scott 110-112.

¹³ Even the *Mercury*, despite its eventual approval of *Sleeveless's* suppression, worried that "[t]hese things savour too much of the old—not to mention the new—Russia" (563).

almost “perfect” or “invisible” in Bourdieu’s terminology: when agents have internalized the rules and demands of dominant discourse, the agent itself is “censored once and for all” (“Censorship” 138). And yet, at another level, that internalization reveals the discourse’s gaps, and its violence, when it more clearly parallels what Bourdieu understands as “the class struggle” between the orthodox authorized and heterodox unauthorized opinion (*Outline* 169). Simultaneously invisible and excessive, the erasure of *Sleeveless Errand* reworks a supposedly apolitical cultural discourse centered on the field of literary expression into something more overtly political, almost divorced from the domain of the aesthetic itself.

“I realized the need for organization”

At the time of her novel’s suppression, Norah James had long been involved in leftist politics. As an adolescent, she “became interested in the women’s suffrage movement,” even dragging her mother to suffrage rallies, where, as James writes, “[s]he was horrified when she discovered that I had learned to heckle” men who “shouted an offensive or factitious remark” (*Democracy* 39-40). After studying at the Slade, James worked at the Ministry of Pensions, where she “realized the need for organization of the staff for the betterment of the bad conditions prevailing” and “became a trade union organizer [. . .] responsible for 25,000 men and women members of the clerical association” (qtd. in “JAMES” 716). Around this time she became a member of the 1917 Club, made up of Labour and Liberal political candidates and activists, and her social set included such politically minded individuals as Harold Laski, H.G. Wells, and illustrator David Low, among many others, as detailed in her autobiography (Ingram 347; *Democracy* 216-217, 256). Her political leanings were no secret.

There does not seem to be an explicit or documented connection between the British state censorship and James as a quasi-political figure, despite Partridge’s later insinuations. However, there were partisan, far-left reactions to the suppression of both *Sleeveless Errand* and *The Well of Loneliness*, as these acts were understood as what Helen Freshwater calls censorship’s “most traditional guise,” “the intervention of a representative of a repressive institution, directly linked to the state” (241). Rather than limit the censorship to the domain of an institutional discourse of literary value, T.A. Jackson’s analysis in the *Labour Monthly*, insists that there is an “easily [. . .] traced” “connection” between “the crushing of the General Strike and the miners to the banning (and burning) of the ‘Well of Loneliness’ and the ‘Sleeveless Errand’ [sic]” because “the concerted and sustained

repression of a lower class” requires extraordinary order “in the ranks of the class repressing” (235). These novels, he writes, represent “the genuine endeavour, among a section of the intelligentsia at any rate, to treat sex-relations seriously in their relation to social relations. [The Home Secretary] feels [. . .] that any fundamental critique of social-relations, and truly scientific scrutiny of conventional moral standards cannot fail, in an age of literacy and libraries, to shatter all those optimisms upon which a disintegrating social system always relies” (235). For Jackson, the suppression indicates a larger imposition of an orthodox discourse, the domain of which may not be at first easily discernible.

Two months later in *Labour Monthly*, Graham Pollard weighed in with the following:

[The authors of *The Well* and *Sleeveless*] are obscure, and their importance is due to this very insignificance. It is obvious why a capitalist government should proscribe the Statutes of the Communist International: but the prosecution of these “obscene” books must be an attempt to stop the disintegration of the bourgeoisie themselves; it is the action of an aged beauty smashing the mirror that reveals too clearly the wrinkles of her own decay. (437)

These two leftist analyses interpret an implicit cultural challenge provided by both *Sleeveless* and *The Well*: the affront to bourgeois ideology that depiction of “sex relations” in terms of “social relations,” a depiction that either reveals or accelerates the devolution of the bourgeois itself. While James’s political work in particular may suggest her underlying interest, as an author, in representing class struggle, Jackson’s and Pollard’s advocacy prefigures Celia Marshik’s 2002 argument that the novels “were prosecuted because they share two features that discomforted governmental and judicial readers: both novels contain female characters who alter their sexual behavior as a direct result of working for the war effort, and both texts indicate that young, unmarried women were particularly vulnerable to wartime and postwar transformations” (“History’s” 146). Thus, these novels suggest that sexual relations are influenced by the wartime social relations (resulting representationally in *The Well*’s explicit same-sex desire or *Sleeveless*’s miserable promiscuity), which challenges “the impact of war upon a nation” and undercuts an aspect of bourgeois ideology (Marshik, “History’s” 147).¹⁴ These examinations work to reveal British censorship’s true, expanded target—particularly for James’s novel—less a matter of vulgar idiomatic slang than the

¹⁴ Similarly, Ingram’s idiosyncratic 1986 reading of the novel claims that both *Sleeveless* and *The Well* were considered obscene because the novels challenged heterosexual patriarchy: “all is not well in mummy-and-daddy and patriotic-sons land” (352). See also Parkes (n15, 207).

repression of radical representation. The very stuff of either novel is too unsettling for conservative, mainstream consumption, at least according to the institutionalized cultural arbiters.

The coupling of *Sleeveless Errand* with *The Well*—as opposed to other suppressed and controversial works—follows logically given the timeline of the state actions: both trials occurred within five months of each other. Other factors suggest a certain similarity beyond their challenging content. James's career as a jacket and advertisement designer at Jonathan Cape also placed her near the epicenter of *The Well of Loneliness* suppression. According to James, when the novel first came under Cape's consideration, "[h]e asked me if I would read it that night and let him know what I thought of it. I was mildly surprised, because this was the first time he had asked me for an opinion on an MS" (*Democracy* 211). James thought the novel "a fine and sincere piece of work," and at this time she "saw quite a lot of Radclyffe Hall" and "found her an extremely highly-strung woman, with one of the kindest hearts in the world" (*Democracy* 211). Angela Ingram notes that both Hall and James frequented an after-hours club started by Harold Scott and Elsa Lanchester, "the Cave of Harmony," beloved by many other artists, writers, and members of the 1917 club (347). As James developed a personal as well as professional acquaintance with Hall, it is unsurprising that the younger woman attended *The Well* trial at Bow Street: it "was," she writes, "the first time I'd ever been in a police court. I was chiefly surprised at the number of well-known critics who were prepared to come forward and say that the book was a piece of literature and, on those grounds, could not be condemned as a piece of obscenity" (*Democracy* 212). Of course the magistrate, Sir Chartres Biron, did not allow the defense to call witnesses, and a similar defense strategy for James's own novel would lead nowhere.

James's interest in *The Well of Loneliness* trial aside, the contrasts between the two state actions, denoting a move from public sensation to private suppression and erasure, suggest a possible strategic evolution in British censorship. The contrasts continue as we chart the novels' later publication histories and receptions, for a key occurrence is the 1949 appearance of the Falcon Press British edition of *The Well*: the republication was simply unprosecuted by the Home Office without comment (Baker 353). Consequently, *The Well* gains a sense of cultural legitimacy that state censorship heretofore denied, although this republication is not often acknowledged as a watershed moment in literary history. Doan and Prosser, for example, suggest that *The Well* would have greater influence when "published in paperback" in Britain during "the early fifties" (14-15), while Marshik

elides the question of both *The Well* and *Sleeveless's* republication by noting that “[w]hile we cannot know the exact numbers, [foreign] editions of both novels found their way into Britain” (“History’s” 159). But the example she gives as evidence is the oft-noted 1932 discovery of a copy of *The Well* in a telephone box: there are no such anecdotes concerning James’s work, nor is there ever republication. *The Well of Loneliness*, as that former public (and possibly notorious) sensation, significantly returns to print, and *Sleeveless Errand* remains marginalized. In fact, James’s 1941 novel, *The Hunted Heart*, does not even list *Sleeveless* among the frontispiece listing of her published novels, as if the title itself would be unrecognizable to the reader. Again, the British suppression of James’s novel seems simultaneously over determined and fully complete.

A possible justification for *Sleeveless Errand's* continued absence as a British text is the matter of the work’s value as a work of art, as a literary novel. Parkes’s brief dismissal—that *Sleeveless* “did not bear on the evolution of modernism” (xi)—may well be accurate, but the judgment itself seems dependent on the suppression’s success. Here literary history, as a matter of an institutional orthodoxy, replicates the state’s violence with what Bourdieu considers the “symbolic violence” explicit, if often misrecognized, in any discourse of legitimacy (“Censorship” 139-140). Simply put, the logic of literary authority suggests erased works have little influence, and as *Sleeveless Errand* was absented, it is no longer worth considering: the novel is trapped in a literary historical double-bind.¹⁵ And when scholars and critics make the infrequent attempt to divorce the novel from its literary historical context, to read it as an autonomous work, *Sleeveless* does no better. Pearson, for example, suggests that “James may not have been the world’s greatest writer” and declares *Sleeveless* “a deeply terrible book, maudlin, melodramatic, and fatally upstaged by its obvious and unabsorbed influences” (413). Again, appealing to republication as a marker of legitimacy, he also notes that of her 70 authored novels listed in the British Library catalogue, “[n]one is in print” (Pearson 413). The reputations of many previously censored twentieth-century works are often a matter of extended, serious critical discourse as yet unresolved; Terry Castle, for instance, notes that *The Well* is “quite possibly the worst novel ever written” (394-395). And yet that novel is a matter for consideration and discussion; it has entered into literary studies’ ideological discourse, the discipline’s field of opinion. The seeming prohibition against *Sleeveless Errand* “is perhaps an

¹⁵ Absence, again, signifies this dynamic of exclusion. For example, although Marshik’s 2003 essay (re)establishes important connections between *Sleeveless* and *The Well*, James’s novel barely registers notice in the more canonically (and literarily) focused *British Modernism and Censorship* (2006).

indictment of the narrow focus of contemporary literary analysis,” according to John Shapcott, for Arnold Bennett’s 1929 “recognition of the novel’s raw power has not been subsequently pursued” (93-94). Shapcott’s observation validates Bourdieu’s analysis: criticism and its effects may function as a form of manifest censorship.

Investigating the strategies behind and procedures of the state censorship of *Sleeveless Errand* does not lead to a necessary recovery of the text: unlike D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and to some respect, Radclyffe Hall, Norah James does not stand as an “important” author in twenty-first century orthodox cultural discourse. Her work, like many other so-called popular authors of the previous century, sold well; her novels saw print well into the 1970s, although at the end, her hardback publisher was the Valentine Club, a romance imprint. As Pearson sums up James’s professional life, “mostly, she wrote” (433).

It is hard to evaluate James’s life-long career in light of the *Sleeveless Errand* suppression. At one level, it did not affect her overall production, her longevity, or her general reputation. Among her works there are novels, books for young adults, cookbooks, and memoirs: she was denied few audiences as a professional writer. The notoriety of her first novel’s suppression seems not to have cast a particularly long shadow. In fact, her second novel, *Hail! All Hail!* appeared within the year, published by Scholartis; if some sort of personal or partisan vendetta motivated the state action against *Sleeveless Errand*, it was by no means a sustained attack against James herself or her publisher. More to the point may be James’s literary reputation and her loss of that artistic promise suggested by Garnett’s early reading of the *Sleeveless* manuscript or Bennett’s praise in the *Evening Standard*. Literary history, then, certainly suggests that the aim of the original state censorship—to exclude James’s work from being considered, from the universe of possible discourse—has been successful and continues to be more fully carried out by extra-legal institutional arbiters, whether they be contemporary reviewers or the academy itself. The “quality” of the novel, its ability to be understood as “literary” rather than “commercial” or “popular” simply evades analysis, as *Sleeveless Errand* occupies a paradoxical Bourdieuan rhetorical field: we cannot tell whether the present orthodox verdict is a recognition within the field of opinion of the work’s actual merit or a result of the earlier censorship’s influence and continued control of the field of discourse.

Near the end of *Sleeveless Errand*, the novel’s protagonist, Paula Cranford, laments the devolution of postwar Britain and her own corruption. The wartime sexual freedoms have been replaced with social punishments, war work is supplanted with unemployment, and the

promised postwar social reconstruction is not going to happen at all (*Sleeveless* [Scholartis] 223-225). She continues:

Of course, I know some women have won through all right. The new mothers have, and a tiny band of women who have got some profession they're dead keen on. But it's in the next generation of children that the chance of a better future lies. The only thing my sort can do is to contaminate them as little as possible. (*Sleeveless* [Scholartis] 226)¹⁶

Still quarantined from literary expression as represented by formal, physical publication and distribution, the novel in which Paula appears has yet to "contaminate" the United Kingdom.

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¹⁶ For these passages, see also the Paris Kahane edition (202-205) and the US Morrow edition (234-237).

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A NATIVE AMERICAN IN PARIS. LANDSCAPES OF DISLOCATION IN *THE HEARTSONG OF CHARGING ELK* AND *THREE DAY ROAD*

Józef Jaskulski

When thinking of contemporary Native American and First Nations literature, it seems tempting to concur with Thomas King's observation that Aboriginal writers have been "somehow reluctant to try their hand at historical fiction" (Gordon 133). And yet, in the span of the past few decades, two Indigenous authors on both sides of the US-Canadian border have established themselves firmly in the field. While their early success came with works set in the present, the historical novels of the late James Welch and the celebrated James Boyden have provided full-bodied accounts of Aboriginal life set in different periods of American and Canadian history. It is easy to notice a strong resemblance in the output of these two writers with respect to their involvement in history, from non-fiction—including Welch's account of the battle Little Big Horn in *Killing Custer* and Boyden's take on Métis leaders Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont delivered as part of Penguin's *Extraordinary Canadians* series—through trilogies of historical novels covering three periods in the pre- and post-conquest history of Aboriginal tribes. The final piece of Boyden's Cree trilogy, *The Orenda*, has just been released, preceded by *Three Day Road* and *Through Black Spruce*. And although Welch only published two historical novels on the life of Great Plains tribes, i.e., *Fools Crow* and *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, a sequel to the latter was in the making, as the author stated in an interview with Mary Jane Lupton two years prior to his passing in 2003 (I 200).

Out of the aforementioned works, two in particular manifest significant parallels. Welch's *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and Boyden's *Three Day Road* both use their transatlantic setting to inspect national narratives on vital historical events: the closure of the Frontier as a seal on the United States' internal expansion and Canada's engagement in World War I as a formative moment to its sense of

nationhood. Both novels cover the themes of individual displacement and alienation from tribal cultures at the brink of new historical periods, highlighting the hardships of transition and adaptation to new circumstances. Welch and Boyden are also unorthodox in the articulation of their novels' narrative structures, effacing the clear cut departure-return resolution, typically employed in the fiction of the Native American Renaissance. In the context of the above, the goal of this paper is twofold: firstly, to examine how these two novels serve the purpose of historical rectification, challenging obscure fragments of official landscapes of the past and highlighting the "previously neglected or marginalized" (Gordon 119); secondly, to explore the ways in which these two novels structure their protagonists' perceptions of alien surroundings, developing them into maps of spatial and cognitive displacement.

Redressing the Historical Landscape

The Heartsong of Charging Elk and *Three Day Road* can be treated as novels fragmenting the coherent colonial representations of watershed moments in the history of the US and Canada, instead proposing to recover their erased fragments. The former tells the story of a young Lakota refusing to yield to reservation life and assimilation policies, who hired by William "Buffalo Bill" Cody as performer on his bombastic show about to tour major European cities. As a result of a bureaucratic mix-up, Charging Elk is left stranded as an undocumented alien in the middle of Marseilles and tries to survive in an urban environment despite its daunting prospects. The latter work recounts the fate of two among thousands of young First Nations men who enlisted as soldiers in the Canadian army during World War I. Xavier Bird and Elijah Weesageechak, Cree youths who similarly to Charging Elk fail to be subdued by the boarding school system, end up as snipers in the trenches of the Somme. In their narratives, both authors use the iconic moments of Euroamerican national mythologies as a pretext to rewrite history from outside the center. Boyden unravels the myth of World War I as a foundation for Canada's sense of national identity, within which Canadian regiments used to be presented as a vessel of egalitarianism, equalizing First Nations soldiers with their non-Aboriginal peers in a joint war effort. Likewise, Welch disentangles the image of Native Americans as first citizens of the US, popularized in the course of Buffalo Bill's history lesson.

Bearing in mind the evident inconsistencies in official and intimate histories when discussing these two novels, it may be useful to invoke Oakeshott's distinction between historical past and practical

past as further developed by Hayden White. Drawing from Oakeshott, White defines historical past as a highly selective version of the past expressed as the entirety of all events and lives which occurred sometime and left a trace of their existence, while practical past, on the other hand, is such a vision of the past which determines practical action taken by individual and communal entities, acting as an inter-communal reservoir of self-knowledge in both everyday life and extreme conditions, such as catastrophes, natural disasters, wars and conflicts and other life-threatening situations, and as such is often excluded by professional historians as a domain escaping proper, “objective” exploration (White 14-16). Thus, to authors representing ethnic minorities, the canonical historiography of the American continent—non-Aboriginal accounts of Native American past included—corresponds with the polished discourse of historical past, while stories of extreme experience (hunger, genocide, disenfranchisement, shell shock, etc.) and lives of ordinary members of Aboriginal communities, which establish the staple of Welch’s and Boyden’s historical prose, significantly overlap with the notion of practical past, constituting a reference for contemporary Native American and First Nations self-awareness. On a larger scale, to paraphrase Lisa Yaszek (quoted in White 196), these two novels are part of historical recovery projects in which Native Americans have been engaged for over two hundred years, dating back to the early 19th century and documenting the appropriation of Aboriginal tribes within Eurocentric mythoi.

As narratives of practical past, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Three Day Road* emphasize those aspects of the bygone ages which the historical past fails to address in its sweeping narratives (White 16). Thus, they deliver intimate accounts overwhelmed by the grandiose, dominant history which they in turn undermine. Theirs are stories of individuals thrust into historic circumstances, casting new light on those overlooked in the official archives: First Nations soldiers, Buffalo Bill’s Native employees, survivors of acculturation programs. In *The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West, a phenomenon raised to mythical proportions assessed by some as the landmark moment in the budding history of American popular culture (Kroes & Rydell 26) is ironically translated into a behind-the-scenes story, in which Cody’s Native American stunts actually come to life, one of them emerging as the centerpiece of a revisionist tale of Native empowerment. Along with his Lakota colleagues, Charging Elk exposes the selective character and artificiality of progressive historiography of settler America, aware “that it was all fake” (Welch 52). What Buffalo Bill incorporates into his story of the birth of the nation, Charging Elk’s ruminations undermine. Along with the disappearance of Cody’s

Wild West from Marseilles, gone is the illusory projection of colonial conquest, leaving “not one sign that the Indians, the cowboys, the soldiers, the vaqueros, the Deadwood stage, the buffaloes and horses had acted out their various dramas on this circle of earth” (Welch 48). The gimmicks of the American troupe may impress the European audiences, but they do not overshadow the prevailing sense of the past among the community of Native American stunts. Contrary to the French crowd, Welch enables his Lakota performers to see through the vaudeville surroundings of William Cody’s flying circus and notice white people’s tendency to romanticize Native Americans and imprint on them the stamp of the noble savage, who they invariably perceive through the material lens. Charging Elk sarcastically observes that the Indian should invariably appear as “tall and lean. He should have nice clothes. He should look only into the distance and act as though his head is in the clouds” (Welch 38). Welch uses his characters’ musings over the discrepancy in one’s self-perception and their image in the eye of the colonial beholder to signal what Paola Bacchetta terms as the paradoxical requirement of “responding within a dominant grid of intelligibility (that erases and silences us)” which all minorities face when writing in an alien language, yet without “reinforcing that grid (and our erasure and silence)” (Anzaldúa v).

Likewise, Elijah Weesageechak, one of the two Cree snipers in Boyden’s *Three Day Road*, takes up a game of assimilative hide-and-seek when he agrees to subject himself to the Canadian residential school system, using the time spent at a school run by nuns to master the oppressor’s tongue “like one of their bishops” (Boyden 65) and use it to his own advantage in a hostile environment of boarding schools and army barracks. In the grain of Welch’s narrative, Boyden also translates the experience of World War I, commonly idealized by white Canadians as the forge of their nationhood, into a tale of exploitation of skilled workforce by the military, who conned large numbers of Aboriginal men into participating in the bloodshed under the pretext of improving their social and political status upon returning home. Emblematic of this practice are the words Boyden ascribes to one of Canada’s neglected Aboriginal heroes, legendary sharpshooter Francis Pegahmagabow of Wasauksing First Nation, whom the two Cree snipers encounter in a tavern while on furlough. “We do the nasty work for them and if we return home we will be treated like pieces of shit once more,” says “the one they call Peggy” (Boyden 325). Rather notably though, for all the fatalism of circumstances described, these practical Native accounts of the past manage to evade the pitfalls of victimization and grandiloquence, which they criticize as characteristic of epic, non-Aboriginal accounts of the past.

In representing how it may have felt to turn-of-the-century Natives to deal with the immediacy of genocide and cultural uprooting, Welch and Boyden go all the way, including the mundanely ironic insights, such as Charging Elk's observation on the reaction of his digestive tract to an unwelcome change of dietary habits. "Charging Elk didn't like the cheeses—some were dry, others smelly or sticky on his teeth, all gave him diarrhea. But the reservation Indians, who were used to the white man's commodities, ate the cheeses whole and farted all night, much to their enjoyment" (Welch 45). Such use of irony strips the Welch's protagonists of iconic noble savagery, presenting them as down to earth individuals entangled in their historical struggles for survival.

Towards a Topography of Displacement

In her introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Sonia Saldívar Hull poetically refers to the initial chapter of her seminal study, devoted to the historical condition of Chicana/os, as "a topography of displacement" (Anzaldúa 2). The historical map charted by Anzaldúa details in particular the annexation of Northern Mexico by the United States and the subsequent imposition of Anglocentrism, listing consecutive stages in the cultural appropriation of the local Chicana/o population, whose customs and communal knowledge had been consistently erased by the US educational system. Such mappings of historical recovery of appropriated accounts of the past have also been developed by representatives of other ethnic minorities in the United States, constituting an inherent part of modern ethnic fiction, including Native American prose. The redrawing of these maps is in the very foreground of historical novels such as *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Three Day Road*, which use it to explore the complexity of the protagonists' dislocation and the development of internal idioms aiding them in their struggles to cope with their condition.

In both cases, France, where Native protagonists are tossed, alienated and—as it is the case with Charging Elk and Xavier Bird—excluded by their inability to communicate in the language of their immediate surroundings, is a locale of ambivalent qualities, which the Aboriginals strive to grow accustomed to. On the one hand, France seems less sectarian and bigoted than the turn of the century USA or Canada. With no assimilative legislation in force, the French appear as more permissive to and ignorant of Native otherness, at least for as long as the Other keeps their differences to themselves. Although completely estranged, Charging Elk remains free to think and talk to himself in Lakota, observe tribal ceremonies, avoid dis-

enfranchisement and ultimately become a French citizen, marrying a French woman. Charging Elk's ups and downs in continental Europe to an extent do indeed echo those of Yaszek's Black Atlantic writers, in particular James Baldwin's African American expatriates on their quest for self-discovery. Welch's rural France is to Charging Elk what Paris was to the narrator of *This Morning, This Evening, So Soon*, a *locus* of the characters' *bildung* and acquisition of a sense of self-empowerment. Interestingly enough, similarly to Baldwin's protagonist, Charging Elk's sense of self-worth is also strengthened through art. Also mirroring Baldwin's expatriate novels are the novel's stylistic features, including the use of point-of-view narrative, highly polished sentences, crisp descriptions, in the grain of the graceful realist novels of Henry James. Thus, Charging Elk's story in a sense adds an Indigenous shade to the history of representations of expatriate Americans in France.

And yet, as Welch pointed out in the interview given to Lupton, France is also "a forbidding place from the main character's point of view" (1 207). Staying overseas comes at the cost of estrangement: linguistic, cultural and communal. Until his imprisonment and subsequent parole, the spatial confines of Charging Elk's life are narrowed down to the cityscapes of London, Paris and Marseilles, where he is completely separated from the openness of the plains to which he was used as a Lakota. Compared with the copious area of the Stronghold, a place in the Black Hills inhabited by a handful of Lakotas unwilling to yield to US impositions, French cities appear as claustrophobic. Even when moving from one venue to another, Buffalo Bill's personnel travel on night trains, when the surrounding rural landscape becomes invisible. Added to Charging Elk's spatial estrangement is the sullen machinery of French bureaucracy. As a result of a documentation mix-up at the hospital in which the Lakota is treated having fallen off a horse, it occurs that he has been pronounced dead and thus his obstinate existence poses an ontological problem for the French officials, unwilling to amend the mistake in view of inconceivably excessive paperwork. Because the Lakota fails to keep to himself as an alien and transgresses the law by murdering a man who sexually imposes himself on Charging Elk having previously drugged him, Charging Elk spends several years in prison. He is sent to an ancient stronghold of La Tombe, "in the dry hills behind Carcassonne, not far from Montsegur, which the Crusaders of Louis IX laid siege to, capturing the Cathars and burning them alive in a great bonfire" (Welch 344). By juxtaposing the Cathars' last stand with the Lakotas' Stronghold in the Black Hills, which proved to be the last stand of the Lakotas, Welch posits the existence of his Native

protagonist as a “heresy” to the bureaucratic order which struggles to compartmentalize Charging Elk’s otherness and would sincerely appreciate his eradication from its records. Like the Cathars, Charging Elk is an ill-fitting alien adhering to an unorthodox moral code, therefore he is sequestered for the benefit of the French society.

The ambiguity of the alien landscape likewise informs Boyden’s depiction of wartime France in *Three Day Road*, contributing to Xavier Bird’s profound sense of alienation. On the one hand, along the lines of the national historical narrative, displacement of the Cree snipers offers them a chance to enjoy equal treatment as army men, yet the temporary character of this egalitarianism pervades their perception. It is only “while we are here we might as well do what we are good at” (Boyden 325). As in the case of Charging Elk, France seemingly offers Xavier and Elijah a chance to briefly protract the annihilation of their warrior lifestyle. When transplanted into the heart of what “was once beautiful country, but is now mashed earth” (Boyden 232), though, they quickly discover that modern warfare is a travesty of survival in the wild, and sniping is far removed from the innocent thrill of hunting. In Welch’s novel, the Lakotas’ reenactments of the Little Big Horn triumph, which initially provide the Native American performers with a sense of transient satisfaction derived from the fact that although “Buffalo Bill always rescued the *wasichus*—the settlers, the women and children, the people who rode in the stagecoach—from the Indians, but he couldn’t save the longknives” (Welch 70), eventually prove to be inscribed in the dominant Euroamerican narrative.

Displaced from their traditional surroundings, the Aboriginal protagonists are subject to the white gaze which decontextualizes tribal elements, reconfiguring them to suit a nontribal perception (Allen 129). As a result of such a reconfiguration, in the case of Welch and Boyden grounded respectively in the French bourgeois imagination and Canadian colonial ideology, the Lakota performer stranded in Marseilles of the Belle Epoque and the Cree sharpshooters entrenched in the dugouts along the Somme are misconstrued by their white counterparts as “a somewhat lesser animal” (Welch 103). The cultural ignorance of Europeans embalms the Other in the veil of bigoted imagination, as difficult to shed as the shells of mud covering Xavier’s and Elijah’s uniforms. Boyden fittingly evokes the paternalistic rhetoric of turn-of-the-century Canadian assimilationists devoted to kill the Indian in order to save the man, collating the zealous fervor of boarding school nuns and the disciplinarian rigidity of army superiors, equally derogatory to Aboriginal communities which they situate as inferior heathens, whose “rivers run backwards, to the north instead of to the south like in the civilized world” (Boyden 62).

Although differently grounded, their diatribes attest to the inability of homogenous narratives of historical past to encompass the difference and their tendency to suppress the indication that all may not be so quiet on the historiographic front.

The extreme degree of spatial removal to which Welch's and Boyden's protagonists are surrendered is amplified by their linguistic exclusion. As they begin their respective journeys, neither Charging Elk nor Xavier Bird, through whose sensibilities the two novels are narrated, speak any English (or French, for that matter). They "do not understand much of the *wemistikoshiw*" and Xavier confesses explicitly that "it hurts my mouth to try to mimic the silly sound of it" (Boyden 4, 14), which results in his being sidetracked from the bulk of the soldiers' conversations. Likewise, Charging Elk is excluded from most of the legal proceedings during his arrest and trial ensuing from his killing of a gay merchant who drugs the Lakota and attempts to perform fellatio on him. Hampered by his rudimentary French, throughout the court proceedings Charging Elk "couldn't voice a protest, could not explain his circumstances or mount a defense" (Welch 103). His sentence may have been reduced if he had been able to account for his action by invoking the Aboriginal concept of *Siyoko*, the evil presence which "could only be explained in the Lakota tongue" (Welch 338). The condemnation of Charging Elk corresponds to that of the *windigo* hunter and Xavier's great-uncle who, upon killing a Cree woman driven into cannibalism, is arrested by the Canadian authorities and sentenced to death by hanging.

Excluded spatially and estranged from their fellow tribesmen, these Aboriginal protagonists try to tame the alienating landscape through the ingenious use of their native tongue. In their novels, Welch and Boyden both try to reproduce the way in which historically displaced Native Americans may have perceived the foreign locales in which they had been cast. As it has been the practice with a large body of post-colonial works written in languages imposed by the colonizer, in their point-of-view / first person narratives the two writers reconstruct the processes of abrogation and appropriation (Ashcroft 37), through which the subaltern subdue the alien episteme. Although written in English, their accounts resist the categories of the dominant culture, transcending the normative application of the imposed language and liquidizing its fixed meaning. Such a methodology may not be easy, as "one has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own," as Raja Rao puts it (quoted in Ashcroft 60), and yet it allows minorities to voice their radically different interpretations of the past and negotiate the gap between the official history written from the center and the subjugated histories of the

overshadowed margins.

In *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Three Day Road* such subversions of national narratives start at the formal level, for both novels can be seen as an abrogation of two popular genres which white colonizers turned to when chronicling the history of the colonies, and which later underpinned the buildup of North American mythoi. According to such an abrogative reading, Welch's novel formally evokes a colonial captivity narrative in reverse. A lone Lakota warrior is tossed amidst the spiritual darkness of a maritime metropolis, where his internal torments and a profound sense of alienation provide (a slightly ironic) vindication of his character and tribal values, while also enabling him to reassess his current condition. Boyden's retelling of Canada's mistreatment of its Aboriginal heroes bears a caricature resemblance to J.F. Cooper's frontier romances. In the wilderness of no-man's-land, Xavier's and Elijah's shooting skills turn out to be unmatched, as the Cree youths prove incomparably better at white people's warfare than any of their white combatants, thus lampooning the likes of Natty Bumppo.

Boyden takes this reversal of roles to the level of language. He endows Elijah with a flamboyant knack for English, which the Cree sniper masters better than any white Canadians around him. Having "always had a gift for *wemistikoshiw* language" (65), Elijah's uses his superior command of the colonizers' tongue to mockingly assist them in writing elaborate love letters to the spouses of other Canadian soldiers. These abrogative inversions allow Elijah to turn the imperial language against the foundations of the empire's discourse and reinterpret his Aboriginal condition against the bulk of the colonizers' perceptions, employing a subversively humorous trickster hermeneutics. Faced with Canada's commitment to eradicate traditional tribal lifestyle, best embodied by the boarding school nuns' involvement in "striking the heathen from thee" (Boyden 173), Elijah cunningly exposes the policy of appropriation. Himself a trickster (his Cree name means "one who takes different forms at will" (Boyden 174)), Elijah resists the nuns' efforts to force the trickster out of the Indian language when he assumes the role of Xavier's tutor during English classes at school. In a deed deemed sacrilegious by the nuns, yet natural to the Cree culture harmoniously embracing the sacred and the profane at once, Elijah teaches Xavier how to spell English words. The first word Xavier learns to spell in English is 'God,' followed immediately by the word 'shit,' which Elijah quizzically defines as "what comes out of Sister Magdalene's bum" (Boyden 172). Thus, contrary to his educators' desire, Xavier's brief education at the boarding school is instituted upon a transgressive blend of the transcendental

and the earthbound, and as a result of Elijah's twisted pedagogy, Xavier's gradual mastery of English helps him resist assimilation instead of facilitating it.

In both novels, the process of appropriation of the colonial language is further reflected in the authors' use of code switching and their explorations of descriptive definitions aiding the Indigenous characters' cognition of alien space. A frequently employed stylistic device, it has perhaps been most aptly defined in Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* as a bilingual patois, intermingling "the alphabetic writing of the metropolitan center and the pictographic writing of pre-Columbian civilizations" (2). Welch's and Boyden's narratives are remarkably similar in recreating their protagonists' sense of urgency in devising their own variant of English involving code switching, transfers of vocabulary and poetic descriptiveness, all assisting the Aboriginal in gaining foothold in foreign surroundings. Theirs is "a forked tongue, a variation of two languages" (Anzaldúa 77), English with a distinctly Indigenous flair, incorporating a range of tribal words to domesticate the language that is not their own: *wasichus/wemistikoshiw* to refer to white people, *siyoko/windigo* to denote psychopathological anomalies, *Manitou/Wakan Tanka* to address divine presence, *wicasa wakan / hookimaw* to connote medicine (wo)men, are just a handful among dozens of Aboriginal vocabulary items referring to the phenomena which English fails to grasp properly.

In line with the infusion of Aboriginal vocabulary into their narratives is the meticulous way in which both authors reconstruct the cognitive process of radically displaced Native Americans. Unveiling the painstaking process of his protagonist's settlement in France, Welch utilizes what may be identified as the aesthetics of bewilderment. One pointed case of such bewilderment comes as the marooned Lakota wanders about Marseilles and stumbles upon a nativity scene representing a man "in a brown cape," a woman "in a long blue dress and a white cloth that covered her head," and an infant "on some straw that filled a wooden box" (Welch 41). In what looks like a naïve description of a familiar cultural phenomenon, Welch divulges to the reader that if a lot seems bewilderingly arbitrary to the center in its perception of subaltern cultures, then an equally large portion of the center's culture may be just as bewilderingly arbitrary to the eye of a subaltern beholder. While also laboriously developed by Boyden, bewilderment in *Three Day Road* is frequently supplemented by the poetics of simile in the protagonists' internalization of the alien space and the toll it takes on them. Thus, Xavier conceptualizes German U-boats as "great iron fish all around the North Atlantic" (Boyden 208), acquiring a sense of familiarity by means of analogy. This method

proves equally fitting in Xavier's slow adaptation to the Canadian landscape on his return from Europe, which is in turn scarred by his war trauma, due to which the autumn trees around Moose Factory "look like the dead trees of Ypres" (Boyden 123).

Palpably powerful in their evocations of words and images, the aforementioned strategies applied in *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Three Day Road* attest to the formation of new Aboriginal idioms following the historical disintegration of ancient tribal communities. These idioms appear as both highly idiosyncratic and context-dependent, as they are forged to communicate individual dissociation from traditional tribal life, attest to desperate attempts to domesticate unfamiliar landscapes and alleviate the distress inseparably accompanying any historical transformation. In fact, the historical landscapes as represented by Welch and Boyden would to an extent be representative of other accounts of the past produced by members of ethnic minorities. They do, in fact, share significant affinity with Anzaldúa's concept of *Nepantla*, which she defines as

a space between two bodies of water, the space between two worlds. A limited space, where you are not this or that but where you are changing. You haven't got into the new identity yet and haven't left the old identity behind either—you are in a kind of transition. And that is what *Nepantla* stands for. It is awkward, uncomfortable and frustrating to be in that *Nepantla*, because you are in the midst of transformation. (237)

Both *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* and *Three Day Road* respectively underscore the periods of cultural closure imposed on North American Indians, detailing the moments of transition from traditional tribal lifestyle to post-Indian communities, to use Gerald Vizenor's nomenclature (5). Their protagonists' transformations are indeed uncomfortable and frustrating, particularly in the case of Xavier, whose exclusion on his return home is multiple, as he is ignored as both a traumatized veteran, cripple, morphine addict and Indian. Neither Charging Elk nor Xavier remain what they once were—Xavier admits he has become "a different man. I am thinner than when I left Canada, and harder in so many ways" (Boyden 252), while Charging Elk confesses, "I am not the young man who came to this country so long ago" (Welch 437). If there is one major discrepancy between Welch's and Boyden's stories, it is in the ultimate conclusions they draw from their characters' quests. Boyden seems to stipulate the possibility of healing the trauma, which results from genocide, cultural dispossession and shell shock, in the course of healing ceremonies, thus seemingly referring to the traditionally circular narrative pattern of departure and return used by the writers of the Native American Renaissance. And yet there is not much of a tribe to return to for Xavier,

as the disabled veteran can only depend on his medicine woman aunt and, once she dies, he will remain at the mercy of the Canadian government or face certain death in the bush as a cripple. Welch, on the other hand, diverts even further from the orthodox Native American narrative mode, fashioning his story in a way more akin to the contemporary testimonies of genocide survivors, disestablishing the conventional story of recovery and suggesting the infeasibility of his character's return home upon long-term exposure to displacement. Instead, he attempts to hypothesize how lone survivors may have coped with defining themselves against the impossibility to return to the vanishing culture in its unspoiled form.

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C.3.3.: OSCAR WILDE THE PRISONER, AND THE CARCERAL

Pedro Daniel Ríos Jones

It is as a convict, as a point of application for punitive mechanisms, that the offender is constituted himself as the object of possible knowledge.

- Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

On 27 May 1895, Oscar Wilde was sentenced under the Criminal Law Amendment act of 1885 to two years hard labor for “committing acts of gross indecency with other male persons.” In giving Wilde the maximum sentence, along with the clear implication that he would give him a larger one if he could, Justice Wills (the judge presiding over the case) swiftly brought to an end to Wilde’s fame and prosperity. In effect the justice doomed Wilde to play two new roles in life—first that of prisoner and then that of exile. These are very different roles from those of the self-proclaimed Professor of Aesthetes and the Dandy. However, these roles would not be his last, for Art often has posthumous roles awaiting those upon whose head it lays its laurel wreath.

When the libel trial against the Marquess of Queensberry began on 3 April 1895, Wilde had two plays running in the West End: *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Not only were these his most commercially successful plays, but the latter continues to be considered his most flawless theatrical piece. Just four years prior to this Wilde had commenced his final climb to the top with the publication of his only novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The novel’s espousal of hedonism, its decadent aspects, and its homoerotic overtones caused a scandal and a critical backlash, which forced Wilde to defend his art by putting himself further into the public spotlight. Yet as Trevor Fisher has pointed out, “Oscar’s baiting of the Philistines was deliberate, and designed to create a reaction” (30), thus Wilde was courting this controversy, harnessing it to increase his fame. Following this was the thoroughly decadent and decidedly symbolist *Salomé* (1891). *Salomé*, the story of Salomé’s attempted seduction

of John the Baptist and his subsequent beheading, was banned in England because at the time it was illegal to depict biblical characters on stage. Finally, and in rapid succession, came Wilde's society comedies, propelling him to fame and fortune and setting the stage for his tragic and sudden fall from grace.

Clearly Wilde was at the height of his creative powers as the first trial (the libel trial against the Marquess of Queensberry) began. However for most of his prison sentence, and the few years he was alive after his release, Wilde produced very little artistic output¹—the poem “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” and the long letter *De Profundis*² (1897). For a man of letters accustomed to a life of leisure, prison was a veritable death sentence. In addition to hard labor, prisoners subjected to the separate system³ were not allowed to talk to each other for any reason—neither was Wilde allowed to write anything until the end of his sentence. This was a far cry from his previous life of lavish spending, decadent pleasure seeking, and periodically composing artistic work. Yet when he was finally allowed pen and paper, Wilde proved that his creative ability had not diminished by composing *De Profundis* in his last months in Reading Gaol. In *De Profundis* Wilde embraces the suffering that characterizes punishment and comes to understand it as a different mode of life. One characterized by pain much in the same manner his previous life was characterized by pleasure—and ultimately exposing the transformative and subversive potential of this presumably oppressive carceral experience.

In direct contrast to this is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Dorian, who sells his soul for eternal youth in order to preserve his uncanny beauty, becomes imprisoned by a decadent discourse that, if not of his own creation, he makes uniquely his own. Here we find the artist rising at full steam, scheming, exploring, and manifesting the myriad possibilities made real in Art. In regards to his identification with the characters in the novel Wilde offers us the following: “I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages perhaps” (Wilde, *Picture ix*). Thus *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a

¹ Wilde did however write letters prolifically during this time, continuing a lifelong trend.

² *De Profundis* was written in prison (between January and March 1897) but was left unpublished until 1910 when Robert Ross, his friend and literary executor, published a version without references to Lord Alfred “Bosie” Douglas—the person to whom the letter is addressed.

³ The separate system was based on the belief that prisoners had to face up to themselves. The system sought to achieve this by isolating convicts to their cells in order to break their wills by being kept in total silence and in long pointless hours of hard labor.

place where Wilde⁴ (and the reader) works out issues of decadence, and the potential effects of the discourse and behavior that make it up, ultimately proving that a presumably liberating discourse such as decadence has the potential to be also both imprisoning and oppressive.

As Michel Foucault states:

I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of “liberation” or and another is of the order of “oppression”...no matter how terrifying a system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience...on the other hand, I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice. (*The Foucault Reader* 245)

Thus, one can view Decadence, a presumably liberating practice, as oppressive or even carceral—just as one can see the prison system, a presumably oppressive practice, as liberating. As both Decadence and the subjugation of the body to the prison system contribute to the artist in his construction/conception of the self (or to use more Wildean wording—utilize different modes of life to narrate the self), these experiences can be seen as limit experiences—a technology of the self which is essentially an experience that pushes the boundaries of the self. This relates to the way we exist and how we perceive and create that existence. The ways in which both Wilde and Foucault propose to deal with these ontological issues are remarkably similar: the former proposes that we treat life as a work of art, as does the latter, the first calls it life as a work of art, the second the arts of existence. Both agree that existence is a life-long project, and both were in their lives and works committed to pushing the limits.⁵

Though the examples above give one the general idea of how Wilde and Foucault are linked in regards to how they view issues of the self, it is important to understand just how much their strands of thought connect and thus why certain tools that Foucault left us form a useful framework through which to view Wilde’s work. Understanding the parallels in their thought will allow us to examine the evolution of these ideas in the realm of art—a strange and wonderful place. To this end we must first take a look at the Victorians and the parallels between their society and ours. The foremost connection is that many of the technologies (discursive and otherwise) of contemporary society were first deployed in the nineteenth century. The spreading

⁴ “To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim” (Wilde 3).

⁵ Both Wilde and Foucault promote the blurring of the distinction between art and philosophy. As O’Farrell states, “Foucault had long wanted to be able to describe his own work as art to break down the traditional divisions between art and intellectual knowledge” (118). In *De Profundis* Wilde states, “I made art a philosophy, and philosophy an art” (Wilde 1017).

of the British Empire, upon which the sun never set, over swaths of the world ensured that these technologies (techniques of power, industrialization, Darwinism, methods of organization, etc.) were well dispersed. The best analysis of this phenomenon is Foucault's seminal *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Here Foucault traces the history of punishment from the end of the medieval period, through the change from sovereign power to that of disciplinary power, the labor of refining that new power, to its deployment in the Victorian period and the establishment of a disciplinary society. Further, the highly influential concept of the carceral, and by extension the forms of power associated with a disciplinary society, are based on Jeremy Bentham's⁶ Panopticon prison design—which was the authoritative design in prison architecture.

We must then consider the connections Wilde brings into play. As a late Victorian he has a distinctive place in the history of Western literature, he is a bridge to modernism, and as such is a figure of transition. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, is a novel that captures the mood of this medium towards an intense focus on the individual. Wilde's work and celebrity were certainly forward looking, for example, in his career he made extensive use of his image, discarding one when it was no longer useful and adopting new ones as he saw fit—thus making his identity fluid and malleable. The unique position that Wilde has with past and present, the space he occupies in literary history, and the fact that over a century after his death his plays are put on, his epigrams are in use, his works adapted in diverse mediums, all point to both the continuing relevance of the issues Wilde worked out in his art and his enduring legacy.

The remainder of this essay will explore how the carceral, a presumably inherently oppressive system, can also have the opposite of its intended effect: in short how the prison too can be a site of liberation. The carceral/disciplinary system effects punishment upon the individual by claiming the individual's body in the name of offences committed against the social body. The body, placed in an austere institution and subjected to disciplinary power, is then transformed into a docile one by strict organized training, observation and surveillance. Though the subject is supposed to emerge from this experience of punishment reformed, the sad truth of the matter is that much more

⁶ Bentham was extraordinarily influential in the Victorian period. His philosophy (Utilitarianism) was a "synthesis of economic, political, and social thought," which was essentially hedonistic in its ethics in that it relied on a pleasure over pain principle. Called either felicific calculus or moral arithmetic, a formula was developed which could serve as guide in any given choice or action. Its economy was laissez faire and its beliefs secular. It should also be noted that early in the Victorian era Benthamites were able to effect reforms in the penal code (Altick 115-141).

often than not this experience brings about recidivism and ultimately career criminals.⁷ Thus, throughout its history the prison has proven time and time again that, despite constant reform to the system it is inadequate in the functions it solemnly promises to society. Its failure is stark and remains unchanged for centuries. As we will see below, over a century ago Oscar Wilde would suffer from the effects of the prison both while in gaol and after his release. However the question we must ask now is: does the oppressive tendency of this system, and its many mechanisms and auxiliary technologies, necessarily connote the stifling of individual progress/development? Is it the case that an individual cannot use the space to liberate heretofore-unknown aspects of the self? In order to answer these questions we will begin by examining Wilde's time in prison,⁸ his treatment, the conditions, his day-to-day routine, etc. Following this we will examine his encounter with suffering as a limit experience, one in which he pushes on the limits he set for himself earlier in life (i.e. a life of pleasure). Lastly, will be a discussion of Wilde's delineation of his artistic future in *De Profundis*—the potential he sees in his prison experience and how he proposes to reshape his being in relation to it. In other words how he proposes to change the way he creates his art and make his life in light of his new experiences.

It is commonly assumed that Oscar Wilde spent the entirety of his sentence at Reading Gaol. In fact, Wilde's role as convicted prisoner begins at Pentonville Prison in north London. Pentonville was opened in 1842 and was considered a model penitentiary; it was also the prison, which with its opening, introduced the separate system from the USA into Britain:

The central idea [of the separate system] was to keep prisoners apart from one another much as possible: as part of the punishment and to discourage further corruption from mixing with hardened criminals... Within this system the chaplain played an important part, encouraging the prisoners to turn away from their previous ways and to look to religion. The disadvantage of the system lay in the negative psychological effect of the total isolation and associated solitary confinement when in a cell; it was claimed that prisoners had gone mad from the intensity of the silence. (Stokes 30-31)

Known as one of the greatest conversationalists in recorded history, this must have been a silent hell for Wilde. On 4 July 1895, just over a month after arriving at Pentonville, Wilde was transferred to

⁷ This can be clearly seen, not only in statistics, but in contemporary television programs such as *Gang Land* (History Channel) and *Lock Up: Raw* (MSNBC), among many others.

⁸ The greatest resource for this is Anthony Stokes' *Pit of Shame: The Real Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Stokes position as a warder in Reading Gaol for over twenty years not only gives his study insight, but also allowed him a unique access to prison documents.

Wandsworth Prison; in late November he was finally transferred to Reading Gaol.

Reading Gaol has a long history; in fact for almost five hundred years there has been a county gaol in Reading.⁹ This places Reading Gaol in an interesting position for it has, as an institution, gone through the entire change from sovereign power to disciplinary power. As Foucault explains in *Discipline and Punish*, at the end of the medieval period there began a change in the way to punish. In the medieval period the power came from the king (who was bestowed this by God); thus to break the law was to offend the king, and the king had the right to exact bloody revenge upon the body of the condemned. This punishment was therefore necessarily brutal and violent; it was also a public spectacle where thousands gathered.¹⁰ The Enlightenment/Age of Reason changed this, for the power no longer comes from the king, it is now that of the people. Slowly but surely the spectacle ceases and punishment is taken into the shadows in order to be more “humane”—in order to hide our shame and increase control. Techniques are created, techniques of coercion, subjugation, training and surveillance, a new form of power is produced and deployed—disciplinary power. Reading Gaol went through this entire process and carries on to this day.

At Reading, Wilde would acquire the last of many names he would bear, C.3.3.¹¹ This was the number of his cell; it was on C block (the ward that held convicted prisoners), C3 landing, cell number 3.¹² The cell, like all others in Reading, was 13 ft. (length) x 7 ft (width) x 10 ft (height). The cell was sparse, containing a stool, a small table, shelves, a drawer, and a copper basin for washing and the like. A prisoner was allowed six gallons of water a day for all needs including waste. Every morning the prisoner would remove his/her¹³ own

⁹ Its location has of course been moved during the five centuries of its existence.

¹⁰ The last public execution held at Reading Gaol was that of John Gould. At Reading public executions took place on the roof of the gaol because that was the place with the most even surface. There were an estimated 4,000 people in attendance (most of whom, as usual for public executions, were women). Gould remained alive for two minutes before his life ended and was left on display for an hour (as was the custom). Following this all other executions were held privately. For a full account of John Gould’s crime and punishment see Stokes (68-72). For the entire history of executions at Reading sees Stokes “Chapter 4: Executions”.

¹¹ It is under this name that Wilde would publish *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.

¹² Reading Gaol was redesigned in 1844 in the Pentonville design, which was itself based on the Panopticon design. This design was “in the shape of a four-spoked wheel” (Stokes 34) with each spoke radiating from the center, in the center was “a large open area that commanded a full view of all wards as the radiated out from it; enabling security and control to be maintained from a single, central point by a minimum of prison officers” (34).

¹³ Since its beginnings men, women, and children have been prisoners at Reading. Women

waste and dump it in the allotted area outside the cell. Every cell also included a Bible and a prayer book. Wilde's diet at this time consisted of two pints of rice milk and a pound and a half of coarse bread daily, every other day a half-pound of meat and potatoes was served and on some days soup. The diet caused Wilde suffer from acute diarrhea and contributed to his extreme weight loss and declining health in prison, it also made his cell rank with the stench of his own waste. For most of the day prisoners were kept in their cells in isolation, the only exception to this was during the long hours of hard labour, and the one hour of exercise. To ensure their silence prisoners were made to wear a 'Scottish cap' (a leather hat that covered the face and had two slits for the eyes) at all times when not in their cell.

Though Wilde clearly had it hard in prison as he says in *De Profundis* "I am one of those who are made for exceptions, not for laws" (Wilde 1027), and this was no less true during his incarceration. While in Pentonville for example Wilde received a visit from Prison Commissioner R.B. Haldane, one of the most powerful people in the prison system at the time. Haldane first got Wilde books, to which Pentonville's governor (i.e. warden) strongly protested as it went against the rules of the separate system. Haldane also got Wilde transferred¹⁴ from Pentonville to Wandsworth where there was a more sympathetic chaplain, and eventually to Reading Gaol. The governor at Reading was the by the book Colonel Isaacson whom Wilde detested. Wilde complained about Isaacson and the latter was promoted to another prison, with the much more liberal-minded Major Nelson replacing him. Nelson was sympathetic to Wilde and gave him more books, even going so far as set aside money to acquire more for him, and eventually allowed him to write. In addition to the assistance from Haldane there was George W. Palmer, owner of the Palmer biscuit factory at Reading (the town), and a family friend of Wilde's. Palmer, being an outstanding and influential person in Reading was part of Reading Gaol's Visiting Committee. The Prison Act of 1877 formed visiting Committees, which consisted of an independent group of citizens "who could come into a prison at any time, inspect and investigate any issues, and award punishments on prisoners over and above the authority of the governor...[they] answered only to the Prison Commission and the Government" (Stokes 81). Thus Wilde had help on the inside, which made his prison experience smoother, just a bit more bearable, and ultimately allowed him to survive and to compose his letter to Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas, *De Profundis*.

prisoners were held at Reading until the 1915. In 1951 Reading was reclassified as a borstal correctional institution (i.e. juvenile detention center).

¹⁴ Wilde's fifteen books followed him throughout.

When Oscar Wilde met Bosie in 1891, Wilde was beginning the peak of his career, as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had recently been published and was very much in the public eye at the time. They quickly became inseparable; this attachment would persist even after their deaths' as both men are continually defined by each other. The relationship began well enough as Bosie introduced Wilde to the seedy underground Victorian homosexual scene—indeed it was through Bosie that Wilde would meet the many rent boys he feasted with. Wilde was so enamored that he essentially abandoned his family to be with his lover. Though all seemed well at first, Bosie's temper soon got the best of him. He would often throw childish tantrums where he would become angry and cruel. Eventually Bosie's father, the Marquess of Queensberry, got wind of their relationship and began harassing Bosie and then Wilde. This situation came to a head when Queensberry left his card for Wilde at the Albemarle Club inscribed: "For Oscar Wilde, posing somdomite [sic]." After all the harassment (on several occasions Queensberry tried to disrupt Wilde's plays) Wilde had had enough and began legal proceedings to prosecute Queensberry for libel. This of course had disastrous consequences for Wilde: losing meant that he was open to a counter suit and eventually imprisonment. It is worth noting here that while many of his friends and family asked Wilde to flee the country, seeing that the trial was clearly impossible to win, Bosie was not one of these, as he wanted to see his father publicly humiliated. Because of the intensity of their relationship and the effect it had on Wilde's life, at the end of his prison sentence he would write a long love letter to Bosie (*De Profundis*). Here he would give his account of their relationship and its disastrous effects, as well as delineate the grand possibilities for his post-prison development as individual and artist.

In *De Profundis* (1897)¹⁵ Wilde's subject becomes that of suffering and how it may liberate the soul. The work was written in prison and clearly demonstrates a mode of life characterized by suffering much the same way the decadent's is characterized by pleasure. Through this Wilde utilizes the technologies of self-exposition, self-ordering, and self-invention encoded in various symbols (Christ, poets, and art). Through his subjugation to the power of the carceral by the prison system, a presumably oppressive experience, Wilde is able to find freedom from the discourses that had previously bound his behavior. His body being worked upon by power, his soul becomes free to earnestly participate in the examination. As an author however

¹⁵ Though written in 1897 *De Profundis* was not published until 1905. Robert Ross, who expurgated all references to Bosie, edited this version. It was not until 1962 that the entire letter was published accurately.

he is in a unique position in that he can use his self-invention to self-narrate, leaving behind the artifacts of this process, for “To reveal art and conceal the artist is art’s aim” (Wilde, *Picture* 17). The prison experience can then be seen as another form of limit experience in that it forces the self to observe and catalogue the self, to scrutinize the self, creating another extreme form of the examination and pushing at the boundaries of its definition. Because it was written in prison *De Profundis* offers particular insights that are ripe for such analysis.

In terms of limit experiences in *De Profundis*, Wilde pushes the boundaries he had set for himself concerning pleasure as a mode of existence. In prison his new mode of life is suffering, as he says:

But, we who live in prison, and in whose lives there is no event but sorrow, have to measure time by throbs of pain, and the record of bitter moments. We have nothing else to think of. Suffering—curious as it may sound to you—is the means by which we exist, because it is the only means by which we become conscious of existing; and the remembrance of suffering in the past is necessary to us as the warrant, the evidence, of our continued identity. (Wilde, *CW* 990)

Thus it is clear that through suffering the prisoner affirms his existence; further it comes to form the very evidence of identity. This evidence is produced by self-examination (remembrance), through which the prisoner is able to assert his existence and avoids losing his identity to the system that subjugates him. Suffering assists in the definition of the self, for without the outside world through which to define himself and in the solitary confinement of the cell, there is a necessary turn inwards which, though painful, contextualizes the individual (both historically and in relation to the self). Immersed in an existence of punishment characterized by suffering Wilde is forced to affirm his existence through something other than mere pleasure. In this way he ceases to be mastered and becomes master of himself. Though it is clear that his body belongs to the prison system, Wilde here reclaims his soul by reconstructing his outlook in relation to what he is experiencing. As he writes:

Sorrow, then, and all it teaches one, in my new world. I used to live entirely for pleasure. I shunned sorrow and suffering of every kind. I hated both. I resolved to ignore them as far as possible, to treat them, that is to say, as modes of imperfection. They were not part of my scheme of life. They had no place in my philosophy. (*Complete Works* 1023)

Wilde jumps from one extreme to another; he calls suffering “the secret of life” and sorrow “the supreme emotion of which man is capable.” This is a far cry from the pleasure-seeking decadent he used to be. Indeed he goes so far as to say that, “Other things [pleasure] may be illusions of the eye of the appetite, made to blind the one and cloy the other, but out of Sorrow have worlds been built, and at the

birth of a child or a star there is pain” (1024). Evidently Wilde realizes that in being blinded by sensual experiences he became a slave to pleasure: in short that he was imprisoned by the very desires through which he sought liberation.

Though it may seem that Wilde is merely exchanging one extreme for another, he does recognize that, “What the artist [of the self] is always looking for is that mode of existence in which the soul and body are one and indivisible: in which the outward is expressive of the inward...the soul made incarnate: the body instinct with spirit” (1024). Thus Wilde is figuring out what was only hinted at in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, that what one should seek in being is an artistic life, by this I mean a life that is being made itself into a work of art, one that is balanced between body and soul, the sensual and the spiritual. In fact they should complement each other in such a way that one becomes a visible symbol of the other, making existence/being an expressive project that can only rightly be achieved by being an active participant in one’s own creation. Wilde does this in prison through self-reflection and self-narration, in being allowed to write he is able to work on/out himself.

Thus the relationship between the body and soul that is desired is one of balance. Further, Wilde recognizes that “it is tragic how few people ever ‘possess their souls’ before they die” (1021) and later upon his shedding of the bitterness that threatened to consume him at the beginning of his prison sentence, “It was of course my soul in its ultimate essence I had reached” (1030). These lines demonstrate an intricate knowledge of the workings of the body and soul, which can only come about as the result of long meditation or self-reflection, in short, an intense self-examination. Yet, if one does not possess one’s own soul who does? The answer to this would have to be the numerous discourses that exercise power over it. It seems then that it is only through the process of suffering and self-examination that the soul may be brought back into the fold of the self and cease to be a mere prison for body.

In addition to this revelation, Wilde proposes to reshape himself as an artist in relation to his prison experience by using what he has learned about himself to construct a mode of art that is new to him. He begins delineating this by stating, “If I ever write again, in the sense of producing artistic work, there are just two subjects on which and through which I desire to express myself: one is ‘Christ as precursor to the Romantic movement in life’: the other is ‘the Artistic life considered in its relation to Conduct’” (1034).

In the first, “Christ as precursor to the Romantic movement in

life,” Wilde sees in “Christ not merely the essentials of the supreme romantic type, but all the accidents, the wistfulness even, of the romantic temperament also” (1034-1035). In this way Wilde observes in Christ the manifestation of the full potential of the Romantic, “He [Christ] felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped in any form was death” (1034). What is most important here is that Wilde is recognizing the how active existence should be, and by extension how inactive his previous existence had become. In Christ, he sees room for qualities he had not yet fully explored in his person—sympathy as morality, the love of ignorant people, and the need for repentance. The latter Wilde views as “the means by which one alters one’s past” (1037). This is notable for here he is finding, through the story of Christ, his own need and ability to alter his past, to relate to it (and himself) in a different manner, through a different system. Ultimately he concludes:

The charm about Christ, when all is said... [is that] he is just like a work of art himself. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something. And everybody is predestined to his presence. Once at least in his life each man walks with Christ to Emmaus. (1037)

Thus like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, everyone is predestined, without knowing, to sharing one’s deepest concerns with Christ, through this recognizing him, and through him recognizing life. For in sharing one’s deepest concerns with Christ one is at once sharing them with oneself. This confession and subsequent recognition is not to/of Christ the person, but the divine within us all. As in art, on this road, one has only what one brings. That Wilde compares Christ’s function to that of Art is significant for in this way he brings everything back to living life as a work of art (one of his own central tenets). Thus he is reconstructing his philosophy from the ground up, replacing certain structures with others and actively participating in his own ontological project. In this way he is organizing his own being.

The other subject Wilde proposes to center his possible future artistic productions on, “the Artistic life in relation to Conduct,” is a remarkably appropriate one considering it was Wilde’s own artistic life and its relation to his conduct that landed him in gaol in the first place. With this however he seems to want to assert that an Artistic life is not one which essentially leads to punishment. Claiming that those “whose desire is solely for self-realization never know where they are going” (1038), he thus highlights the uncertainty of the journey of the self in life, even for those to whom it is a conscious and active project. Wilde also notes the importance of recognizing “that

the soul of man is unknowable...[that] the final mystery is oneself” (1038). He equates this realization with wisdom, the ultimate wisdom in fact, and in this way demonstrates his desire to search his soul and through it overcome the experiences he has gone through—essentially to rewrite himself in such a way that at the end of his life *he* will be satisfied with it. This is a stark change from the man who sought fame at all costs, for he no longer wishes to define himself through the way others see him, but through the way he sees himself. In *De Profundis* Wilde sees the potential for a fluid refashioning of his identity as an individual and an artist, but sadly these things would remain in the realm of potentiality.

Ultimately Wilde acknowledges: “I hope to live long enough, and to produce work of such a character, that I shall be able at the end of my days to say, ‘Yes: this is where the artistic life leads a man’” (1038). Unfortunately this was not to be. Why then was Wilde’s project derailed? Why did the myriad potentials he saw not come into existence? Here Foucault can provide a possible answer. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault outlines the effects of the deprivation of liberty by law and “the simultaneous system that has historically been superimposed on the juridical deprivation of liberty” (271):

Prisons do not diminish the crime rate: they can be extended, multiplied or transformed, the quality of crime and criminals remains stable or, worse, increases.

- Detention causes recidivism; those leaving prison have more chance than before of going back to it; convicts are, in a very high proportion, former inmates.
- The prison cannot fail to produce delinquents...[it] also produces delinquents by imposing violent constraints on its inmates; it is supposed to apply the law, and to teach respect for it; but all its functioning operates in the form of an abuse of power. The arbitrary power of administration.
- The conditions to which the free inmates are subjected necessarily condemn them to recidivism: they are under the surveillance of the police; they are assigned to a particular residence, or forbidden others.
- Lastly, the prison indirectly produces delinquents by throwing the inmates family into destitution. (265-268)

Tragically in the three years of his life after release Wilde would fall into the trap of most of these effects. To begin with, he quickly went back to his old ways, eventually going so far as to continue his relationship with Bosie (much to the dismay of both his wife and Bosie’s

family).¹⁶ This culminated in the infamous Naples Experiment, where for various months they lived together in a house in Naples, Italy. This ended when they ran out of money (having been cut off from all sources) and Bosie had left. In addition, though he was no longer in England and therefore no longer subject to English law, since his decadent behavior continued (and eventually consumed him) he could be considered a recidivist. It has already been demonstrated that power was exercised on Wilde and his fellow inmates at Reading Gaol: the violent constraints he went through, the abuse of power, and the administration of his body. While in exile, for some months, the Marquess of Queensberry had him followed by private investigators he hired to ensure that Wilde's relationship with his son did not resume. He was also outcast from his own country and ultimately Wilde's family was left destitute. Because Wilde lost the libel trial against Queensberry he had to pay the Marquess' legal fees, leading to the auction of all of Wilde's belongings at the house on Tite Street, leaving his wife and children without a home and penniless. In addition to this his wife, Constance, and children had to leave England for the continent, as well as change their names. Hence, Wilde clearly fell prey to the post-carceral effects of the prison system.

A century later the crime Wilde was convicted of, and severed two years hard labor for, is no longer a crime in England. The historical context in which Wilde found himself made it a crime punishable by law. Wilde did however commit a crime for which only he could hold himself accountable. Far from simply living in flagrant defiance of the rules of his society, or a mere crime of moral turpitude, his crime was that he squandered his gifts: his genius, a loving and devoted wife, two beautiful children, and a brilliant career: in short a crime against his self. All of this brings us to the unfortunate conclusion that Wilde failed in his project, and this perhaps is the greatest tragedy of his life—that through a combination of internal and external factors Wilde was unable to bring himself back from the depths. Like Dorian, he gives up, unwilling to be an active participant in his own existence; in fact, he surrendered himself to the life of a pauper, begging his friends for money, drinking himself to death, drowning his sorrows and regrets in brandy and absinthe in the seedy cafes of Paris, and ultimately dying in a cheap hotel, penniless and without having produced a work of art in years. Yet, in *De Profundis* Wilde resists the very system that enslaves him. Wilde used his connections to gain access (albeit limited) to books and writing utensils. This coupled with experiences are the raw materials for creating his art. In writing

¹⁶ In fairness one must mention that for some time after his release Wilde refused to see Bosie, but as in the past Bosie eventually wore Wilde down and the later acceded to his wishes.

a love letter to his homosexual lover from prison, and further using the medium to expose the possibilities of freedom he finds in that site of oppression, Wilde practiced freedom—a kind of liberation few before or since have practiced.

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**THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND
NATURE, AND THEIR DECAY IN THE FACE
OF INDUSTRIALIZATION IN
WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' *PATERSON***

Carlos D. Acosta-Ponce

William Carlos Williams delineates his concerns with industrialization and its effects on humankind through the consistent, constant use of decaying, corrupted, eroded, and otherwise subverted natural imagery as poetic devices. The city of Paterson, New Jersey, and in a broader sense, Passaic County, serve as the cornerstone of his poetic vision in his quest to create “a long poem upon the resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city” (*Paterson* xiii). From his musings on Alexander Hamilton’s industrialist vision and his economic goals for America to the effects of industrialization on the environment, Williams repeatedly equates the corruption and decay of the landscape to that of humankind as a whole. Thus, where Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* constitute an epic encompassing his views on what he perceived to be the evils of the world, Williams’ epic uses the microcosm of the city of Paterson to address his concerns regarding an increasingly industrialized United States that Robert Lowell describes as “Whitman’s America, grown pathetic and tragic, brutalized by inequality, disorganized by industrial chaos, and faced with annihilation” (190). In the most basic sense, Williams searches for a purely American poetic voice that will allow humankind to contextualize itself in relationship to nature while addressing the dialectic between nature’s inherent beauty, its decay and its variants of rot, corruption, stagnation, degradation, and destruction, as well as the effects of pollution caused by humans. These become central to Williams and to *Paterson*’s environmental concerns.

Although Williams died in 1963 and did not live to see how contemporary culture has come to have an increasingly more informed understanding of humanity’s place in the world and its relationship with nature, he appears to have anticipated some of the modern environmental movement’s ideas about the importance of the envi-

ronment and the landscape, not only as poetic subjects, but as something to be cherished and protected because of its interrelationship with humanity. For example, in her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, credited with starting the modern environmental movement, Rachel Carson shares Williams' concerns about industrialization and the environment. In the introduction for the 2002 edition of *Silent Spring*, Linda Lear argues that the book "contained the kernel of social revolution" (vii) in the face of postwar United States' industrial development. Like Williams, Carson had extensive education in both the humanities and science, and was able to understand the scientific principles behind the destruction of the environment, particularly the use of pesticides such as DDT. Also like Williams, she came from a place (Springdale, Pennsylvania) where industrialization had destroyed an otherwise pristine riverside town that became "a grimy wasteland, its air fouled by chemical emissions, its river polluted by industrial waste" (xiii). The first chapter of *Silent Spring* tells the story of an idyllic American town where nature was unspoiled and the air, water, plants and other natural resources were clean, healthy and plentiful. Then, "a strange blight crept over the area" (Carson 2) and the people and animals began to fall ill, with many dying. Everything became still and the sounds of nature were muted, and Carson explains that "No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves" (3). Like Carson, Williams recognizes the role of humankind in the destruction of the environment and *Paterson* is his anticipation of what would become the modern environmental movement.

This essay explores the role of the environment in Williams' *Paterson* from an ecocritical/ecopoetic perspective, evaluating the text in terms of its portrayal of the environment and nature, while concentrating on the relationship between the poetry and the physical environment described in it, and the tension/interaction between the rural and urban settings and their elements of the wilderness, the river, the mountain, and the city. To a lesser extent, this essay also examines how Williams' historical analysis of *Paterson* outlines the ecological history of the area. More broadly, this essay looks at *Paterson* from the perspective of environmental literature and what Greg Garrard calls "the relationship between the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing the critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). In retrospect, and in its broadest sense, *Paterson* can be classified as an ecopoem, having a discernible tone of reconnection towards nature, resistance towards anti-ecological perspectives such as unchecked industrialism and technological advancements, and contains a vision for an improved,

healthier and more beneficial relationship with the environment. Additionally, the long form of the poem allows for Paterson to be much more nuanced when addressing environmental concerns than shorter forms of poetry. *Paterson* can be seen as text “that investigates—both thematically and formally—the relationship between nature and culture, language and perception” (Gander). Although other scholars such as Lothar Hönnighausen disagree with this assessment, stating that Williams’ “discussion has tended to focus more on literary history and aesthetics than on politics [and that] such neglect of the socio-political dimension would be unacceptable in ecopoetical poem” (279), *Paterson* is clearly underscored by environmental concerns and the role of society in the corruption of the landscape.

Leonard Scigaj suggests “that language is a positive instrument that can promote authentic social and environmental relations between humans and their environment—relations that can lead to emancipatory social change” (33). Indeed, two of Williams’ characteristic poetic pursuits in *Paterson* are the search for an adequate poetic language, that American idiom, and the interchange of man and certain aspects of his environment in order to compel a new awareness in citizens of the city. Mark Long explains that “generations of readers have come to understand Williams’s poetics through the phrase ‘No ideas but in things,’ those deceptively simple words found in the opening lines of the book-length poem *Paterson*. The phrase signifies a poetics predicated not on ideas but rather on things, underscoring a poetic project that seeks immediate contact with the world” (58). Williams draws parallels between a decaying environment and what he perceives to be a decaying humanity to underscore an ethical dilemma between progress and the advancement of society, and the cost to its citizens; furthermore, Williams’ treatment of the city and its surrounding areas as a living organism allow him to point at the negative effects of industrialization over an environment that is inextricable from the human condition.

Williams’ concern with industrialization and the decay of the environment has been well-documented. In his exploration of Williams’ 1923 volume of poetry, *Spring and All*, Josh Wallaert explains that:

in 1921 the town of Rutherford passed its first zoning ordinance. During the next fifteen years, the population was to grow by fifty percent, as the construction of the Holland Tunnel linked New Jersey to metropolitan New York. Williams was not removed from the social and environmental concerns of his time. He wrote a letter to the *Rutherford Republican* to propose that a new high school be built on the Peter Kipp estate rather than in a busy commercial district downtown, and he later joined efforts to preserve the woods as a public park. (93)

Wallaert’s passage shows that Williams was not only aware of threats

to the environment, but also felt an ethical responsibility to protect it, and took steps to contribute to ecological conservation efforts. Similar to *Paterson*, *Spring and All* combines sections of prose and free verse, and according to Joshua Schuster, “can help us understand how it was possible for Williams to argue for the local with an avant-garde poetics that relies on formal techniques of dislocation” (116). The formal elements that Williams implements in *Paterson* had already been tested in *Spring and All*, and the fragmented quality of the poem’s narrative serves as a backdrop for the fragmented relationship between the individual and the environment. For example, in the poem “Spring and All,” Williams seems to be previewing the environmental concerns that will later be addressed in *Paterson*:

All along the road the reddish
purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy
stuff of bushes and small trees
with dead, brown leaves under them
leafless vines—
Lifeless in appearance, sluggish. (“Spring and All” 1924)

The description of a stark landscape where vegetation is struggling to survive and where the environment is decayed foreshadows how these poetic elements will be subsequently implemented in *Paterson*. Although the condition of the landscape in this passage is the result of natural processes and the life cycle of the countryside, it is the interruption of these organic processes that become the central concern in Williams’ views on industrialization and its effects on the environment in *Paterson*.

Choosing *Paterson*, New Jersey as the canvas upon which he would capture his vision of American history, modern society, and the changes caused by and happening to both, Williams voices his concerns on the themes of industrialization, dehumanization, economic stagnation, and a socio-political system that he sees as becoming increasingly dated. In the first two books of *Paterson*, these themes are woven together by a constant motif: beauty as a subjective, concrete notion, and its subversion through images of corruption, decay, and death, particularly regarding the natural landscape. By Books III, IV, and V, the corruption pervades both the rural and urban settings, no longer allowing the prevalence of the unspoiled landscape alluded to in Book I.

In *Paterson*’s opening lines, the initial description of the city and its surroundings as a slumbering giant is characterized by an idyllic, paradisiacal atmosphere:

Paterson lies in the valley under the Passaic Falls
its spent waters forming the outline of his back. He

lies on his right side, head near the thunder
of the waters filling his dreams! Eternally asleep,
his dreams walk about the city where he persists
incognito. Butterflies settle in his stone ear.(6)

This imagery in this passage is distinctly beautiful, and is characterized by the raw power of unspoiled nature, without any mention of human influence. Williams' descriptive, visual language evokes a tranquil scene where nature has run its course and is in perfect serenity and order. Nevertheless, the idyllic qualities of the scene are instantly subverted by the natural decay of the landscape, characterized by images of "oozy fields ... dead grass ... withered weed-stalks" (7). The use of such imagery following the initial description of the landscape transforms an otherwise beautiful scene into a desolate setting, characterized by rotting vegetation and images of death, decay and stagnation, thus subverting any idealized or romanticized notion of natural beauty and ecological balance. By inserting the image of a naturally decomposing locale, Williams established the need for natural decay as a crucial part of the perpetuation of life. Later, Williams goes on to explain role of humans in the interruption of these natural processes:

Half the river red, half steaming purple
from the factory vents, spewed out hot,
swirling, bubbling. The dead bank,
shining mud . . . (36)

This description of how the waste products from the factories have ruined the river summarizes Williams' views on human influence over the environment, progress, and the industrialization of Paterson, thus the nexus between the rural and urban spaces is established with the advent of an invasive, interloping, man-made industrial complex. Human intervention has disrupted the natural cycle of decay and renewal, and these lines also show how every element of the rural, idyllic, paradisiacal Passaic Falls has been corrupted by human hands. Thus, for Williams, the idea of a wilderness where nature is uncontaminated by industrial progress embodies his vision of "the elemental character of the place" (xiv), without the influence of humanity.

Further exploring this idea, Lee Rozelle argues that "central to *Paterson* is the idea that body, place, and city interrelate directly—the molecular, the ecological, and the urban" (110). This unification of human body, soul, and landscape manifests itself as the Giant Paterson, which is man, city, and myth:

. . . a mass of detail
to interrelate on a new ground, difficulty;
an assonance, a homologue

triple piled

pulling the disparate to clarify
and compress. (19)

These lines show that Williams is trying to capture the way the inter-relationship between man and environment should be, recognizing that although sometimes perceived as separate, man and environment are inextricable from each other. Interestingly, these lines also seem to describe *Paterson* itself as a poem that is trying to reconcile a myriad of poetic, historical, autobiographical and mythical elements, and arrange them into the new American idiom; that poetic voice that will allow humankind to integrate itself into a relationship with nature.

Williams' concern with place and the local resonates with a connection to nature and the environment and the search for the American idiom needed to describe them. In *Paterson: Language and Landscape*, Joel Conarroe claims that "in choosing to use local setting and local subject matter, Williams demonstrates his affinity with another profoundly American writer, Henry David Thoreau" (11). Indeed, Williams seems to share the transcendentalist belief that the individual should be close to nature and distance himself from a corrupt and stagnant society, but he goes further in addressing the potentially cataclysmic effects that humankind can have on the environment. Thoreau's seminal transcendentalist text, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, is an account of the time he spent two years and two months living on the shores of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. *Walden* became part personal declaration of independence, social experiment, voyage of spiritual discovery, satire, and manual for self-reliance (Thoreau 850). In *Walden*, Thoreau was putting into practice what Ralph Waldo Emerson had previously suggested in *Nature*. Thoreau decided to implement Emerson's plan to "go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society" (Emerson 497). By leaving his comfort zone and the urban setting, and communing with nature, Thoreau attempted to sever the ties that bind the individual to society and that are detrimental to his well-being. Furthermore, Thoreau anticipates the notion of a prevailing interconnectedness between man and his environment in the biosphere; that is the totality of Earth's ecosystems. In *Walden*, Thoreau explains how he felt that contact between the individual and an unspoiled nature would be beneficial for both, and outlines the reasoning behind his decision to go into the woods:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and

Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. (915)

Thoreau felt that he could no live a full life by remaining constrained by a corrupting society and what he perceived to be the evils of Western materialism and consumerist culture. He also displays a willingness to strip away most of what is artificial in his life in order to be in solitude and in contemplation of nature. This summarizes the tenets of American transcendentalists, who exalted thought and self-knowledge as the most important aspects of the human condition. The individual must transcend the material world. The individual's conscience was paramount for transcendentalists and they also believed that conflicts between right and wrong should be settled from within and not by the conventions of society. Another extremely important item in the Thoreau's list of relevant things was the strength of the mind, and the inherent capacity for good in the individual. Thus, Thoreau becomes "an avatar for first-wave environmental critics" (Le Menager 394), who asserted the primacy of the connection between man and environment. However, Williams had the hindsight and historical knowledge of many decades after Thoreau's death in 1862 to fully grasp the magnitude of the damage that humans could do to the environment.

Like Thoreau, Williams finds himself in a world where society and industry are eager to advance in terms of progress, but not in what he feels are the best interests of the individual and the environment. Neither can visualize a world in which any outward improvement of life or any industrial advancement can bring inner peace and contentment. Both see man as part of nature and the current state of society as decayed and corrupt. In this manner, Williams sees the role of modern man in relation to nature to be tense and chaotic:

Walking —

Thickets gather about groups of squat sand pine,
all but from bare rock . . .

—a scattering of man-high cedars (sharp cones),
antlered sumac . . .

—roots, for the most part, writhing
upon the surface

(so close are we to ruin every

day!)
searching the punk dry rot. (44-45)

This passage presents an image of a speaker who is walking through the woods, where he is observing the lack of order in the vegetation. The identification of sand pines, cedars, and sumacs suggest an initial familiarity with the landscape. The speaker truly understands these trees and has a strong appreciation of the landscape and its natural processes, thus spanning the chasm between man and nature that Williams is trying to bridge through the new American idiom. This relationship with nature goes beyond Thoreau's notion of merely joining the environment and benefiting from its advantages; it establishes the inextricability of man and nature, and the need for humankind to protect the environment.

For Williams, however, it is through poetry, not introspection that man can come to understand nature. Nevertheless, the Williams-Thoreau parallels prevail in analysis. Much like Thoreau's relationship with Walden Pond, Williams' attachment to the Passaic River allows him to hold on to the idyllic imagery of the past:

My serpent, my river! genius of the fields,
Kra, my adored one, unspoiled by the mind,
observer of pigeons, rememberer of
cataracts, voluptuary of gulls! Knower
of tides, counter of hours, wanings and
waxings, enumerator of snowflakes, starrer
through thin ice, whose corpuscles are
minnows, whose drink, sand . . . (192)

The previous passage evokes a memory of the river as timeless, remaining pristine throughout all the seasons, remaining calm without the influence of any interloper such as man. The insertion of this vision of the wilderness' landscape into *Pater-son* suggests that there is something to strive for; a goal that is attainable if the continuous corruption of the environment is stopped and the damage done by industrialization is reversed.

Williams' idea of the river as central to the environment in *Pater-son* has been held for some time and has been the source of scholarly exploration. Louis Martz maintains that "the basic image of Book I was the Passaic River, metamorphosed into a symbol of the flow of all human mind, including the mind's half-conscious sense of powers beyond itself; the falls of the Passaic seemed to represent the power of the poet to interrupt, refract, and coalesce the flow into a quivering and terrifying scene of beauty" (qtd. in Quinn 95). The river is at times a powerful poetic symbol, a force of nature, and a source of fertility and life that is "terrifying" for those who do not understand it. Although it is susceptible to the actions of man, the river also has the capacity of influencing him:

with the roar of the river
 forever in our ears (arrear)
 inducing sleep and silence, the roar
 of eternal sleep . . . challenging
 our waking—. (*Paterson* 17)

These lines show the power of an uncorrupted river, capable of bringing peace to the individual, providing serenity and tranquility, and allowing him to sleep peacefully. It “challenges our waking,” counteracting the influence of industrialization by evoking a feeling of contentment. What need is there for progress when such beauty and peace is readily available?

John Elder explains that poetry “becomes a manifestation of landscape and climate, just as the ecosystem’s flora and fauna are” (39). Elder’s position explains William’s choice of the city of Paterson and its surroundings as the location for his poem. The damage done to Paterson’s ecosystem at the hands of man and, in a broader sense, in the name of progress, is the defining factor in the parallel between the decaying of Passaic Falls and Williams’ view of the decay of contemporary society. It is this environment that Williams’ “imagination must ‘repair,’ ‘rescue’ and ‘complete’” (Fiero 965). The Passaic River, the central, life-giving force of the landscape, is also described as corrupted in the present, mirroring Williams’ perception of the corruption of both man and society:

Smash the world, wide!
 —if I could do it for you—
 Smash the wide world . . .
 a fetid womb, a sump!
 No river! no river
 but bog, a . . . swale
 sinks into the mind or
 the mind into it, a ? (*Paterson* 170)

In these lines the reader encounters a corrupted image of fertility (the “fetid womb”) and elements of stagnation and inactivity (“bog . . . swale”), along with blank spaces where language seems to have failed to comprehend the abysmal conditions of the environment, and the flow of the river has been stymied. As a whole, the image presented above describes the deplorable conditions for which Williams holds industrialization and progress to be at fault, turning the Passaic into “the vilest swillhole in Christendom” (*In the American Grain* 195). Thus, the river that Conarroe describes as Williams’ “symbol of all beginnings” (82) no longer serves as such, instead becoming the embodiment of modern environmental corruption, stagnation and death. By the 1950s, companies like Diamond Shamrock, a leading producer of Agent Orange, was knowingly and systematically

contaminating the river with the toxic byproduct dioxin. Tom Moran explains that “the company knew even in the 1950s that dumping dioxin was illegal, and set up an alarm system to warn employees when inspectors were sniffing around” (“The Attempted Murder...”). Moran also chronicles the steps taken to cover up these actions by exposing how “workers at Diamond Shamrock were ordered to dump dioxin into the Passaic River in Newark, and then to march out at low tide and knock down the toxic mud piles with rakes so that no one would know” (“The Attempted Murder...”).

James M. O’Neill and Scott O’Fallon chronicle the history of pollution in the Passaic:

By 1880, Paterson’s factories had begun to foul the river. And the tidal flow — the Passaic is tidal from Newark Bay to the Dundee Dam in Garfield — swept Newark’s sewage and factory discharges upstream and down. There were efforts to indict manufacturers for polluting the river, but the owners just threatened to take their factories elsewhere and throw thousands out of work. Because of the bacteria in the river, the death rate from typhoid was among the highest in the nation in Newark by the 1890s. A New York Times reporter traveling the Passaic around that time wrote that Paterson’s silk mills, tanneries and slaughter houses poured their “flood of filth” into the river, causing it to resemble a “vile, inky fluid.” He found hundreds of dead fish. Untreated sewage from Rutherford, Passaic and many other towns spilled into the river. The smell was so bad that riverfront homes in Harrison were abandoned by 1895 and there were reports of acid fumes peeling the paint off some buildings. The cities abandoned their drinking water intakes below the Great Falls. Paterson’s intake was moved five miles north to Little Falls in 1897, but the river was growing dirty even there. A sewer line was built to carry waste from Paterson to Newark Bay, but the river continued to be fouled. There was so much gunk that the Passaic caught fire near Kearny in 1918. Firefighters tried to douse the flames, but a film of oils, creosote, sawdust and refuse continued to burn on the river, menacing a nearby munitions warehouse. (“Polluted Passaic River Suffers...”)

Williams’ extensive knowledge of the history of the area meant that he was aware of everything that had happened to the environment of his Man-City. O’Neill and Fallon further explain that an attempt to clean the river was made in 1970, seven years after Williams’ death, but President Nixon put an end to it, and it was not until 1972 with the passing of the Clean Water Act that real action began to take place in order to address the damage done to the river (“Polluted Passaic River Suffers...”).

Williams’ critique of progress is centered on the figure that he feels is the instigator of the destruction of the Passaic River: Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton, the founder of the American financial system, is seen as the primary culprit in the destruction of the environment in *Paterson*. In one of the prose sections of *Paterson*, Williams narrates:

Even during the Revolution Hamilton had been impressed by the site of the Great Falls of the Passaic. His fertile imagination envisioned a great manufacturing center, a great Federal City, to supply the needs of the country. Here was the water-power to turn the mill wheels and the navigable river to carry manufactured goods to the market centers: a national manufactory. (70)

This section of prose summarizes not only the historical beginnings of the destruction of the environment in the Passaic Falls, but offers an implicit description of the utilitarian, economically driven outlook held by Hamilton and other industrialist visionaries. Instead of seeing the beauty of the falls, Williams suggests that all they saw was the sheer amount of natural resources available to be exploited in the name of industry and progress, leaving behind a city that “is something less than elegant” (Conarroe 50). This prose passage, however, appears within a much broader context. In the passages dealing with Father Klaus Ehrens’ homily, Williams effectively outlines a dialogue between two ideologies: Hamilton’s utilitarian, economically motivated mentality, and their rejection, seen in Father Klaus’ epiphany. Father Klaus narrates, “And the Lord said to me, Klaus, get rid of your/money. You’ll never be happy until you do that” (*Paterson* 69), establishing the potentially divine worth of avoiding the greed that Williams sees behind the industrialist mentality.

Another element of *Paterson*’s setting, in terms of the environment and landscape, is the Mountain. Sister Mary Bernetta Quinn explains that “in establishing the elemental character of the place, the poet describes two titanic figures: masculine (*Paterson* the city) and feminine (*Garrett Mountain*)” (92). In contrast to the Passaic River, the Mountain “is not presented in a single, chartable series of images, but proliferates in several directions at once” (99). This means that the Mountain’s complexity as a poetic symbol in *Paterson* comes from its connection to most, if not all, of the women that appear throughout the poem. More importantly, the Mountain represents the female counterpart of the Giant *Paterson*, “a giantess, stretching against the man-city” (Conarroe 100):

And there, against him, stretches the low mountain.
The Park’s her head, carved, above the Falls, by the quiet
river; Colored crystals the secret of those rocks;
farms and ponds, laurel and the temperate wild cactus,
yellow flowered . . . facing him, his
arm supporting her, by the *Valley of the Rocks*, asleep.
Pearls at her ankles, her monstrous hair
spangled with apple-blossoms is scattered about into
the back country, waking their dreams—where the deer run
and the wood-duck nests protecting his gallant plumage. (8-9)

The Mountain, as seen above, is the environment’s equivalent of the Earth-mother. Her all-encompassing, protective nature allows for the

flora and fauna to thrive in her proximity. Conarroe observes that “the ‘pearls at her ankles’ is later explained ... [as] the discovery of mussels in Notch Brook. The spoiling of these pearls as described in this passage is typical of the ... senseless rapes suffered by the maternal principle” (100), also seen in the draining of the lake and the frenzy of the gathering of eels by the people of Paterson. The people’s greed drove them to basically raze the riverbed in order to catch every fish they could, not because they needed them for food, but because could carry them by the wagonload in order to sell them and make easy money. The Mountain, also initially a pristine, immaculate, and untouched natural image is corrupted by human intervention, emphasizing the continuous role that, according to Williams, man, and society in general play in their own destruction.

Later on, the Mountain is also presented in the role of a protector of fertility and reproduction who has been thwarted by the corruption of the landscape:

The flower spreads its colored petals
wide in the sun
But the tongue of the bee
misses them
They sink back into the loam
crying out. (11)

The “tongue of the bee” missing the petals signifies an interruption of the process of pollination, and by extension, a break in the reproductive process of plants, the cornerstone of any ecosystem. Conarroe proposes that this interruption is an image of the “failure of communication between the sexes ... and the failure of marriage” (101). The failures of communication and marriage are later seen in Book IV’s episode involving the fragmentary conversations between Corydon, Phyllis and Paterson, where traditional ideas of romantic relationships are subverted:

Corydon & Phyllis
You must have lots of boy friends, Phyllis
Only one
Incredible!
Only one I’m interested in
right now
What is he like?
Who?
Your lover
Oh him. He’s married.
I haven’t got a chance with him
You hussy! And what do you do together?
Just talk. (153)

This passage shows the failure of the communication between the

sexes and of marriage, two integral parts of civilized society that are shown by Williams to be inadequate. Williams' disapproval of a society that corrupts and destroys the environment extends to the institution of marriage, an institution that is artificial and that interrupts natural communication, making language fail. Williams criticizes people who fall into social norms "and marry only to destroy, in private, in/their privacy only to destroy, to hide/(in marriage)/that they destroy and not be perceived/in it—the destroying" (*Paterson* 107).

The Mountain's association with the feminine and its corruption also parallels the corruption of the environment. Furthermore, the Mountain's role as Paterson's consort is defined in poetic statement:

The scene's the Park
upon the rock,
female to the city

—upon whose body Paterson instructs his thoughts
(concretely). (43)

Thus, the Mountain's multivalent role as the embodiment of the feminine, the counterpart of the Giant, and the protector of fertility, is established as an essential component of both the setting and the poem, susceptible to the environmental corruption and decay caused by society's industrial goals. If Paterson the city is the representation of the mind of modern man, then by instructing his thoughts upon the Mountain, she is becoming corrupted by the mere proximity of the city and its industrial facilities.

Where the Passaic River and Garrett Mountain embody the rural elements of *Paterson*, the city is the epitome of the urban elements of the poem. A city, by its definition as a large, permanent settlement of people, is the ultimate transgression against the environment. It is also the pinnacle of civilized society; the ultimate symbol of man overcoming nature by creating his own space within it. Paterson the city is constrained by the rural elements that surround it, and it is in the liminal spaces between the city and its rural surroundings that the corruption of the environment is more easily identifiable. In one of the many self-reflexive passages of *Paterson*, Williams questions the benefits of progress, social conventions, and the city itself:

Doctor, do you believe in
"the people," the Democracy? Do
you still believe — in this
swill-hole of corrupt cities?
Do you, Doctor? Now? (109)

That "swill-hole" of a city is the Paterson of the present: a Paterson that has succumbed to urbanization. If one subscribes to the premise

that everything that is confined within the urban areas is lost and corrupted beyond rescue, one must look at the instances in the poem where the urban and the rural meet in order to observe the damage done in the name of social progress. For example, the prose passage dealing with the confrontation between some of Paterson's citizens and a mink demonstrates an encounter between the urbanized population and a wild creature. Some of the citizens "tried for a while to hit it with their clubs but were unable to do so" (49), a statement that presents the reader with an attempt to prevent an intrusion of the natural environment into the urban setting; an attempt emblematic of the general separation of the urban man from the wilderness, regardless of the fact that it is the urban man who encroaches onto it. In the same manner, Hamilton's vision of the great industrial hub in a place that had not been developed epitomizes the attitudes prevalent at the time, where man and river meet and man immediately implements methods to subjugate and control nature.

The modern scientific principle of urban heat islands (UHI), defined as "built up areas that are hotter than nearby rural areas ... [that] can affect communities by increasing summertime peak energy demand, air conditioning costs, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, heat-related illness and mortality, and water quality" ("Heat Island Effect"), is a well-established, contemporary environmental issue. Although not a major environmental concern or point of scientific study during Williams' lifetime, the principle of increased heat in urban areas had been identified by British manufacturing chemist and an amateur meteorologist Luke Howard in his 1819 book *The Climate of London, Deduced from Meteorological Observations, Made at Different Places in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis*. Howard observed that "in the denser parts of the metropolis, the heat is raised, by the effect of population and fires" (288) and that urban temperatures were higher on an average of 1°-2°C, and in some instances up to 12°C. The increased temperatures of a burgeoning industrial hub like Paterson would have been observable, thus establishing the area as an urban heat island. The economic and environmental costs to Paterson's citizens would have been palpable, and these costs would have been reflected in the quality of life of the people. This concern on what is happening inside the city however, suggests "the foreboding notion that technological and urban developments might well erode both nature and community in an unending push for unregulated replication" (Rozelle 101). In short, *Paterson's* preoccupation with uncontrolled urban growth and technological and industrial advancement is summarized in the poetry:

. knowledge the contaminant

Uranium the complex atom, breaking
down, a city in itself, that complex
atom, always breaking down .
to lead. (177)

Having experienced the advent of the Atomic Age and the onset of the Cold War, Williams had a clear view of the terrible, destructive potential of unchecked scientific progress and technological advancement. By using the image of Uranium as a parallel to the city, he demonstrates how progress can have an adverse effect and damage both humanity and the environment. Ultimately, the city, and urbanity in general, are defined by their counterparts: the wilderness and the rural. It is the interaction of these elements that frame Williams' concerns with environmental impact of unimpeded industrial progress. Williams' anxieties about the effects of industrialization on the environment are also captured in the aftermath of the flood in Book III:

Where the water has receded most things have lost their
form. They lean in the direction the current went. Mud
covers them

—fertile (?) mud.

If it were only fertile. Rather a sort of muck, a detritus
in this case—a pustular scum, a decay, a choking
lifelessness—that leaves the soil clogged after it,
the glues the sandy bottom and blackens stones—so that
they have to be scoured three times when, because of
an attractive brokenness, we take them up for garden uses.
An acrid, a revolting stench comes out of them, almost one
might say a granular stench—fouls the mind . (*Paterson* 140).

Paterson also draws deeply from historical sources in order to provide information on the ecological past of the region. For example, at different points of the poem, the reader learns that in 1857, the area began to be harvested for pearls (9), fished for sport (11), and that “the last wolf was killed near the Weisse Huis in the year 1723” (97). Williams considers the events affecting the environment to be of great historical importance. In his consistent theme of the parallels between social and environmental decay due to pollution, he makes it clear to the reader that he considers a healthy environment a vital and indispensable part of a better world. In the same manner, he was keenly aware that the majority of the population did not share his concerns. He then goes on to summarize the historical account of what was happening in the mountains and the woodlands of the area, as well as in the United States in general, where there was not only the exploitation of natural resources, but also the exploitation

of people. This issue is addressed through the chronicling of the displacement of the native peoples and the arrival of African slaves. Notably, the displacement of the native peoples also explains how a purportedly civilized society deals with what it deems to be primitive races. These races, paradoxically, seem to be much more in communion with nature and are able to better grasp the magnitude of the damage done by an advanced society. For Williams, the factual and ecological histories of Paterson are interlaced, and they help explain the problems of civilized society by contextualizing the role of humankind within the larger scope of the environment. Williams describes a society that behaves as “tho’ they wished death rather than to face/infamy, the infamy of old cities/a world of corrupt cities” (*Paterson* 107), thus preferring to remain as it is rather than strive for beauty. This also seems to imply a vicious circle where the industrial effects on the environment cause humanity to adopt increasingly damaging behaviors. The more industrialized that Paterson becomes, the more its citizens conform to the aftermath of Hamilton’s industrialist vision, because it is a “city founded upon a ‘plan’ and therefore prediction (not the first habitation in North America to be so founded, but perhaps the first large industrially-based project to be so planned) that seems to go awry because of facts or fields or forces unpredicted in the plan” (Hahn 80). Consequently, with industrialism out of control, the citizenship further damages the environment by participating in the industrial process, thus perpetuating this cycle. In this sense, *Paterson* is what Carla Bilatteri describes as “a poem commonly read as Williams’s imaginative attempt to address, and, hopefully, to transform, the destitute condition of the real” (58). Williams is trying to find the ever-elusive American idiom in order to contribute to the betterment of society.

The question is, then, does Williams offer a possible solution to the problem of the decay of the environment and its corruption at the hands of humanity? Is he making a definitive statement on about the relationship between humanity and environment? If one looks closely at the numerous instances where Williams addresses environmental concerns, the reader can deduce that a solution is outlined. First, Williams’ belief in the connection of man and nature is clear. That interconnectedness is homologous to “the first Law of Ecology: ‘Everything is connected to everything else’” (Rueckert 108), thus the line between Williams and environmental literature is established. Second, the environmental decay and corruption presented in *Paterson* underscore the need for a sort of harmony and balance between humanity and nature. This harmony and balance once existed, in the times before Hamilton envisioned the Passaic Falls and its surround-

ings as an industrial hub to be exploited. Third, the corruption of the landscape and the destruction of beauty in *Paterson* are the direct result of the realization Hamilton's industrialist vision, thus ascertaining the cause-and-effect relationship between industrialization and environmental corruption. Fourth, like Thoreau, Williams believes that the social and political structures of the United States are both corrupted and corrupting, and that the individual needs to go back into a close association with nature in order to find true peace and live a full life. Finally, society itself, as seen by Williams is corrupted, forcing the individual into a vicious cycle that leads humanity to become increasingly damaging to the environment. That damage, in turn, ultimately harms the individual by forcing him to participate in what Williams believes to be a doomed system.

Consequently, Williams' possible solution has to address both the environmental problems identified in *Paterson* and the corruption of society that have been outlined in this essay. This solution must operate on two levels. On one level, in the transcendentalist tradition, the individual needs to distance himself from the corrupting influence of society and its political structures. Once this happens, the individual can contemplate his relationship with nature and achieve peace. On the second level, society itself has to stop accepting environmental damage as an inevitable result of progress and take active steps in order to protect nature, even if it means the destruction of the corrupted city by turning into a blank slate. The Paterson fire of 1902 is one of the most relevant events in the history of the city. Richard Walter chronicles some of the events:

The Fire was discovered in the trolley car sheds of the Jersey City, Hoboken and Paterson Railway Company ... A high wind was blowing, and the tinder-like building was swept by the flames. All the engines in the fire department were called out. The fire evaded the heroic efforts of the firemen to stay its progress. Fanned by the gale, it swept away the business center of the city ... Not counting sheds or outbuildings, 459 buildings were destroyed, among them large business houses, banks, City Hall, five churches and the Free Public Library, with its 37,000 volumes. The insurance loss is approximated at \$8,800,000, and the property loss at \$6,000,000. Five hundred families lost their homes and everything they owned. ("A History of Paterson")

Despite the harm this fire caused by human negligence did to Paterson's infrastructure, economy and to its status as one of the foremost industrial centers in the United States, Williams does not see the blaze as a wholly negative event. In *Paterson*, Williams reflects on the aftermath of the flames:

flames, a chastity of annihilation. Recreant,
calling it good. Calling the fire good.
So be it. The beauty of fire-blasted sand

that was glass, that was bottle: unbottled
Unabashed. So be it.

An old bottle, mauled by the fire
gets a new glaze, the glass warped
to a new distinction, reclaiming the
undefined. A hot stone, reached
by the tide, crackled over by fine
lines, the glaze unspoiled
Annihilation ameliorated: (*Paterson* 118).

In this passage, Williams does not see the Paterson fire of 1902 as a destruction or ending, but as an opportunity for renewal and change. The notion of “annihilation ameliorated” suggests that the fires destruction of the city could hinder the industrial development that Williams sees as the annihilation of the environment. Furthermore, the image of the bottle transformed by the fire into something new, points to the possibility of a repurposing of Paterson the city itself. Even the image of the library aflame, where the knowledge of the past is burning, is seen as “a defiance of authority” (*Paterson* 119), and an opportunity to begin anew.

The fragmented, sometimes disjointed structure of the poem’s narrative resulting from the combination of poetry and prose parallels Williams’ vision of the fragmented relationship between the individual and the environment. The poem’s form mirrors that fragmented quality, but is also an attempt to reconcile man and nature. *Paterson*’s long poem form is characterized by a detailed, nuanced search for a language, for the American idiom, that allows Williams to explore the “the resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city ... [and] to use the multiple facets which a city presented as representatives for comparable facets of contemporary thought thus to be able to objectify the man himself as we know him and love him and hate him’ (*Paterson* xiii). In short, the long poem form allows Williams simultaneously to outline and investigate history, industrialization, the corruption of society, the crisis of the environment, and the search for that purely American idiom. Such an undertaking would perhaps be impossible with another poetic form. Although *Paterson* remained an unfinished literary work, it is a text rife with opportunities for academic exploration from an environmental literature and perspective.

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UNFATHOMABLE POETICS: QUEER INTERPERSONALITY IN THE NEW YORK SCHOOL

Jose Escabi

The New York School was a heterogeneous collective of artists that dealt with a startling number of themes in an equally diverse gamut of styles. It is then understandable that there is a certain informality or looseness to the group, as its members suffer the burden of being *too* inimitable, *too* incomparable, and too stubborn to be pinned down to just one ‘thing.’ If there is one ‘thing’ that can unite such disparate geniuses, it is that of an overwhelming desire to innovate, as the collective was characterized as “a mobilized grouping, like a school of fish, creatures who share a love for traveling in the same (avant-garde) currents” (Gray 543). But, more than that, as a community, it afforded some of its members the opportunity to express their otherwise threatened selves in a safe space. As most of the poets of the New York School were homosexual, a type of support network developed within the group. The amity of this gang of artists allowed for its queer constituents not only to exist safely but to develop and expand their poetics through the interpersonal relationships afforded by the gift of communal artistry.

Perhaps the most outgoing of these poets was the great Frank O’Hara. As a social busybody, this infectious desire to be with and around, seen and heard, understood and misunderstood by people permeates every line of O’Hara’s poetry. Many have remarked on the uncontrollable energy shooting through his poems that give them this wonderful semblance of being alive. O’Hara himself expressed an interest in letting his poems simply *be*.

The busy nature of O’Hara’s poems is nothing compared to the process that brought them about. As someone with an avowed interest in Abstract Expressionism, O’Hara valued the artistic process just as much as if not more than its product. As a result, the poets of the New York School found themselves embroiled in a sort of lived poetry, where the trivial goings-on of their lives could be suddenly immortalized in verse. Bruce Boone insists that “the writing of these

poets was a project for self-referentiality: a textual project, an act or event that displaced the subject into an object produced, making the production process itself its own referent” (69). O’Hara is then reproducing microcosms of lived experiences in his work, experiences that were facilitated by the presence of a community to interact with and respond to.

These microcosmic poems represent for Terrell Scott Herring an “alternative literary public sphere.” Using Habermas’ concept of a bourgeois public sphere, Herring positions O’Hara’s poetry as an outgrowth of a de-intellectualized, culture-consuming postwar America. In his “Personism: A Manifesto,” O’Hara outlines his plans for mediating this new attitude towards art, where “the literary public sphere has lost its cultural capital to the movies, pulp fiction, and brand-name labels” and poets must then “advertise their work as if it, too, were commodity” (Herring 419).

O’Hara then creates what Herring calls a “poetics of impersonality,” where the poems are packed full of hyper-specific details and the minutiae of everyday life (414). This overabundance of personality is coded in such a way that it registers as impersonal, as it is so particular that it escapes identification or, heaven forefend, resonance. For Herring, then, “gay presence is simultaneously gay absence” in Frank O’Hara’s poetry, as the speaker overdetermines the contents and context of the poem to such an extent that the reader, particularly a straight reader, would be left feeling the same way as they did before they engaged with the poem. It is then possible for the reader to consume the poem without its having “distracted him into feeling about the person” for whom the poem is written for (28). Media doesn’t get much easier to digest than that.

Herring uses the “Poem [Lana Turner Has Collapsed!]” as an example of this impersonal personality. Following Michael Warner’s suggestion that “mass subjectivity” is enabled by an “infatuation with mass disasters that destroy bodies (plane crashes, train wrecks, school shootings) and with minor disasters of the celebrity body (movie stars’ weight gains or drug arrests),” Herring reads the poem as an embodiment of this fascination with bodies that are not our own (419). In the poem, the speaker is on their way to meet a friend when they spot a headline telling them that Lana Turner has collapsed. The speaker’s thoughts then “turn to” Lana Turner, her location and her actions. The speaker’s emotions are mediated through a negotiation with Lana Turner’s circumstance; he only exists in relation to her. The poem ends with a collective “we” wishing Lana Turner well, urging her to “get up” (78). Herring avers that Lana Turner is “the disgraced body [that] succeeds in connecting a disembodied mass public through

print" (421). Lana Turner's misfortunes are what allow the speaker of the poem to regain their composure. It is only through the ritual sacrifice of *an other's* body that our own bodies can persist.

Herring positions O'Hara as the body being sacrificed for the continued survival of this "alternative literary public sphere." For him, "the irony of personism is that the moment O'Hara speaks of himself through the discourse of the alternative public sphere, he immediately loses his face—his identity—through the impersonal poetic medium," as the private is being made public and thus the self is being given up (425). But O'Hara does not die; he becomes instead a cipher: "Achieving depersonalization through the language of the public sphere, the anticonfessional poet reveals all, only to reveal nothing about himself" (425). O'Hara martyrs himself as a poetical subject so that homosexuality can exist in the public sphere as something both hidden and discovered, just as he presents himself in his poetry.

If O'Hara's poetry is "a cruising ground on which men come together through impersonal intimacy," what does that make the New York School clique? (422). Is there a necessity for this covert homosexuality? Or are the poets allowed to exist as exuberantly as their poems threaten to be? A small peak into the nightlife of this mob of queer ebullience could provide us with an answer. But before the curtain is lifted on the outings of these poets, it would be prudent to examine them in their natural habitat.

John Ashbery has earned the reputation of a poet whose "language can, most of the time, only be trusted to be *untrustworthy*" (Fink 1). Ashbery's "Some Trees" has been described as an "elusive, mysterious piece" that "resists [the readers'] understanding" (Silverberg 42). The poem is replete with contradictory statements such as "arranging by chance," "To meet as far this morning / From the world as agreeing / With it," and "A silence already filled with noises" that Mark Silverberg is in favor of not solving or reconciling, instead asserting that these paradoxes are meant to be "savored" (43). For Silverberg, these enigmas are "part of the oddly inviting impermeability that absorbs so many of Ashbery's readers" (43-44).

But this charming obtuseness might have a grimmer purpose than coyly beckoning the reader onward with a sly smile that dares them to unwrap its infinite layers. Silverberg includes readings from John Shoptaw and Vernon Shetley where "the poem's reticence marks the desire it dare not speak aloud under the regime of homophobia and surveillance in which it was written" (45). But Silverberg argues against this interpretation, observing that the "you and I" of the poem are never clearly defined. It is possible then that the "you and I" refer

to the reader and the speaker of the poem:

On this reading, the arranged chance meeting is the encounter of the poem itself, a space that “surrounds” and includes both reader and author (“A silence already filled with noises, / A canvas on which emerges / A chorus of smiles...”). What is being protected is more than a secret human love affair; it is also a love affair with language, with a poetic process that is unwilling to reduce poems to paraphrasable meanings and simultaneously to consumable products. (45)

Ashbery is keeping his poetry from being consumed as a cultural artifact. This is quite unlike O’Hara’s unwilling willfulness to be subsumed into the ether of his readership and passive-aggressively placating their desire for easily digestible goods. Where O’Hara sacrifices himself at the altar of pop art, Ashbery, as Silverberg illustrates, “protects his work against the pitfalls of the contemporary avant-garde, against a public eager for artistic products and personalities to consume” (45).

In Ashbery’s poetry, readers see someone who is deeply implicated in the politics of sexuality and is ever conscious of the encroaching danger at the outer limits of his poetry. In short, someone fraught with worry and uncomfortable with the notions a heteronormative society might have of his body and the bodies they associate with. This is an altogether different person from the one who experiences gay encounters in the company of fellow homosexuals with whom he has forged a bond through the interpersonality of a queer community that grew out of and within the New York School.

The glimpse into the double life of New York School poets comes, funnily enough, in the form of a poem: Frank O’Hara’s “At The Old Place.” In it, O’Hara describes how he and a couple of friends decide to go to The Old Place, a gay dance-bar in Greenwich Village. The suggestion to go there is not spoken but mouthed, and even then in code: “L G T T H O P” (Let’s go to the Old Place). It is not safe to shout suggestions about going to gay bars if not already in a gay bar. It is so unsafe, in fact, that the code survives encrypted and untranslated in O’Hara’s poem. We can intuit the meaning of the code by reading the rest of the poem, but the fact that it is presented as is serves as a gesture at the transgressive nature of the events being described. It is also perhaps a spiteful jab at straight readers, tasking them with *working* for the meaning of the code instead of simply handing it to them as is expected from something that has been produced in a market with a heteronormative bias as a cultural artifact to be consumed by privileged heterosexual subjects.

On their way to the bar, most of O’Hara’s friends “malingers.” One of these friends is referred to as “Ashes,” and then “J.A.” It would not

be too much of a stretch to suggest this “Ashes”/“J.A.” to be John Ashbery himself. Much like in his poems, Ashes “malingers” instead of “dart[ing] ahead,” like Alvin does. He is not eager to throw himself further into a public, heteronormative space even if it means eventually reaching a private, queer one.

But, once he gets there, he cuts loose. “Wrapped in Ashes’ arms [O’Hara] glide[s].” Ashes no longer “malingers” by himself, but “glides” across the dance floor with his fellow poet. The space they have created for themselves allows them to blossom, unencumbered by the judgment of others. Ashes feels comfortable enough to exclaim, upon the arrival of another group, one that had previously declined to accompany them, “I knew they were gay the minute I laid eyes on them!” He discloses not only his sexuality but the sexuality of others, a potentially dangerous and even lethal act under other circumstances, circumstances thankfully not provided by gay bars, circumstances that could regrettably be described as “normal.”

Boone characterizes the poem as “a displacement of connections, [which] will be understood by those with a common experience; not by the dominant other, for whom it will be simply idle chatter with no meaning at all” (86). He contrasts this building of a “community code” with a poem of Ginsberg’s, “Chances ‘R,’” which also happens to involve a gay bar:

The Ginsberg poem, we are tempted to say, shows a certain kinship with what Sartre has called “the spirit of seriousness.” And to be sure, the speaker seems painfully distant from the scene he describes. The terms of the description are hardly friendly, and the gay men dancing are “fairy boys,” “gay sisters,” with no “religion but the / old one of cocksuckers.” Such a language characterizes the viewpoint of the dominant “other”—an outsider. The speaker *observes* rather than participating in the scene, from a juridical standpoint that echoes the terms of male supremacy (85).

Ginsberg exemplifies for Boone a case of internalized homophobia that does nothing to build a community of support for fellow peers, something he describes as Ginsberg’s “defining reluctance to be politically homosexual” (85).

Boone typifies O’Hara’s poetry as a “trivialization” of homosexuality, drawing parallels to Frantz Fanon’s colonized subject. The homosexual subject, like the colonized subject, is afraid directly to confront its oppressors and so directs its aggression towards itself:

Postulating a gay subtext to these poems would help make comprehensible one of the otherwise rather puzzling features of the poetry: O’Hara’s constant tendency to present symbols of deep and violent pain and then ‘contextualize’ them, either turning them against himself in minimizing them or else by parodying his own feelings about

the pain. The violence of the language of these poems is first of all *repressed* violence, as if gay language were being repressed by straight language. (75)

The violence being repressed in O'Hara's poetry is the one that would be done to his oppressors. In fact, violence is done *to* O'Hara's poetry by any reading that neglects to take into account this gay language that struggles with itself to surface. Boone suggests that an "oppositional gay language" is "disguised, and makes itself available to the repression of later critical discourse" (78). He is referring to the "dominant art-institutional language" that would have been available to O'Hara, as someone who received an upper-class education and was employed in a museum (78). Boone notices a tendency to conflate "talking gay" with the "art talk" of the period, a trend that allows O'Hara's gay language to be swept under the umbrella of the dominant discourse and appropriated

Boone goes on to hypothesize that O'Hara's awareness of his art's becoming commodified and, indeed, his own complicity in the process of commodification as a curator for the Museum of Modern Art goes beyond any sort of stubborn adherence to irony and contradiction. For Boone, O'Hara's relation to the machinery of capitalism is that of morbid curiosity, pointing out that, at the time, homosexuality was thought of and talked about in the vein of prostitution, in terms of "tricks" and "numbers," and was subsequently fetishized and commodified (79).

This reification of the sexual desires inherent to the queer community frustrates O'Hara. Kevin Floyd posits that this historical vantage point, a queer one that brings to the forefront the questions of subjectivity elided by Marxism in the search for totality, is the key to rethinking and ultimately rescuing the dialectic of reification and totality from the grasp of infinite abstraction and dawdling metaphysics.

O'Hara is then interrogating this violent reification of desire in his dear, heretofore unsullied queer community which functioned as an escape from capitalism by having his text occupy the role of a surrogate for his queer body, as both are being subject to the process of commodity fetishism. It is no surprise that Boone finds it so frustrating that the queerness of O'Hara's poetry was so often stripped away or disregarded entirely by early scholarly work on his oeuvre.

The importance of historical context to any reading of O'Hara's poetry can therefore not go unsaid. More than just the key to understanding the biographical aspects of his poetry, history is put at the forefront of John Lowney's analyses of O'Hara's work. For Lowney, O'Hara is a medium through which history can be interrogated.

O'Hara becomes a way of discovering historically situated modes of desire through his "compel[ling of] readers to continually [...] decide on what is significant while concurrently reflecting on the grounds for such a decision" (257).

If it can be accepted that O'Hara's texts functioned as an interrogation of the processes constructing history and reifying literature and queerness, it cannot be denied that the altercation that ensued between the interrogator and the interrogated was a gruesome one. In "Personism: A Manifesto," O'Hara blithely confesses that what he is proposing could quite possibly be the "death of literature as we know it" (29). "As we know it" could here correspond to the aforementioned depreciated state of literature in the bourgeois public sphere that Terrell posits, where it is stripped of all cultural capital, worthless to a society that hungers for easily digestible morsels of media. Except that O'Hara's "alternative literary public sphere" is little more than a caricature of the bourgeois one, so this heavily apocalyptic proclamation (delivered with his characteristic insouciance) would probably be reserved for capital L Literature, the whole of it.

There is a type of frustration displayed in O'Hara's poetry borne out of a desire to escape from the discourses he is currently, unavoidably contributing to and being produced by. He mentions Artaud and how he was supposed to be the one to bring about the death of literature, but concludes that "for all its magnificence, his polemical writings are not more outside literature than Bear Mountain is outside New York State" (27). Multu Konuk Blasing latches on to this unfulfilled, eternally postponed eschatology. O'Hara knows he is doomed to the same fate as Artaud, but finds a way of putting off this destiny, however briefly. Using "Biotherm" as an example of this, Blasing imagines the poem as

a sort of digestive system, and what we experience while reading it is the sense of the passage of time through the man writing it. Everything is in flux—ingested, processed, and voided by the poet's body. And if a poem is not the process of this passage, it is inert and alien—waste or excrement. (57)

The excrement is the literature that O'Hara cannot, despite all of his ostentation and intimidating posturing, get rid of. He then endeavors to create this new type of literature, this *negation* of literature, where he "[talks] faster and faster and [piles] up more and more minute personal details, more and more intimate revelations, and more and more physical 'speech'—all in an attempt to escape the finality or 'death' of literature" (59). But this, for Blasing, ultimately is merely "another way of writing literature" (59).

Why, then, does O'Hara continue to write? Why doesn't he simply

use the phone instead of writing another doomed poem? Using Winnicott's theories on child psychology, Caleb Crain recuperates from the outwardly happy accidents of O'Hara's poetry a volatile subject in search of something it can never hope to attain: a true self. For Crain, O'Hara's poems are where "O'Hara plays along the border of two worlds: between on the one hand compliance, the false self's accumulation of hollow and arbitrary detail, and on the other hand what Winnicott called 'fantasying'—suppressed processes of desire that may have lost touch with the outside world" (300).

To make sense of this we must understand that Crain thinks of O'Hara as someone who has created a host of false selves in order to hide his gay self, someone who has employed a defense mechanism that has destroyed that which it aimed to protect. O'Hara then subjects himself to a "willful disorganization" that Crain prescribes as the most useful tool in "resist[ing] compliance" (306). But O'Hara lacks a proper object through which he can demonstrate this "willful disorganization," citing an example of Winnicott's:

Winnicott described a one-year-old who at first was tormented by her destructive impulses. She cried nonstop as she bit spatulas and threw them to the ground. Winnicott allowed her to bite his knuckles without punishing her; he then introduced her to her toes. She was fascinated. (303-304)

The introduction of an object that cannot be gotten rid of, a toy that cannot be broken no matter how hard it is played with, is what O'Hara lacks, because "he is never confident he can hate the person behind [his poems]," ostensibly the ideal object of O'Hara's "willful disorganization" (304). He is doomed to that wasteland mistaken as providence between "compliance" and "fantasying," willfully disorganizing himself, spreading himself thin, too thin, in futile attempts at recovering the unrecoverable. Such is the beautiful failure of O'Hara's poetry.

Cain uses O'Hara's "Mediations in an Emergency" as an example of this "transitional object" he is forced to content himself with (305). Cain is disturbed by the notion put forth by O'Hara in the poem that "'becom[ing] someone other' is in fact not as easy as 'choos[ing] a piece of shawl and my dirtiest suntans.'" Not only does the speaker of the poem not know who they are becoming, it is becoming increasingly difficult to imagine the possibility of recuperating their lost identity. Cain worries that O'Hara might descend into a madness precipitated by the lack of an object, a madness we can catch a glimpse of in Blasing's reading of "Biotherm," where O'Hara voraciously gobbles up the words in his poems signifying food as an act of consolidating the signifier and the signified.

And so all O'Hara has to keep him company in this heightened

state of self-lessness are the charms in his pocket in “Personal Poem,” “an old Roman coin Mike Kanemitsu gave [him] and a bolt-head that broke off a packing case when [he] was in Madrid.” These lucky charms represent for Cain the magic of possibility, the promise of a future brought about by chance. For Michael Clune, however, these charms are representative of an antidote to the free market discourse that dominated the postwar climate of the time. Clune thinks of O’Hara as a poet “shopping without a list,” that is to say a poet who chooses to include things in his poems based on an “instant response to the immediate environment rather than by the speaker’s immediate fixed values, desires, or beliefs” (183).

Clune avers that “In choosing without knowing why, O’Hara enters into a direct relation with society” (187). O’Hara gives himself over to the flow of a social organism in a boldly defiant move towards a collective. O’Hara’s revolutionary praxis is an effacing of the self for the whole of the selves.

It is this selfless self-lessness that functions as the driving force behind the communal project of the New York School. O’Hara’s reliance on others, on interpersonality, for a self he can no longer have is ameliorated by his sacrifice *for* others, *for* interpersonality, through the painful exploration of the self he does not have. He martyrs himself for the creation of queer spaces and an interrogation of the material conditions under which he lives. O’Hara’s poetry is doomed to failure, but, as much as he would hate to admit it, it is the sentiment that counts.

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CUENTOS / *FICTION*

GRACE

Suchitra Samanta

Anwar weighted down with small stones the bright blue plastic sheet that served as a roof and sides for his pavement home. The streaked and mildewed wall of a factory that manufactured batteries provided a back wall, while a dirty, discolored cloth, frayed at the edge and slung between the bamboo poles that supported the blue sheet, served as an entrance. A few feet away, along busy Hazra Road, tramcars rattled ceaselessly. In buses, in trams, bulging with an overload of passengers, in cars, and in three-wheeled rickshaws, the multitudes of Kolkata made their way noisily, raucously, right at Anwar's doorstep. If he had to move again, as he had had to many times already, well, with a little help, his home, poles, bricks, and plastic sheet were not too difficult to pick up and carry, to wherever he might set up next.

It was mid-morning. A storm hovered ominously on the dark, clouded horizon. Anwar put the bricks up closer, propping up the poles more firmly, so they would withstand the sudden gusts of wind, the sometimes-driving rain. He then sat himself down, cross-legged, facing the street, with his tin bowl next to him, and put his wooden crutch up against a pole so that it was visible. The chances of pedestrians throwing coins into his bowl were higher if they could see his handicap.

Hena, who lived and worked in the vast slum along Kalighat Road, just to the back of Anwar's home, threw a coin into his bowl as she walked by, wiping her nose with the edge of her sari.

"Consider yourself fortunate, that I can spare a *paisa* for you!" She flung at him as she wove her thin frame through the crowds that surged along the pavement.

"Why should I smile at a whore who throws me a coin," Anwar retorted, scowling.

"Mussalman! You are another species!" she said over her shoulder to him. "Go back to Pakistan!"

“Why should I go to Pakistan, I am from Bihar,” he called out. “Who are you to speak, a whore is all you are!”

Hena did not deign to reply, holding up the pleats of her gaudy synthetic-silk sari, with its red-green-yellow paisleys, as she headed to the teashop at the foot of the bridge, followed slowly by Anwar. Beneath the bridge ran a sluggish, shallow, muddy and malodorous stream, grandiosely named the Adiganga, that first of holy rivers, prior to the great Ganga itself. Among the many sparks of dissension that started off their day, this unsanitary, turgid yet holy stream in Hindu belief had often inspired Anwar’s derision, as he mocked Hena’s proclamations of religious superiority. On her part, ever quick to strike back, Hena informed him of the baths she must take after being in the presence of a Muslim, a cow-killer, a beef-eater, a polluted being. At the teashop the short, bald and past-middle-age owner, Ghoshbabu, would welcome the two, his regular customers, with a gap-toothed smile, “Come, come!”

Anwar would buy Hena a cup of tea while she would buy biscuits for both of them. The other prostitutes, who also worked in the extensive brothel that lined the road that led off Hazra Road towards the Goddess Kali’s ancient Temple, would on occasion throw him a coin, though they generally ignored the middle-aged, bearded Muslim in their midst. Some would come by Ghoshbabu’s teashop, but would then proceed quickly to the business of the day. Hair slick with fragrant oil, eyes lined heavily with kohl, they would festoon themselves along the rusted iron rails of the bridge, bright daubs of color on a dreary monsoon day. With Hena, over the past couple of months—since he had set up at this location—Anwar engaged in lively insults, reciprocated vigorously by her. Over tea and biscuits, interspersing their arguments with “Muslim” (a pejorative, here), and “only a whore,” shouting over the horns of buses and rattle of tram-cars, they argued and scolded. Hena would declare that her black Mother, Kali herself, was God, all powerful, the destroyer of evil, and would keep her, Hena, from harm. Lovely of face, all-merciful, Hena asserted, *she* was assured of her Mother’s grace. No matter how she earned her living.

Ghoshbabu, in between dispensing cups of tea to his customers and wiping his hands on a grimy rag, would add, “But her sword, the garland of skulls she wears, the severed head she holds, frightens me. Our mother is not predictable, who knows how she works.” Sighing deeply at the vagaries of life, its dreadful tragedy, clearing his throat with a drawn-out “harrrrh,” he would suddenly smile, and call out to Khoka, the young boy who helped serve the customers, “Ey Khoka, see who wants another cup of tea!”

“We are not meant to know how she works,” Hena would retort, firmly. “But she will punish the wicked, that we know.” (Here she would glance obliquely at Anwar). “The head in her hand is a demon. She has beheaded him with her sword.”

Anwar, on his part, would proclaim loudly that Allah was the one true God. Unlike your Hindu idols, he would fling at Hena, his Allah would keep *him* safe and provided for. “I am poor. I suffer for Allah, I say my *namaz* five times a day—and,” (here Anwar looked significantly at Hena)—“I buy tea for a whore. Allah will reveal himself in my heart.”

There was, of course, no resolution to this argument, nor was it intended that there should be one. Each simply enjoyed their daily battle, relished not giving in to the other’s God, loudly, vocally, confirming their own, and the grace they hoped would be bestowed upon them as reward for their faith. On Tuesdays and Saturdays, auspicious days for worshiping the goddess, Hena would walk to the Temple in the afternoon, when business was slower, and bring back *prasad*, sharing her deity’s “grace” with Anwar and Ghoshbabu. Touching it to his forehead reverentially, Ghoshbabu would put the entire *pera* into his mouth. Anwar would eat the sweet, dense milk cake in silence, without thanks, or expression. It soothed, for a while, his yearning stomach. His silence would be met, he knew, by some sharp comment from Hena such as, if she did not throw scraps his way, he might well be dead. The goddess, declared Hena in a superior tone, worked through her, Hena, to feed a Muslim, such was God’s compassion. Anwar committed to nothing.

This place, thought Anwar, had worked out well enough so far. A stream of worshipers walked by, especially those returning from the Temple, and who were moved to charity after worship, so he had found. Of course, he had also found some friends—the amiable Ghoshbabu, whose hospitality he appreciated—not all Hindus were so generous to a Muslim—and Hena, if she could be called a friend, insulting and ignorant as she was, and of questionable profession. Through the mind-searing heat of May and much of June, just before the monsoons arrived, when the pavement burned underfoot, Ghoshbabu had allowed him to sleep on his shop floor, offering some respite.

Anwar had come from a village in Bihar state, many years ago now, seeking a job in the city. About two years ago, while laboring at a construction site, a cart carrying bricks had fallen on his leg, breaking it in several places. A cousin, who lived in the vast slums in the southwestern part of the city, along with other Bihari Muslims who

had emigrated to Kolkata to look for work, had reluctantly put him up as he recovered. But he had found it difficult to find work since, and had had to leave his cousin's. An extra mouth to feed had stretched relations thin, and Anwar sought a living elsewhere. Middle-class Hindu households, he had found, were reluctant to employ a Muslim houseboy, especially a crippled one. He had worked temporary stints for a while in sales in the Fancy Market in Ekbalpur, near the slums, though even Muslim shop-owners in their hurry had not always been sympathetic to his lame leg. In a desperate moment, hunger churning his stomach, he had set up with crutch and tin bowl at Gariahat Bazaar. Here he found the well-dressed ladies, shopping for saris and jewelry and household appliances generous enough with their charity. While he couldn't eat well, he was at least assured of one meal a day.

However, one day the police came by, the sergeant yelling threats and shaking his stick. The stall owners along the pavement, selling cheap cotton blouses, and nightgowns, plastic tablecloths, and brightly-printed bed linen were ordered to pick up and leave. The police also flattened Anwar's bamboo and plastic-roofed home. So he had moved, with crutch and bowl, sheet and poles, to the corner of Russell Street and Park Street, the city's playground. In the expensive restaurants, the many bars and discotheques, the affluent, both young and old, came for lunch, or to dine at night. Perhaps he could count on their generosity. But his stay was brief. Here especially, commanded by the rich and powerful to keep their playground clean, the police came by periodically to sweep up the street. So he moved again.

But, soon after he had moved there, the police came to Hazra Road too, but with other intentions in mind. When Hena failed to come by, he went to Ghoshbabu's in consternation.

"The police picked up the girls," Ghoshbabu informed him "They took them away in a black van."

"When will they come back?" Anwar asked.

"Who knows? I think they are getting the girls tested for the sickness," said Ghoshbabu, scratching his head thoughtfully. "And Hena looked like she's not well," he added. "She's been complaining of a cough lately, a little fever even."

Anwar ate his biscuits in silence, and listened to some men who had stopped by on their way to work, loudly discussing the latest civic elections over tea. He missed the round of insults and arguments with Hena, that morning. He also decided that he would move again, away from the brothels, but not too far, to be near his new-found friends.

He declared his intention to Ghoshbabu. "I'm moving nearer the temple. I think I will make more money there. And who knows what the police will do to me here?"

Ghoshbabu nodded. "Yes, more pilgrims there, and Anwar, they give a good meal to the poor at the temple, you know that."

Anwar asked if he would be fed, leaving his real question unasked.

"The Mother's grace is for *everyone*," replied Ghoshbabu, with emphasis on that last word, and sighed sentimentally. Had Mother Kali not looked upon him favorably, once a destitute refugee from Bangladesh? Now he was the owner of a tea-stall that did brisk business, which had paid for a modest two-roomed flat in Behala, where so many refugees had settled. "Besides," added Ghoshbabu kindly, "You will always get a biscuit and tea here!"

Moving to the vicinity of the temple would mean a walk down Kallighat Road to get to Ghoshbabu's, a half-mile or so, not so far even on a crutch. In the narrow, crowded lanes along the Temple walls, he knew, drugs were bought and sold—but the *paladars*, the Brahmin caretakers of the Temple, were powerful. Perhaps then, he hoped, the police would be wary of raiding the vicinity of this vastly sacred place for Hindus. And, though he would find few Muslims in the area he also knew that a diverse population had set up on the pavements outside the Temple to beg for alms from those who came regularly to worship, but especially from the thousands who came on festival days and often from great distances. Those days were especially good pickings for Hena and her friends too. He decided to try his luck.

That evening, as the melodious, sonorous sound of the conch-shell, the ringing of brass bells at evening worship reached his ears, a black dog with three legs, its fourth missing at the knee, sat itself down in front of him. "Go away, go on! Run off! Nothing for you here!" Anwar raised his hand as if to strike it. It skipped back, then sat again, facing him expectantly. He could see it was hungry. Well, it wouldn't have much luck with him. He shook his crutch at it threateningly—it emitted a series of high yelps, as though he had beaten it, and limped, still yelping, down the street. He decided to walk to Ghoshbabu's and ask if there was news of Hena.

"Too soon," said Ghoshbabu despondently. "But those girls can look after themselves. Hena has the mental strength of a man. If those police give her a hard time, she will fight. And anyway, if they are doing tests, that is a good thing."

Anwar did not doubt Hena's spirit, but reflected privately that

she had been looking rather drawn lately. He walked back with two slices of bread, which Ghoshbabu gave him with his tea, to find the three-legged dog sitting patiently outside his lean-to. He broke off a piece and threw it to the dog, which ate the bread swiftly, hungrily, and looked at Anwar for more. The worshipers were emerging from the temple, and Anwar, not wanting the dog in his way, made as if to throw a stone at it. Yelping shrilly, it hobbled off again down the street. It did not show up again that night. Anwar, to his delight, made a few rupees in alms that evening. It was a Saturday, and the worshipers had come in great numbers. He treated himself to some deep-fried eggplant in chick-pea batter from a kerb-side seller doing brisk business, and then to hot, fresh *chapatis*, and warm curried lentils. Maybe his move had, after all, been a good thing. Maybe, he thought, the powerful Mother Kali looked out for him after all. Or maybe it was Allah. On a full stomach he felt generous.

The next morning, to the sounds again of the morning rituals that awoke the goddess, Anwar slowly walked to Ghoshbabu's. Again, Ghoshbabu informed him that Hena wasn't back, and that he had no news of her. After his tea and biscuits, back at the Temple, worry niggling at his heart, Anwar set up with his bowl. The dog arrived, and keeping a safe distance, sat down facing him. *Neri kutta!* Street dog! He let out a string of colorful curses and shook his fist at it. It moved back a few feet, and sat down again. He flung it a piece of bread that he had saved from the evening before, for himself, not for the dog. But there it was, hungry creature. The dog devoured the bread, then crept up on its belly, nearer to him, but carefully out of his reach and to one side.

That morning the takings were few. The dog disappeared, then showed up, then disappeared again. Anwar wondered if he should have fed it the bread. It would keep coming back. Who knew what diseases these street dogs carried. Anyway, it kept its distance from him, leaping to its legs each time he shifted position. Around three in the afternoon, his stomach churned with hunger. A passer-by threw him a coin and said, "Why don't you go to the temple, they are giving out food to the destitute. You can get some *khichuri*." Why not? Ghoshbabu had said no one would be turned away. Anwar walked to the Temple gate and joined the crowd waiting to be fed.

He savored the steaming hot lentil and rice preparation, though not the muttered comment of the man who served him the food, "Why don't you go to the mosque? Go and eat there." But, Anwar thought, hunger changes the rules. In another situation he might have responded with a sharp retort. But not now. He ate in silence.

The dog showed up again the following morning, just after he had returned from Ghoshbabu's, sitting with its head between its paws, expectantly. Hena was not back yet, and no one had news of her. Anwar threw the dog a piece of bread. Through the day, again, it disappeared and reappeared, no doubt foraging for food elsewhere. Now it sat outside his shack, its head between its paws, expectantly. Sitting with his bowl, Anwar noticed that despite its protruding ribcage—much like his own—the dog carried itself, even on three legs, with a certain grace. She (Anwar determined) held her head high, elegantly even, unlike the mangy curs that slunk along the city's streets. Her dark coat too, was surprisingly glossy, not dull and dusty like the other street dogs. Her expression, increasingly to Anwar, was one of gentleness, and a bright intelligence. A handsome animal, he thought, despite its missing leg. He stretched out his hand gently towards the dog, holding out the remaining bread. The dog crept up to Anwar on its belly, wagging her tail, and gently took the bread from his hand.

The following day the dog showed up with a raw wound on her rump. Evidently someone had flung a stone at her. Anwar called the dog to him, making a variety of noises, drawing her closer. She approached fearfully, hesitantly. He wiped the wound with a wet rag and gave the dog some bread again. The dog took the bread and backed away slowly, sitting as she always did, at a distance, while she ate. That afternoon Anwar went a little early, to make sure he would get in when the afternoon *khichuri* was given out at the Temple. He tore off a bit of the plantain leaf on which he had been served, and wrapped a fistful of the rice and lentils in it to give to the dog, should she show up. He found her waiting outside his shack, and laid the leaf with the *khichuri* in front of it. The dog ate ravenously, running off after she was done. Anwar picked up the leaf and threw it off the kerb. A cow ambled up, and chewed slowly on the leaf. Anwar struck it on the rump, driving it off.

That evening, as the bells and conches sounded the evening worship at the Temple, putting the goddess to rest for the night, the dog returned. She sat, this time, closer to Anwar's shack. He called her nearer, to check the condition of her wound. The dog approached with greater confidence, and patiently waited while Anwar inspected the sore, which had, by now, dried up. To Anwar's surprise, when he offered the dog a piece of dry bread, she swiftly licked his hand before taking the bread from him. That night the dog stayed, sleeping just outside Anwar's shack. The next morning she accompanied him to the tea stall, trailing him at a safe distance. Anwar thought that he rather liked the dog's company. What a gentle animal. What could

have taken off her leg, he wondered. Anyway, she filled, even a little, some place in his heart. He was surprised at this unaccustomed emotion. If Ghoshbabu could give him a bit of bread, if he could salvage some *khichuri* from the Temple, he could keep this dog, Anwar thought, as his own.

Hena was there, sitting at the wooden bench to one side of the stall, sipping a cup of tea. They looked at each other without smiling, raising their eyebrows at each other in silent, non-committal greeting. He asked with a scowl, "So are you back at work?"

"Of course," she snapped haughtily. "Who will feed me otherwise? I see that you have set up at the Temple?"

"Yes," replied Anwar. "It's better for me there. So why did the police take you away?"

"They made us take blood tests," she answered. "All the girls got the tests." A shadow crossed her face as she looked away for a moment. Then she glared fearlessly at him, as usual, and said, "We will be informed soon about the results." She sipped at her tea, noticed the black dog sitting outside the stall. "Whose dog is that, did it follow you here?"

"Whose dog can it be, it is a stray!" Anwar replied sarcastically.

"But it seems to have come here with you!" Hena's mocking laugh ended in a cough. Then she called the dog to her with clucking sounds, and gave it a piece of her biscuit.

She continued, "I have just been to the Temple to offer worship. The Mother Kali will look after me, she will keep me safe. Who else do I have?" This with a dramatic flourish, as she arranged the pleats of her red and black flower-printed nylon sari. And then, as she pulled out from a knotted bundle in her sari a *pera* for Anwar, she said, "Here is our Mother's grace. Give some to your dog."

Anwar mocked, taking the *pera*, "Your Mother is a black stone, nothing else. There is no God but Allah!" He gave a piece of the *pera* to the dog who ate it with alacrity.

Hena left to take up her place on the bridge.

Would he lose his friend, such as she was, Anwar worried. The dog followed Anwar back. Irritated, he waved vigorously at her. "Go away!" The dog looked alertly at him, and retreated. He shook his fist at her again and yelled, "Go on, go away!" He made as if to fling a stone at her. The dog looked surprised, then slowly hobbled off down the street. In sudden fear Anwar wondered if she would return.

The rains were heavy that morning, and the limp rag of a door

could not keep Anwar dry. His blue plastic roof, too, leaked, soaking his cotton quilt. Wet to the bone, he took shelter in the doorway of a shop across the street. He would not eat much that day, he thought, as worshipers, with black umbrellas unfurled, hurried to catch buses and trams to their destinations. He looked down to see the black dog, shivering, wet, looking up at him. He called her in, and together they waited out the heavy shower under the sheltering archway.

At dawn, as conch and bell awoke the goddess, Anwar lay on his damp quilt aching in every limb, feverish and thirsty. The dog, lying just outside his door, sat up as he got up on his elbow. There was no going to the tea stall today—he felt too ill. Suddenly the dog got up, and trotted off. Some half an hour later, Khoka, Ghoshbabu's young assistant, showed up with a cup of tea and biscuits for Anwar.

"The dog came to the stall," said the boy, "it seemed agitated. It wouldn't go away. Ghoshbabu said, and Henadidi was there too, they said maybe something is wrong, Khoka, go and see. So I came."

Anwar thanked him, paid him for the tea, and then threw a portion of his biscuit to the dog. That day he was unable to sit with his bowl, unable to get the *khichuri* in the afternoon. But then he didn't feel much like eating. The dog spent the day lying outside his shack, and remained by him through the night. She didn't eat either.

The next morning, feeling better, and hungry, Anwar went to the tea stall, followed by the dog. Hena wasn't there. "Is she with a client?" he asked Ghoshbabu.

"She has been taken to the hospital," said the stall owner. "She was very unwell last night." Ghoshbabu looked down at his hands, then off to the side. Anwar drank his tea in silence. He bought a whole biscuit for the dog this time, which the animal devoured hungrily.

About mid-morning, as Anwar sat with his bowl he heard the sound of shouts further up the street. The dog sat up on her haunches, alert. Suddenly a black City Corporation van stopped across from him. Men with nets jumped from the van, running here and there, chasing the strays, which scattered with shrill yelps. Anwar leapt to his feet in panic, calling the black dog to him, *Kalua, Kalua*, Black One, Black One! "This dog's mine," he shouted as a catcher approached. "Leave it alone!"

"Of course it is," the man said sarcastically, "it guards your fancy home! Just like the rich folks!"

The dog dodged one catcher, but it was slow. Another catcher netted it, and bundled it into the back of the van, which roared off down the crowded street. Weeping, cursing, shouting, Anwar flung

a stone at the receding van.

In the afternoon he went to the Temple, and returned with a little *khichuri* wrapped in a banana leaf. He opened the banana leaf with its contents and placed it on the pavement, outside his rag-door. When the bells sounded at the Temple that evening, Anwar looked around his shack and along the road, just in case. There was nothing there. He turned to the Temple, and implored silently, "Dark Mother, grant us your grace!" Catching himself, he repeated, again and again, "Allah is great, there is no God but Allah!" He picked up his crutch and set off towards Ghoshbabu's shop. Perhaps there would be news of Hena. He called on the goddess again. This time he did not catch himself.

That night, he looked hopefully around, in case, miraculously, his dog had returned. His dreams were full of dark dogs, the sounds of bells, and conch shells, and of longing.

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