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Ensayos / *Essays*

HISTORIA, TRAUMA Y LITERATURA: LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL HOLOCAUSTO EN LA NARRATIVA CONTEMPORÁNEA EN LENGUA INGLESA

María Jesús Martínez-Alfaro

¿Cuánto tiempo necesita una cultura para asimilar el trauma de su historia? Tuvieron que pasar varias décadas después de lo que se considera una de las mayores catástrofes de la historia, el Holocausto, para que la cultura occidental se sintiera capaz de enfrentarse filosófica, sociológica, ética, histórica y literariamente a un trauma tan profundo. El material generado por esta ola de erudición teórica y representación artística nos ofrece también recursos para el estudio de otras muchas experiencias traumáticas, así como de la implicación del arte y la literatura en la representación del trauma. De hecho, prodría decirse que si hay un tema recurrente en los estudios sobre trauma, ése es el tema del Holocausto y su representación.

Hablar de la representación del trauma plantea siempre, de alguna manera, una contradicción. Uno de los aspectos centrales del trauma es la pérdida del lenguaje, esa sensación de terror que no puede expresarse y que con frecuencia acompaña al individuo que se enfrenta a una situación extrema. Las experiencias traumáticas no se procesan verbalmente, sino que se articulan en un "lenguaje" totalmente distinto. A nivel de la consciencia, es como si la experiencia traumática no hubiera ocurrido. Pero a otro nivel más profundo, la persona sí recuerda esa experiencia, que se manifiesta a través de los síntomas de lo que hoy en día se conoce como stress post-traumático: pesadillas, flashbacks, comportamientos compulsivos, etc. El trauma es una especie de agujero negro que engulle la paz y la estabilidad mental y emocional de la víctima, así como su capacidad para expresar lo que ha pasado. Paradójicamente, es precisamente la habilidad para expresar el trauma lo que permite salir a la persona traumatizada del mencionado agujero negro. La expresión, a través del arte, y sobre todo a través de la palabra, inicia el camino hacia la sanación. Sin embargo, y debido a esta dinámica compleja, las

palabras siempre se perciben como incapaces de reflejar o de contener, en toda su enormidad, aquello que en principio se caracteriza precisamente por el hecho de que no puede ser expresado.

El Holocausto es un trauma personal, para aquellos que lo vivieron de forma directa, pero es también un trauma colectivo. Constituye lo que algunos han dado en llamar una "cesura" en la historia de la humanidad (cf. Parry), una ruptura radical que nos obliga a replantearnos no sólo la relación entre pasado, presente y futuro, sino también nuestra concepción del mal y de la naturaleza humana. La enormidad de la masacre privó a la historia de palabras para describirla. Eso explicaría la resistencia a la verbalización de la experiencia sufrida por los supervivientes: carecían de palabras para nombrar lo que no se puede explicar.

Las deficiencias del lenguaje para expresar un hecho así resultan patentes ya a la hora de utilizar un término para referirnos a lo que denominamos "el Holocausto." Primo Levi,[1] superviviente y autor de varias obras sobre su experiencia en los campos de concentración y sobre el genocidio nazi, escribe lo siguiente: "Por favor, discúlpenme si uso el término 'Holocausto' con reticencias porque no me gusta en absoluto.... Pero lo uso para que se me entienda. Desde el punto de vista filológico, es un error" (citado en Agamben 28, mi traducción). "Holocausto" proviene del griego *holos*: todo y *kaustos*: quemado, y hace referencia a un sacrificio u ofrenda que se consuma por medio del fuego. El uso del término con referencia al exterminio judío por parte de los nazis data de los años 50 y fue acuñado por Elie Wiesel.[2] La connotación religiosa, el sentido consagratorio del

[1] Levi nació en 1919 en el seno de la comunidad judía de Turín, donde cursó estudios de química. A finales de 1943, junto a otros judíos, intentó constituir un grupo de resistencia judía a la ocupación alemana del norte de Italia, pero fue capturado por la Gestapo, y deportado debido a sus orígenes judíos. En el campo de Auschwitz fue destinado a las factorías de la IG-Farben de Monowitz, donde trabajó en una fábrica de productos químicos. De los 650 judíos de su grupo, Levi fue uno de los 20 que sobrevivió. Tras ser liberado del campo, volvió a Turín y estudió literatura. También trabajó como directivo en una empresa de resinas. En 1974, después de jubilarse, pudo dedicarse plenamente a la literatura. Se suicidó en 1987. Sus obras sobre el Holocausto incluyen *Si esto es un hombre* (1947), *La tregua* (1963), *Si no ahora, ¿cuándo?* (1982), y *Los hundidos y los salvados* (1986).

[2] Otro de los autores clave, como Levi, en el contexto de la literatura del Holocausto. Wiesel nació en 1928, en una zona que actualmente forma parte de Rumanía. Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial fue deportado con toda su familia, y la mayoría de los judíos de su barrio, a Auschwitz, donde murieron sus padres y su hermana menor. Después de ser liberado de Buchenwald, se estableció en París, donde estudió periodismo y trabajó como corresponsal de prensa. En 1963 obtuvo la ciudadanía estadounidense y dio clases de humanidades en la Universidad de Boston. Entre 1980 y 1986 fue Secretario de la Comisión sobre el Holocausto, dependiente

término en sus orígenes conlleva lo que algunos ven como una cierta explicación, justificación, o al menos una sacralización del hecho al que se refiere. ¿Si tenemos esto en cuenta, concluiríamos que es un error, como apunta Levi, decir que los judíos fueron sacrificados, como si de una ofrenda a Dios se tratara? Y si es un error, ¿cuáles son las alternativas?

El término *Shoah* es hebreo. Se utiliza en Israel, pero su uso se ha generalizado de forma que aparece también en un considerable número de libros y artículos sobre el tema publicados en otros países. *Shoah* (1985) es así mismo el título del documental de Claude Lanzmann sobre el Holocausto, de casi diez horas de duración, y generalmente considerado una de las obras magistrales sobre el tema.[3] *Shoah* significa "catástrofe" en hebreo y, aunque carece del sentido consagratorio de la palabra "holocausto", tampoco satisface unánimemente. Aparece por primera vez en un estudio publicado en Jerusalem en 1940: *Sho'at Yehudei Polim* (*La Shoah de los judíos polacos*). El término usado por muchas de las víctimas durante el Holocausto era *hurban* o *(churban*), yiddish, y también significa "catástrofe" pero con referencia específica a la destrucción del Templo.[4] Ninguno de los dos términos incluye el "sujeto agente" del exterminio, por así decirlo, ya que el Holocausto parece ser, bajo estas

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de la presidencia de los Estados Unidos, y fue distinguido con la Medalla de Honor del Congreso en 1985. En 1986 recibió el Premio Nobel de la Paz. En 1987 creó la Fundación Elie Wiesel para la Humanidad. Sus obras sobre el Holocausto incluyen *La noche* (1958), *Amanecer* (1960), *El accidente* (1961), *La ciudad después del muro* (1962), *Un mendigo en Jerusalén* (1968), *El testamento* (1980), *El olvidado* (1992) y *Todos los ríos van al mar* (1994).

[3] La expresión audiovisual es aún más compleja que la literaria. El cine y la televisión pertenecen a la industria de la cultura de masas y esta pertenencia cuestiona más radicalmente su legitimidad para representar el Holocausto. *Shoah* es la respuesta cinematográfica de Lanzmann al problema de la representación del genocidio nazi. Empezó a trabajar en el proyecto en 1974 y acabó en 1985. El material sumaba 350 horas y el montaje le ocupó unos cinco años. No se trata de una reconstrucción, como hace Spielberg, sino de una reencarnación mediante la memoria. Todo el poder de la narración se deposita en los hombres y mujeres que hablan y en su propio testimonio. El director no usa actores, ni escenarios artificiales de campos o guetos, ni imágenes históricas, sólo supervivientes y lugares tal y como se conservan en la actualidad. Lanzmann visita varios de esos lugares e insta a los supervivientes a los que entrevista a que los visiten, bien realmente, bien a través de la memoria. La película emerge así como construcción de la memoria y sobrio alegato contra el olvido.

[4] La destrucción del Templo Judío por parte de los romanos tuvo lugar en el año 70 A. D. Debido a la orden dada por César la profecía de Jesús se convirtió en realidad: "Cuando Jesús salió del templo y se iba, se acercaron sus discípulos para mostrarle los edificios del templo. Respondiendo él, les dijo: ¿Veis todo esto? De cierto os digo, que no quedará aquí piedra sobre piedra que no sea derribada" (Mateo 23: 37-24: 2).

denominaciones, una catástrofe en el sentido de una tragedia del destino, a añadir a la larga lista de desgracias por las que ha pasado el pueblo judío. Un término que sí hace referencia a los perpetradores de la masacre es “genocidio”, pero no refleja la especificidad de los crímenes nazis sino que los inscribe en la historia de otros exterminios sistemáticos por razones de nacionalidad, etnia, o religión.

La dificultad de encontrar un término apropiado o correcto debe hacernos pensar, por extensión, en la quasi-inexpresibilidad de los hechos a los que nos referimos, en los límites del lenguaje, ya que estas nociones —lo inconmensurable de la *Shoah*, los límites del lenguaje y los límites de la representación— aparecen también de forma recurrente en la literatura del Holocausto. Esta indecibilidad terminológica va unida también al problema de definir aquello a lo que nos referimos cuando hablamos del Holocausto. El Holocausto va más allá de lo que ocurrió en los campos de exterminio. Los *boycotts*, la emigración, las falsas identidades asumidas, la vida en ghettos y en escondites, también forman parte de la persecución y del intento por parte de los nazis de exterminar a la población judía del viejo continente. Por otra parte, el Holocausto no es sólo el exterminio judío, de la misma manera que el Holocausto no es sólo Auschwitz. Ambos, Auschwitz y los judíos, se han convertido en sinécdoques recurrentes, que no son sino eso, una parte que representa un todo mucho más amplio. El Holocausto sí fue una tragedia judía, pero los judíos no fueron el único grupo sometido por el régimen nazi: los seis millones de judíos muertos son una parte de los veinte millones de personas que perdieron su vida. Los gitanos, los homosexuales, los enfermos mentales y los disminuidos psíquicos y físicos fueron otros de los colectivos afectados por las deportaciones y condenas a muerte. De hecho, historiadores como Henry Friedlander consideran que el Holocausto comienza realmente con la primera campaña sistemática en contra de todos aquellos que sufrían algún tipo de minusvalía o de enfermedad incurable y que, dentro del llamado “eugenismo” puesto en marcha por los nazis, condujo a una especie de eutanasia impuesta a todas las personas catalogadas como “seres inferiores”, “vidas sin valor”.

Y si las víctimas fueron muchas y variadas, los responsables puede que no fueran un grupo tan concreto o compacto como a veces se piensa. Centrarse casi exclusivamente en la alemanidad del crimen simplifica enormemente el examen de las culpas y a veces éste se disfraza de investigación sobre las causas. En el prólogo a *Modernidad y Holocausto,* Zygmunt Bauman se distancia de aquellos que nos dicen que las raíces del horror se deben buscar y se encuentran en la obsesión de Hitler, en el servilismo de sus partidarios, en la

crueldad de sus seguidores y en la corrupción moral de sus ideas. A veces, señala Bauman, hay también quien encuentra causas en algunos aconteceres de la historia de Alemania o en lo que se presenta como la especial indiferencia moral del alemán medio. Éstas y semejantes actitudes

> pueden interpretarse en el sentido (no siempre pretendido por sus autores) de que una vez establecida la responsabilidad moral de Alemania, de los alemanes y de los nazis, habrá concluido la búsqueda de causas. Como el propio Holocausto, sus causas se encontraban en un espacio reducido y en un tiempo limitado que, afortunadamente, ha terminado.
>
> Sin embargo, el ejercicio de centrarse en la *alemanidad* del crimen considerándola como el aspecto en el que reside la explicación de lo sucedido es al mismo tiempo un ejercicio que exonera a todos los demás y especialmente *todo* lo demás. Suponer que los autores del Holocausto fueron una herida o una enfermedad de nuestra civilización y no uno de sus productos, genuino aunque terrorífico, trae consigo no sólo el consuelo moral de la autoexculpación sino también la amenaza del desarme moral y político. Todo sucedió "allí", en otro tiempo, en otro país. Cuanto más culpables sean "ellos", más a salvo estará el resto de "nosotros" y menos tendremos que defender esa seguridad. Y si la atribución de culpa se considera equivalente a la localización de causas, ya no cabe poner en duda la inocencia y la rectitud del sistema social del que nos sentimos tan orgullosos. (xv)

El Holocausto es a veces representado como un acontecimiento singular, un barbarismo terrible pero puntual. Lo que pensadores como Bauman, Adorno o Horkheimer sugieren, por contra, es que el Holocausto fue un fenómeno estrechamente relacionado con las características propias de la modernidad. El fascismo no es simplemente el enemigo del humanismo sino una de sus consecuencias. Por tanto, el barbarismo del genocidio nazi no constituye una antítesis de la modernidad, sino uno de sus elementos constitutivos. La razón y el desarrollo tecnológico no son sólo fuerzas de progreso sino también instrumentos de dominación en manos de los poderosos. Ésta es, según pensadores post-humanistas como los anteriormente mencionados, la paradoja de la Ilustración: las herramientas que hacen posible el progreso del ser humano sirven también como aparatos de opresión, y así llegamos al Holocausto: la ciencia y la técnica "como legitimadoras de la política, perversa mezcla de idealismo y positivismo que resultan ser la enésima y bastarda consecuencia de los ideales ilustrados" (Matamoro 52).

Si nuestras locuras son la trágica medida de nuestra racionalidad, debemos indagar en lo que el Holocausto nos dice acerca de la civilización occidental, porque Auschwitz es también Hiroshima, Vietnam, el Gúlag, Bosnia, Afganistán, Irak.… Hay que ser cauto, pues,

a la hora de hablar de la singularidad del Holocausto, de su carácter único. Afirmaciones como ésta, recurrentes en un buen número de estudios sobre el tema, tienen quizás sentido en su contexto, porque ha habido y sigue habiendo corrientes de pensamiento orientadas hacia el revisionismo, la normalización e incluso la negación del Holocausto.[5] El problema con el concepto de singularidad es que puede llevar, como así ha ocurrido, a una apropiación del Holocausto como elemento identitario de la comunidad judía y puede llevar también a una especie de competición por ocupar el primer lugar entre sus víctimas.[6] La cuestión de a quién pertenece la *Shoah* y, por tanto, quién tiene o no derecho a escribir sobre el tema tiene marcadas repercusiones en el mundo de la literatura del Holocausto. Dominick LaCapra propone interpretar la singularidad del Holocausto en otro sentido: algo es singular, único, cuando cruza o transgrede ciertos límites (160). Es una noción no numérica de singularidad, ya que no significa que pueda ocurrir sólo una vez. Al contrario, y paradójicamente, acontecimientos únicos se repiten en la historia, se repite su singularidad entendida como exceso y transgresión. Algo es tan excesivo que resulta único.

El exceso y la transgresión del Holocausto explican su impacto en la historia y cultura occidentales. Nuestra era es de alguna manera la era del post-Holocausto y, en ese sentido, porque el Holocausto nos ha afectado a todos, podría decirse que nos pertenece a todos.

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[5] La corriente revisionista ha tomado fuerza desde comienzos de la década de los ochenta. Para los revisionistas los crímenes nazis han sido injustamente singularizados, afirmación utilizada en medios políticos para reivindicar el derecho de los alemanes a identificarse positivamente con el estado en que viven y poner fin a la esquizofrenia en la que se ha encontrado el ciudadano alemán al enfrentarse con su historia reciente. Por su parte, los negacionistas niegan que el exterminio de los judíos europeos haya tenido lugar: no pudo ocurrir porque los nazis no trazaron ningún plan en ese sentido y no hay documento alguno que lo detalle. Se pretende así no tanto abrir una polémica a partir de una reinterpretación del nacionalsocialismo, sino favorecer los intereses de las organizaciones neonazis ocultando la historia criminal del Tercer Reich. Sobre este tema, ver Rodríguez Jiménez.

[6] En *Holocausto. Recuerdo y representación* (2006), Alejandro Baer explica que, tras la invisibilidad del Holocausto durante la posguerra, se produce en los años 60 y 70 una singularización del genocidio judío. Eventos como el juicio contra Adolf Eichmann (1961), el proceso de Auschwitz (1963-65) y la posterior apropiación del Holocausto como elemento identitario de la comunidad judía americana, sobre todo a través de la obra del superviviente Elie Wiesel, convierten la *Shoah* en un fenómeno misterioso e irrepresentable. A juicio de Baer, este status cambia de forma radical en 1978, fecha de la emisión de la serie televisiva *Holocausto* e inicio del controvertido proceso de "americanización" y "globalización" de la *Shoah*. Comienza en esos años un debate en torno a los límites de la representación y la banalización de la *Shoah* en el que el relativismo postmoderno y el revisionismo histórico han jugado un importante papel.

Por otra parte, las distinciones no deben desdibujarse: no todos somos víctimas o supervivientes, porque considerarlo así, como sugiere LaCapra al cuestionar los planteamientos de ciertos sectores de la crítica post-estucturalista, sería como intentar combatir el exceso con otro exceso, respondiendo a la experiencia hiperbólica del trauma con nada más que hipérboles (x-xi). Y si no todos somos víctimas o supervivientes, ¿tienen ellos y sus descendientes más derecho a hablar del Holocausto que los demás? Más allá de esta cuestión, independientemente de quién cuente la historia, ¿puede acaso la historia ser contada? Esta pregunta constituye un motivo recurrente en la literatura del Holocausto.

A pesar de sus varias novelas sobre el Holocausto, Elie Wiesel afirmaba: "Una novela sobre Auschwitz o bien no es una novela, o bien no es sobre Auschwitz" (citado en Horowitz 15, mi traducción). Para Wiesel, y para muchos otros como él, no existe algo así como una literatura del Holocausto. La sola expresión es una contradicción en sí porque Auschwitz niega toda forma de literatura. Wiesel plantea así uno de los dilemas esenciales a los que se enfrenta todo aquel que siente la necesidad de escribir acerca del Holocausto: ¿Es posible verbalizar lo innombrable, narrar lo inefable? ¿No es un horror tan incomprensible y de tales dimensiones incompatible con la expresión artística? ¿No supone el mero hecho de la escritura una banalización del Holocausto? Otras preguntas podrían añadirse a éstas, porque aun cuando las referencias al Holocausto como algo inexpresable e incomprensible resultan recurrentes, también es cierto que estas referencias van con frecuencia unidas a un intento de expresar y de entender aquello que previamente se ha declarado inexpresable e incomprensible. Ésta es, según Berel Lang, la "retórica negativa" del Holocausto (18).

Que el Holocausto pueda contarse, aunque la historia que se cuente sirva para demostrar la imposibilidad de realizar la tarea con éxito, es una cosa; otra cosa distinta es justificar por qué se cuenta la historia y decidir cómo debe ser contada, porque aquí las restricciones no tienen que ver sólo con la habilidad del lenguaje para representar la realidad, sino con el peso de la historia y los cuestionamientos éticos. ¿Es lícito el intento de producir o de disfrutar de un placer estético generado a partir de semejante catástrofe? ¿Dónde están los límites de la representación y quién los establece? ¿Es cuestionable mezclar el Holocausto con la ironía, como hace Martin Amis en *La flecha del tiempo*, o con el humor, como en *La vida es bella* de Benigni? ¿Es cuestionable, por ejemplo, dedicar una obra al retrato de un alemán decente, como Schindler, cuando hubo tan pocos como él? Y, al hilo de Schindler, que probablemente nos lleve

a pensar en Spielberg tanto o más que en el autor australiano de la novela en la que se basa la película, Thomas Keneally, recojo en lo que sigue un ejercicio de reflexión que propone Jan Strümpel como parte de un argumento más amplio sobre la estética de la violencia.

Cuando se estrenó *Salvad al soldado Ryan* las críticas destacaron la habilidad de Spielberg para mostrar, en esa famosa primera media hora de la película, la llamada "verdad sin maquillaje" sobre el "Día D", el desembarco de los aliados en Europa en junio de 1944. Esa primera media hora impresiona al espectador, que es testigo de una sangrienta carnicería, con efectos especiales que retratan la batalla como una degollación masiva. Supongamos ahora que Spielberg hubiera decidido comenzar *La lista de Schindler* con un paralelo estructural, es decir, con una escena de las cámaras de gas dispuestas con un naturalismo similar: "la verdad desnuda" sobre la destrucción industrial de seres humanos. El soldado reventado en la película y el judío asfixiado en la película, estructuralmente parecen presentar problemas semejantes, pero los separa un mundo. Los recursos estéticos que no despiertan desconfianza en *Salvad al soldado Ryan*, porque existe una "estética del horror" aceptada en la literatura y el cine bélicos, quedan prohibidos en el ámbito de la representación de la *Shoah*. En relación con este tabú constitutivo, Spielberg avanzó hasta el límite de lo permitido: mostró seres humanos encerrados en lo que parece ser una sala de duchas, pero que el espectador sospecha que es una cámara de gas, aunque el lugar finalmente se evidencia como una auténtica sala de duchas. Como representación, quizás no sea concebible nada más.

En las décadas que siguieron al fin de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, no sólo se cuestionó la literatura sobre el Holocausto sino la literatura en sí misma. Ya no es posible escribir poesía después de Auschwitz, afirmó Theodor Adorno (*Prisms* 34). Auschwitz significa para muchos pensadores, como Adorno, la destrucción de la idea misma de humanidad. Por eso, después de un acontecimiento así, la poesía, la literatura, el mero pensamiento creativo son totalmente absurdos y vanos. El silencio parece ser la única respuesta éticamente aceptable después de la masacre. Más tarde, Adorno modificó su opinión inicial para admitir que el sufrimiento tiene tanto derecho a ser expresado como un hombre torturado tiene derecho a gritar (*Negative Dialectics* 362). Por tanto, Adorno añade, quizás fue erróneo decir que después de Auschwitz es imposible escribir poesía. Las víctimas, sus descendientes, los judíos, tienen derecho a hablar, y así lo demuestran los relatos de supervivientes, memorias, autobiografías, diarios, ensayos, etc., como los de Primo Levi, Elie

Wiesel (ver notas al pie 1 y 2), Jorge Semprún (*El largo viaje*, *Viviré con su nombre morirá con el mío*, *La escritura o la vida,* novelas de inspiración autobiográfica), Jean Améry (*Más allá de la culpa y la expiación. Tentativas de superación de una víctima de la violencia*, colección de ensayos), Robert Antelme (*La especie humana*, mezcla de ensayo y autobiografía), Imre Kertész (*Un instante de silencio en el paredón*, colección de ensayos; *Sin destino*, novela); Víctor Klemperer (*Quiero dar testimonio hasta el final. Diarios 1933-1945*; *LTI, La lengua del Tercer Reich)*, Liana Millu (*El humo de Birkenau*, colección de relatos), Wladyslaw Szpilman (*El pianista del gueto de Varsovia*, memorias), etc. Estas narrativas constituyen un género en sí mismo y, al mismo tiempo, han creado un "otro": los relatos ficcionales sobre el Holocausto, con frecuencia cuestionados hasta un punto al que raramente se llega en el caso de la narrativa de supervivientes. Como apunta Sue Vice, en lo que respecta a la recepción de la literatura del Holocausto se observa una clara discriminación positiva a favor de la literatura testimonial y una actitud mucho más crítica hacia la literatura ficcional. Criterios aparentemente literarios en los argumentos que se esgrimen en contra de estas obras ficcionales con frecuencia esconden, según Vice, prejuicios morales, o moralistas (3-4).

La distinción entre literatura testimonial o autobiográfica y literatura ficcional no está, por otra parte, exenta de problemas. Es cierto que gran parte de la literatura postmodernista desdibuja la línea que separa historia y literatura, realidad y ficción, pero también es cierto que la literatura del Holocausto incide de forma especial en el cuestionamiento de esta frontera o en la imposibilidad de establecerla de manera clara. Autores de literatura testimonial sobre el Holocausto con frecuencia hablan de forma enigmática de la ficcionalidad de sus obras. Por ejemplo, Louis Begley, surperviviente del Holocausto, compara el intento de diferenciar lo que es verdad y lo que no lo es en sus relatos (especialmente en su primera novela, de inspiración autobiográfica) con el intento de separar la clara y la yema en unos huevos revueltos (Atlas 118). El americano Art Spiegelman, hijo de supervivientes, suscitó una gran polémica al escribir una carta al *New York Times Book Review* para pedir que su cómic sobre el Holocausto, *Maus*, no apareciera catalogado como ficción en la lista de best-sellers de la mencionada publicación. Elie Wiesel también insistió que su obra *La nuit* (1958) fuera clasificada, o reclasificada, como no ficcional, como memoria o autobiografía. Estos términos se usan con referencia a la obra de Wiesel, pero también otros más ambiguos como ficción autobiográfica, autobiografía ficcional, autobiografía novelada, novela no-ficcional… En fin, distintas variantes de los huevos revueltos en el símil que utiliza Begley.

Hablar de ficción parece debilitar la autoridad histórica de una obra, pero la ficción permite al autor liberarse de ciertas restricciones con vistas a conseguir otro tipo de exactitud y ser, después de todo, fiel a los hechos, aunque de otra manera. El debate en torno al carácter ficcional o no-ficcional de ciertas obras demuestra, por otra parte, que la distinción ficción/no-ficción importa, porque no habría debate si no importara. Para Lang, historiador y filósofo, dicha distinción tiene una base moral, más que meramente cognitiva o estética (74). Para críticos como Sue Vice, lo que este debate demuestra es un factor recurrente en la literatura del Holocausto y que con frecuencia se expresa en la necesidad de indagar en la conexión entre el autor y el narrador/protagonista de una obra. Este interés casi obsesivo en relacionar lo que se cuenta con la vida del autor, añade Vice, conlleva el peligro de basar la "autoridad" de un escritor en sus credenciales biográficas, así como de valorar la obra literaria por lo que tiene o no de ficcional, como si la ficción fuera un error (3-4). ¿Hasta qué punto y por qué es la biografía del autor tan relevante? ¿Hasta qué punto estamos de acuerdo con los que afirman que sólo podemos vislumbrar el horror del Holocausto a través de las palabras de aquellos que estuvieron allí, de los que fueron testigos directos del horror, de los que lo han sufrido en sus vidas o en las de sus familias? ¿Y hasta qué punto los relatos escritos por éstos están exentos de ficcionalidad?

Quizás el ejemplo más conocido de las repercusiones que este debate puede tener es el caso de Binjamin Wilkomirski. Su obra *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (*Fragmentos: Recuerdos de una infancia en tiempos de guerra, 1939-1948*) fue publicada en 1995 y traducida después a varios idiomas. Wilkomirski nació en Letonia en 1939, perdió a toda su familia a manos de los nazis y pasó parte de su infancia en dos campos de concentración. *Fragmentos* narra los recuerdos de esa infancia, o eso se creyó hasta que en 1998 el periodista suizo Daniel Ganzfried publicó un artículo que probaba que la persona que se hacía llamar Binjamin Wilkomirski (Bruno Dosseker, en realidad) había nacido en Suiza en 1941 y ni era judío, ni había estado en ningún campo de concentración. Hay quienes afirman que no habría habido problema si la obra se hubiera presentado desde un principio como ficción. Hay también quienes lo dudan, precisamente por el hecho de que el que una obra sea el testimonio de las experiencias reales del autor se considera muy a menudo un plus, por así decirlo, lo cual implica que *Fragmentos* no habría sido tan unánimemente aclamada por la crítica y el público lector si hubiera admitido su ficcionalidad, precisamente por las ya mencionadas reticencias que despiertan las ficciones sobre el

Holocausto. Y quizás sea por eso, aun admitiendo que pueda haber razones más complejas relacionadas con la psicología del autor, que el de Wilkomirski no es el único caso.

Por poner un ejemplo dentro del campo de la literatura en lengua inglesa, mencionaré el "caso Demidenko". Helen Demidenko, australiana, ganó a los veintitantos años el Australian Vogel Award de 1993 por una primera novela, *The Hand that Signed the Paper,* que publicó al año siguiente en una prestigiosa editorial y que recibió, poco después, otros dos premios literarios importantes en el contexto de las letras australianas. La autora utilizó el término "*faction*" para definir su obra y, de hecho, en el prólogo Demidenko afirma que lo que sigue es una obra de ficción, si bien, añade, sería ridículo decir que no es una obra histórica. Todo bien hasta aquí. Pero el caso es que en apariciones públicas y en entrevistas con la autora, ésta se presentó como la hija de un ukraniano que había emigrado a Australia en 1951, y que había perdido a casi toda su familia a manos de los bolcheviques. Allí conoció a la que sería su esposa, también inmigrante, pero irlandesa. Demidenko subrayó repetidas veces su ascendencia ukraniana, hasta el punto de vestir el traje nacional de Ukrania en algunas de sus apariciones públicas. La novela, de hecho, entronca con la historia de Ukrania durante el Holocausto. La narradora es una mujer joven, llamada Fiona Kovalenko (la similitud entre Kovalenko y Demidenko funciona de forma ambigua, sugiriendo y negando al mismo tiempo que el relato es autobiográfico; Demidenko, el apellido adoptado por la autora, es, de hecho, el apellido de un asesino ukraniano que participó en el Holocausto y era también el apellido de los personajes centrales de la novela en un borrador previo). La novela cuenta la historia del padre y el tío de la narradora, dos ukranianos que participaron, el primero, el padre, en la masacre de Babi Yar, en donde 34,000 judíos fueron asesinados en dos días en 1941 en las cercanías de Kiev; mientras que el segundo, el tío, fue un miembro ukraniano de las SS que prestó servicio en el gueto de Varsovia y en Treblinka. Las acciones de estos dos hombres aparecen en gran parte como motivadas por las circunstancias o, más específicamente, por la gran hambruna que asoló Ukrania en los años 30 y cuyos responsables, siempre según la novela, fueron Stalin y los bolcheviques, mayormente judíos. El Holocausto —Babi Yar, Treblinka— aparece como parte de un círculo recurrente de atrocidad y venganza que se cierra al final de la historia, en donde hay arrepentimiento y perdón en una especie de versión contemporánea del *deus ex machina* clásico. Pero Demidenko había aireado una conexión personal con el Holocausto que no era cierta. El tono antisemita de la novela fue inicialmente ignorado por lectores y crítica, precisamente porque esa

conexión personal con el Holocausto le proporcionaba a la autora una posición "real", "auténtica", desde la que escribir sobre el tema con autoridad. Pero en agosto de 1995 el periodista australiano David Bentley descubrió que Helen Demidenko era Helen Darville, de padres británicos y sin ningún familiar en Ukrania. La conmoción fue tremenda, y el debate intenso, con la participación de académicos y personajes públicos varios y la publicación de cuatro libros sobre el escándalo Demidenko en sólo seis meses. Además de desvelar una maniobra engañosa que ofreció muchos motivos para la indignación, se hizo patente el hecho de que en ningún otro ámbito como en el de la literatura del Holocausto los criterios de calidad se establecen en un terreno tan inseguro y necesitan tanto de un reaseguro extraestético. Todos esos hechos que en la novela parecían sustentarse en la experiencia vital de su autora a través de la nacionalidad ukraniana de su padre y la familia de éste eran fruto de su imaginación, y no sólo de su imaginación, ya que Helen Darville fue acusada de plagiar varias fuentes, entre ellas testimonios de supervivientes incluidos en *The Holocaust* (1986), de Martin Gilbert, así como informes de las atrocidades cometidas por los soviéticos sobre los ukranianos en los años 30, informes recogidos en *The Black Deeds of the Krelim* (1953), de S. O. Pidhainy.

Otra de las características compartidas por muchas obras ficcionales sobre el Holocausto es el recurso a la intertextualidad, el uso de fuentes escritas para reforzar la trama ficcional o para conferir a ésta un aire de autenticidad, similar a lo que se espera de una ficción documental. Dónde acaba la intertextualidad y dónde comienza el plagio es a veces difícil de determinar, pero las acusaciones de plagio —vertidas sobre obras como la de Helen Darville, u otras como *The White Hotel* (1981) del británico D. H. Thomas, *Sophie's Choice* (1979) del norteamericano William Styron, o *The Painted Bird* (1965) del polaco y posteriormente ciudadano americano Jerzi Kosinski— guardan una estrecha relación con el debate en torno a la autenticidad de muchas de estas obras ficcionales. Sin confianza en la integridad de un autor, garantizada biográficamente, parece imposible decir nada fiable sobre su escritura, hasta el punto de que hablar aquí de la autonomía del texto resulta más que problemático.

En definitiva, podríamos decir que la literatura del Holocausto nos obliga a expandir categorías y crear taxonomías y géneros alternativos, híbridos, para describir aquello que es verdad y que no lo es, al mismo tiempo. El título de la primera novela de Louis Begley[7]

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[7] Louis Begley (*n.* Ludwik Begleiter), abogado y novelista, nació en 1933 en Stryj, entonces una ciudad polaca, hoy parte de Ukrania. Cuando las tropas alemanas

—de inspiración autobiográfica, pero que no es, en sentido estricto, ni una autobiografía ni un relato enteramente ficcional— refleja la complejidad de estos temas. Las obras de supervivientes ocupan un lugar importante en el canon de la literatura sobre el Holocausto pero, por razones obvias, no son obras escritas mayormente en lengua inglesa, aunque se hayan traducido posteriormente. *Wartime Lies*, la autobiografía ficcional de Begley, sí que fue escrita en inglés y apareció relativamente tarde si comparamos la fecha de publicación, 1991, con la de otros testimonios de supervivientes. Las mentiras en tiempos de guerra a las que hace referencia el título son los nombres e historias inventadas por el protagonista, un chico judío, durante los años del genocido nazi. Dentro de este marco de referencia, la obra cuestiona la interpretación convencional de las nociones de mentira y verdad. Las mentiras son malas, la verdad es buena, pero en el contexto del Holocausto, la verdad podía costarle a uno la vida. Algunas mentiras, como las mentiras en las que vive el protagonista, se convierten en la verdad de la existencia.

El precio que el joven protagonista paga por sobrevivir pasa por renunciar a su voz, su independencia y su identidad. Maciek, que narra la historia en primera persona, sobrevive a la guerra bajo la protección de su tía Tania asumiendo una serie de identidades falsas y construyendo historias para sustentar cada una de esas identidades. De forma intermitente, la voz adulta de un narrador anónimo interviene con comentarios sobre los hechos narrados, sobre el sufrimiento humano y la lucha por la vida.

El Holocausto altera y finalmente destruye la infancia de Maciek. Para ocultar su identidad judía, Tania le instruye sobre qué apariencia ha de adoptar, sobre cómo debe hablar y moverse, e incluso sobre qué emociones exteriorizar y qué pecados confesar antes de comulgar (se hacen pasar por católicos). Maciek perfecciona su alemán y repasa autobiografías inventadas porque como su tía, cuya autoridad acepta sin rechistar, le ha explicado, las mentiras han de ser más consistentes

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forzaron la retirada de los rusos de Polonia, la persecución de los judíos se intensificó y el padre de Begley se vio forzado a huir, pasando la mayor parte de los años que duró la guerra en Samarkanda. Begley y su madre permanecieron en Stryj pero consiguieron escapar usando documentos falsos según los cuales madre e hijo eran polacos católicos y no judíos. Al final de la guerra la familia volvió a reunirse, estableciéndose primero en Varsovia y Cracovia, después en París y, finalmente, en 1947, en Nueva York, en donde cambiaron su apellido de Begleiter a Begley. En 1959 Louis Begley se graduó en Derecho por la Universidad de Harvard y se convirtió en un prestigioso abogado, combinando su trabajo en el ámbito legal con su carrera como novelista, que empezó en 1991 con la publicación de *Wartime Lies*. Hasta la fecha, ha publicado ocho novelas, si bien sólo las dos primeras (*Wartime Lies* y *The Man Who Was Late* [1993]) están relacionadas con el tema del Holocausto.

que la verdad. La narrativa presenta al protagonista como alguien a quien se le ha privado de voz. Con frecuencia, Maciek calla, y cuando habla, otras voces, de Tania y de otros adultos, desplazan la suya. Cuando es Tania la que habla a través de él, el protagonista aparece como doblemente mudo, porque la voz de Tania tampoco es genuina, por así decirlo, sino que es, sobre todo, un vehículo para gratificar los deseos de otros: sus palabras y sus gestos no son nunca desinteresados sino que persiguen el objetivo de esconder la verdad y de complacer a los que la escuchan. La estrategia adoptada por Tania y Maciek subraya la pérdida de voz de las víctimas del Holocausto, que con frecuencia fue un preludio del silencio radical de la muerte, pero que evoca también una profunda deshumanización y el deslizamiento de la identidad hacia una alteridad remota, vacua. Por otra parte, la imposibilidad de encontrar en la obra una historia verdadera que sirva como punto de referencia a la hora de calibrar las mentiras contadas implica que la historia real de la supervivencia, y la historia real de su autor, permanecen fuera de la narrativa, aunque accesibles sólo a través de la relación entre lo que se cuenta en ella y lo que se calla, o lo que es imposible contar.

La obra de Begley incluye, pues, lo que se considera un motivo recurrente en la literatura del Holocausto: la pérdida de voz, el emudecimiento real o figurado, y el tema relacionado de la historia truncada o incompleta, o de la historia no contada. Como Sara Horowitz explica en *Voicing the Void. Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (1997), la literatura del Holocausto está llena de personajes afásicos y personajes que no han perdido la voz en sentido estricto, pero que no pueden sino emitir sonidos ininteligibles, sonidos animales, desvaríos propios de lunáticos, etc. Otros deciden conscientemente dejar de hablar y otros se ven forzados a usar un idioma que no es el suyo. La preponderancia de personajes que no pueden contar, de historias no narradas, refleja una actitud ambivalente hacia el lenguaje, el deseo de reconstruir los paradigmas de significado destruidos por el Holocausto y, al mismo tiempo, la frustración de ese deseo.

Hay dos escenas recurrentes en memorias, diarios, poesía y ficción del Holocausto. En la primera de estas escenas, la víctima decide que luchará por sobrevivir y sobrevivirá para contarlo, sobrevivirá para hablar por los que murieron. En la segunda escena, el superviviente se enfrenta con la imposibilidad de cumplir ese compromiso. Hay pues, por un lado, una entrega a la tarea de "dar testimonio" por miedo al olvido y, frente a ese miedo, el de no ser capaz de contar, el de no disponer de medios adecuados para hacerlo, el miedo a ser silenciado por el dolor de los recuerdos, e incluso a veces también el miedo a no ser escuchado, creído, entendido. Estas dos escenas

ilustran lo que Shoshana Felman denomina "la crisis del testimonio" en *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992).

El compromiso del superviviente, la obligación autoimpuesta de contar lo que pasó, vive otro tipo de crisis, relacionada con algo tan inexorable como es el paso del tiempo. Cada vez hay menos supervivientes del Holocausto y, quizás por eso, la obligación de seguir contando es, cada vez más, una tarea asumida por sus descendientes, escritores de la segunda e incluso tercera generación, hijos y nietos de supervivientes. En sus intentos de reconstruir el pasado, los autores de la segunda generación tratan de encontrar su lugar en la historia y en la cadena de supervivencia.

A veces, el hecho de que los supervivientes hablaran compulsivamente de su pasado o lo mantuvieran vivo en el presente de otras maneras, ha marcado, incluso saturado, la infancia de estos autores. Hubo también supervivientes que se refugiaron en el silencio, pero que igualmente conviertieron a sus hijos en herederos de los fantasmas del pasado. En cualquier caso, los esfuerzos por recuperar un pasado perdido y que se considera esencial para la formación de su propia identidad aparece de forma recurrente en las obras de estos autores y con frecuencia genera ansiedad, neurosis y síntomas de stress post-traumático (que pueden haber heredado de sus padres en lo que algunos describen como la transmisión intergeneracional del trauma). Todo ello desemboca en un intento de contar la historia no contada, que es también una manera de intentar superar el trauma, o cuando menos enfrentarse a él, al tiempo que se responde al desafío de los negacionistas.

El francés Henri Raczymow acuñó el témino "*mémoire trouée"* para describir lo que literalmente podríamos traducir como "la memoria agujereada" de los descendientes de supervivientes. Este autor se refiere así a los recuerdos que él heredó como recuerdos configurados por todo lo que el Holocausto destruyó y no fue transmitido, agujeros de la memoria y espacios en blanco en su árbol genealógico que le privaron, tanto a él como a otros descendientes de supervivientes, de auténticas raíces. Estos agujeros, estos espacios en blanco, no se pueden ignorar porque son como el miembro amputado que se siente a pesar de su ausencia.

En este contexto, Efraim Sicher compara el Holocausto con el *dybbuk* de la tradición judía (56). El *dybbuk*, una figura típica del folklore judío, es el espíritu errante de una persona muerta que vuelve para terminar una misión o para deshacer una mala acción. El *dybbuk* está también relacionado con la idea mística de la reparación

del alma, o *tikkum*. El intento de exorcizar el *dybbuk* es un intento de reconciliarse con el pasado y una lucha por la libertad, que es también una libertad creativa. Como Edmund Wilson apuntó en su análisis de una de las obras de André Gide, puede que el artista necesite el sustento de sus propias heridas para ser capaz de crear (259). La literatura de la segunda generación refleja, en distintos grados, las consecuencias de lo que Robert Jay Lifton denomina "*the death imprint*", es decir, la huella/marca de la muerte ("Americans as Survivors" 2263).[8]

Las obras escritas por hijos de supervivientes han desarrollado sus propios motivos a partir de las historias contadas una y otra vez por sus padres o, el reverso de la moneda, su silencio sobre el pasado; fotos de hermanos o de otros miembros de la familia que no sobrevivieron; objetos que una vez les pertenecieron; una especial sensibilidad frente al mal o el peligro; el sufrimiento continuo de sus padres; los problemas de comunicación y el entendimiento intergeneracional; la aceptación, el cuestionamiento y, en fin, la problématica en torno a su identidad judía; etc. Pese a su dificultad, los esfuerzos continúan por imaginar algo por parte de alguien que no estuvo allí y prueba de ello es el creciente corpus de literatura de la segunda generación, las autobiografías, biografías, novelas y relatos breves de autores como Carol Ascher, Barry Lane, Lev Raphael, Barbara Finkelstein, Thomas Friedman, Michael Kornblit, Sonia Pilcer, David Preston, Lore Segal, Julie Salamon, Ellen Summers y Art Spiegelman, entre otros. La obra más conocida de éste último, Art Spiegelman, es también una de las más osadas, aclamadas y controvertidas de entre las escritas por autores de la segunda generación, pero sea como fuere, resulta representativa en muchos apectos.

Art Spiegelman nació en Estocolmo en 1948, donde se habían establecido sus padres, Vladek y Anja, tras haber pasado por los campos de concentración nazis. Posteriormente, en 1951, se trasladaron a Nueva York y allí Anja se quitó la vida. Siendo joven, Art Spiegelman se inició en la publicación de cómics underground y pasó después a trabajar para diversas publicaciones como el *New York Times, Village Voice* y *Playboy*, entre otras. En 1980, fundó junto con su mujer Françoise Mouly la revista *Raw*, una publicación

[8] Según Lifton, los supervivientes de una tragedia (y, en este caso, también sus descendientes) sienten una especie de deuda para con los que murieron, así como la necesidad de satisfacer los deseos de éstos para justificar su propia supervivencia. Se embarcan, pues, en una desesperada búsqueda de significado, y de esquemas formales a través de los cuales expresar ese significado, con vistas a establecer y formular de manera aceptable su relación con los muertos ("Americans as Survivors" 2263).

en formato tabloide, de clara intención experimental. *Raw* influyó en el concepto, diseño y publicación de las revistas de cómics pero, sobre todo, consiguió el prestigio suficiente para despertar la atención del lector no habitual. Fue en sus páginas donde apareció originalmente *Maus*, en forma serializada (entre 1980 y 1991), publicándose después en dos tomos, *Maus I* (1986) y *Maus II* (1991), que finalmente se integraron en un sólo volumen. La obra recibió un premio Pulizter en 1992, el primero y último otorgado a un cómic.

Spiegelman utiliza un género inesperado, el cómic, para hablar de un tema mortalmente serio. Es una subversión consciente de la norma, de las jerarquías y del decoro literario entendido como interdependencia entre contenido y forma, puesto que un cómic pudiera no considerarse ni literatura seria ni la forma más apropiada de tratar el tema de Holocausto. Ahora bien, uno de los logros de la obra consiste precisamente en forzarnos a reconsiderar las posibilidades del género. En *Maus*, el cómic se funde con la historia, la biografía y el testimonio del padre del autor, la autobiografía del autor propiamente dicho, y la alegoría que emerge de la fábula de animales. Spiegelman retrata a sus personajes como animales antropomórficos, con cuerpo de persona y cabeza de animal: ratones para representar a los judíos (*Maus* significa ratón en alemán), gatos para los alemanes, cerdos para los polacos, ranas para los franceses, ciervos para los suecos, perros para los estadounidenses y peces para los ingleses. La elección es deliberada y sugiere, metafóricamente, que Polonia se convirtió en una ratonera para los judíos, devorados por los gatos alemanes, o que los judíos polacos se sintieron traicionados por el resto de los polacos, etc. Sin embargo, la alegoría es mucho más compleja. Por ejemplo, no está claro si los judíos son ratones porque eso es lo que son, o porque son percibidos así por los demás, o porque así se ven ellos a sí mismos. Además, los personajes a veces usan máscaras y asumen otra identidad animal, con lo cual el marco alegórico en el que se encuadra la historia se afirma y se subvierte al mismo tiempo. El dibujo es en blanco y negro, pero aparte de viñetas con personajes, diálogos, y comentarios, *Maus* incluye muchos otros textos: mapas de Polonia y de los campos de concentración, diagramas de los escondites, planos de los crematoria, fotografías reales de la familia del autor, etc.

Maus está estructurada en dos planos. En uno, Artie, la versión del autor en su obra, nos relata la compleja relación que mantiene con su padre, Vladek, judío polaco y superviviente de los campos de exterminio. Éste cuenta la historia de su pasado mientras el hijo toma notas para la realización de un cómic basado en las vivencias de sus progenitores antes, durante y después del Holocausto. En

otro plano, asistimos a la historia en sí contada por Vladek, la historia de una joven pareja de recién casados inmersa en el tumulto nazi, la persecución de los judíos, la vida en ghetos, la pérdida de familiares, y la estancia de los Spiegelman en los campos de concentración de Auschwitz y Birkenau. La línea temporal del presente recoge no sólo la difícil relación entre padre e hijo, sino también los problemas del padre a la hora de recordar y verbalizar sus recuerdos, la huella que los hechos vividos han dejado en él y las dificultades del hijo para reproducir la historia familiar en su cómic, así como para hacer frente a una serie de dilemas éticos acerca de si es correcto obtener fama basándose en las desgracias vividas por su familia. El autor entreteje las líneas de estos dos planos —lo que ocurrió en el pasado y lo que ocurre en el presente— haciendo que las viñetas de una narración interrumpan el flujo de la otra.

Maus refleja el sufrimiento de las víctimas, la lucha del hijo por comprender el pasado familiar —un pasado que incluye la muerte de un hermano de Artie (Richieu) durante la guerra y también el suicidio de su madre— y por comprenderse a sí mismo. También refleja la presencia recurrente de un pasado traumático que es una herida abierta en el presente y explora las oportunidades que la expresión artística proporciona de cara a la superación del dolor. La relación, llena de fracturas, entre Vladek, Artie y su pasado, es también la relación problemática de Artie con su propia herencia judía. *Maus* es un retrato del proceso de dar testimonio, y de las dificultades lingüísticas, artísticas, emocionales y éticas que rodean dicho proceso.

El concepto de "dar testimonio", recurrente en este contexto, parece presuponer la existencia de un testigo, alguien que sufrió el Holocausto y sobrevivió. Como hemos visto, el significado de "testimonio" se amplía para dar cabida a los descendientes de supervivientes, que recogen el testigo de éstos últimos para hablar de una historia que no vivieron pero que ha marcado sus vidas de otra manera. El intento de imaginar y dar forma artística a acontecimientos no vividos es lo que estos autores de la segunda o tercera generación tienen en común con otros autores para los que el Holocausto no forma parte de la memoria familiar sino más bien de la memoria colectiva. Y con ellos, el concepto de "testigo" se amplía aún más. Geoffrey Hartman, por ejemplo, acuñó el témino "*witnesses by adoption*", algo así como "testigos adoptivos", para referirse a la expansión de la noción de "testigo" o "testimonio" más allá de las fronteras de lo personal o familiar. Lo que novelas y relatos sobre el Holocausto escritos por autores no directamente relacionados con los acontecimientos pone de manifiesto es la existencia de un espacio intersubjetivo para la memoria, para el recuerdo de lo que

es no sólo un trauma personal para algunos sino también un trauma cultural o colectivo que, por tanto, nos implica a todos.

El escritor británico Martin Amis reconoció en una entrevista que, cuando comenzó a escribir *Time's Arrow* (1991), sintió como si estuviera adentrándose en un bosque de tabúes. Una cosa es estar interesado en el Holocausto como tema y otra muy distinta es escribir una novela sobre ello. Pero en el mundo de la literatura, añade, no hay señales de "Prohibido el paso" (Watchel 47). *Time's Arrow* es interesante, entre otras cosas, porque es un relato que se centra en la figura de un oficial nazi, uno de los doctores que trabajaron en las cámaras de gas de Auschwitz a las órdenes de Joseph Mengele. Dar testimonio es pues una tarea que nos fuerza a pensar no sólo en las víctimas del Holocausto sino también en aquellos que hicieron posible el horror de la masacre. En este sentido, *Time's Arrow* retrata precisamente lo que Hannah Arendt llamó "la banalidad del mal" para referirse al hecho de que no son necesarios monstruos para cometer atrocidades. El protagonista de la novela emerge como un hombre corriente, pero capaz de hacer cualquier cosa buena o mala una vez se integra en un grupo en el que todos actúan de la misma manera. El más común de los mortales puede cometer los actos más inhumanos. Esa es la naturaleza del mal, y del ser humano.

A primera vista, pudiera parecer curioso que el colectivo médico, cuya misión es salvar vidas, fuera uno de los que ocupara un papel más destacado en la implementación del exterminio. Según Robert J. Lifton, este hecho fue posible gracias a una especie de desdoblamiento psicológico según el cual estos doctores anulaban su lado más humano en los campos de concentración —en donde olvidaban su juramento Hipocrático y se convertían en eficientes asesinos sin conciencia— pero activaban o recuperaban esa parte de sí mismos cuando volvían a sus ciudades de permiso, o los fines de semana, y visitaban a sus familias comportándose como maridos y padres corrientes. Una de las obras de Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors* (1986),[9] es un importante intertexto en la novela de Amis ya que en ésta última la relación entre narrador y protagonista se articula en base a la mencionada teoría del desdoblamiento psicológico. El narrador de la novela es la parte más humana del protagonista, primero acallada y después desterrada definitivamente en Auschwitz, porque sólo así el asesino podía cumplir órdenes sin remordimientos y de forma eficaz, convencido de que lo que hacía y lo que era correcto hacer eran la misma cosa.

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[9] Ver también, de este autor y sobre el mismo tema, "El desdoblamiento y los médicos nazis."

En *Time's Arrow* la narración invierte el orden cronológico de los hechos. La historia comienza cuando Tod Friendly está a punto de morir en un hospital en EE.UU., el último de los países en los que el protagonista se refugia después del final de la guerra. El narrador de la historia coincide y no coincide con el protagonista, ya que es, más bien, una parte de éste, su conciencia, su alma, que en el momento de la muerte emerge del exilio en el que ha estado desterrada durante años. Hay quienes afirman que al morir toda nuestra vida pasa por delante de nuestros ojos, como si de una película se tratara. Algo similar ocurre en la novela de Amis, pero es como si la película fuera hacia atrás, como cuando se rebobina un vídeo. El narrador relata la vida del protagonista como quien relata un sueño en el que uno se ve a sí mismo desde fuera pero siendo consciente de que el protagonista del sueño es, después de todo, uno mismo. Sin embargo, a diferencia del protagonista, el narrador es capaz de empatizar con los demás y resulta, en definitiva, mucho más humano que éste. Este narrador no sabe que su relato subvierte el orden cronológico de los acontecimientos y, aunque tiene acceso a los pensamientos y las emociones del personaje central de la novela, es totalmente desconocedor de la historia. Todo en la novela ocurre en orden inverso, a veces hasta las conversaciones y, por supuesto, también las pequeñas cosas del día a día. Así, el sustento procede de los excrementos, que entran en el cuerpo, pasan de la boca al plato y de ahí a la nevera y al supermercado, en donde se cambian por dinero. Los tubos de escape de los coches y las chimeneas de las fábricas absorben el humo y el protagonista recoge el periódico del cubo de la basura, para luego leerlo y llevarlo a la tienda por la mañana. Los pacientes acuden sanos al hospital y allí se les hiere o golpea. En este mundo en el que nada tiene sentido, todo se torna comprensible para el narrador cuando el relato avanza, o más bien retrocede, hasta el tiempo que el protagonista pasó en Auschwitz. Odilo Unverdorben, su verdadero nombre, aparece allí como colaborador destacado en una gran misión: crear judíos a partir de humo, fuego y cenizas. Visto en orden inverso, lo que ocurrió en los campos de exterminio no sería la implementación de un proyecto de destrucción sino de creación. Las vidas arrebatadas en la realidad, serían vidas dadas; el proceso de aislar a ciertos sectores de la población sería, en orden inverso, un proceso de integración. En suma, la locura del Holocausto sólo tiene sentido si se lee al revés, pero el lector sabe muy bien que no se puede invertir la flecha del tiempo y, por tanto, es el lector el que tiene que aportar la dimensión trágica a unos hechos que el narrador, en su ignorancia, celebra.

En el universo de la novela todo ocurre porque ya ha ocurrido.

Visto desde el presente, el pasado no se puede cambiar, pero el futuro admite distintas posibilidades. El horror del Holocausto, según Amis, radica también en el hecho de que puede volver a ocurrir. Las obras ficcionales y no ficcionales de este autor revelan una preocupación constante con la posibilidad de otro holocausto, el holocausto nuclear. Pero a diferencia del Holocausto tal y como se trata en la novela, el nuclear no tiene que ocurrir forzosamente, precisamente porque aún no ha ocurrido. Es necesario, no obstante, que el pasado se explore y no se olvide porque constituye una advertencia acerca del futuro hacia el que quizás nos estamos acercando. Es un error vivir en el pasado, pero ignorarlo es aún peor, si cabe.

En una parábola titulada “The Night Watchman” e incluida en *The New Mahzor* (libro de oraciones judío) el mensaje que se transmite es que la oración no es una manera de informar a Dios de nuestras circunstancias y de nuestras necesidades. Dios ya las conoce. La oración es una manera de mantenernos alerta, de demostrar que somos conscientes de nuestras obligaciones para con Dios, los otros y nosotros mismos. El sereno gritaba la hora, cada hora en punto, en el silencio de la noche. Y no lo hacía para despertar a los que dormían o para informarles de qué hora era. Lo hacía para demostrar que él, el sereno, estaba alerta, atendía sus responsabilidades y no se había dormido. De la misma manera, la literatura del Holocausto, ficcional o no, hasta donde la diferencia puede establecerse o resulta relevante establecerla, también demuestra que los que la escriben y los que la leen están alerta, mantienen viva la lección que puede extraerse del pasado, son conscientes de su responsabilidad y no olvidan ni callan, aunque hablar sea quizás más complicado que doblegarse ante la tentación o la fuerza del silencio, que es el verdadero límite de la representación, el más radical y extremo. La literatura del Holocausto, como los gritos del sereno de antaño, pone voz a la oscuridad de la noche.

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DEATH AND THE MAIDEN: THE FLOATING COURTESAN IN *PAKEEZAH*

Hugo Ríos

“I am not a woman
I am a grave”

Ji í Walker

The Courtesan film occupies a particular position in the popular imagination of India. Its great popularity could be ascribed to its hybrid status, the character of the courtesan being hard to define. Sumita Chakravarty describes the character as “as dancing girl, nautch-girl, prostitute or harlot” and, above all, as both “celebrated and shunned” (269). Rachel Dwyer suggests the appeal of a “lost” Islamic element and the relationship between memory, loss and poetry and the *ghazal* [1] (88). Films such as *Tawaif, Umrao Jaan, Mamta, Amar Prem, Utsav, Ram Teri Ganga Maili, Bhumika* and *Pakeezah*, among others, serve as testimony of the vital force that emanates from the Courtesan Film but it is the last mentioned that packs all the elements of the Courtesan Film plus an interesting commentary on two seemingly unrelated issues: death and the floating condition of the courtesans.

My examination of these motifs will be focused on Kamal Amrohi’s 1972 film *Pakeezah*. My reading is nurtured by the idea that this film stands as a text that is both a performance of the genre as well as a critique of it.

My first viewing of *Pakeezah* was immediately affected by what seemed to be melodramatic excess. Peter Brooks’ definition of melodrama includes an interesting catalog of features, most of which make their way into the Indian film: “indulgence of strong emotionalism, moral polarization and schematization, extreme states of being,

[1] Of Persian origin, the ghazal is a musical poetic form whose themes revolve around unattainable love.

situations, actions, overt villainy, persecution of the good and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plotting, suspense and breathtaking peripety" (11-12). Vijay Mishra in his *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* concurs with this idea but he is careful to signal that it is not the only source of excess, pointing also to Parsi Theater and other "local" influences (36). Mishra also comments on the nature of Bombay melodrama identifying it as representing "cultural truths of a metatextual kind– truths that bind eternal laws together–and not truths of a representational (lifelike) kind" (39). *Pakeezah* follows this road and perhaps takes it a step further. Overall the film presents a plausible structure according to Hindi Film standards but the "excessive excess" it contains eventually burst out of the seams in several key scenes. But in order to talk about this excess it is necessary to establish what is happening in the film in terms of generic conventions.

The importance of the courtesan in Indian society has been documented by several authors, among them Veena Talwar Oldenburg and Mukul Kesavan. Oldenburg traces the cultural and political resistance that these figures embodied, especially after the rebellion of 1857. Also according to Oldenburg, this particular system shows a semi-autonomous hierarchy of women in control that operates without male interference. Their cultural role is highlighted as they seem to be in charge of education, or, as Kesavan puts it they, "catered comprehensively to the complicated needs of the cultivated man-about-town, a more accomplished courtesan, a sort of geisha" (253). The British rulers probably saw the problem with this establishment, a problem that had an inherent paradoxical nature in it. This was an institution in charge of transmitting tradition but as such it had to be controlled in order to start to reinforce the process of colonial education. In addition, courtesans had intimate contact with the Nawabs in the private sphere and this allowed them a direct access to power. Oldenburg goes as far as to describe the courtesans of Lucknow as "an influential female elite" (139). But on the other hand some of them provided what the British saw as affordable sexual service and therefore needed to be regulated but not abolished. This regulation according to Oldenburg "not only debased the profession, stripping it from its social function, but it also made sex cheap and easy for the men while exposing the women to venereal infection from the soldiers" (142). Another controversial aspect in the colonial eyes was that as a social institution the courtesan, called *tawaif,* "created a secular meritocracy based on talent and education accepting Muslims and Hindus alike" (151), which was obviously an aspect that had to be controlled in order to create the religious difference

that would first serve to keep a huge country under control and that would eventually explode to catastrophic consequences during the partition of India.

It is not surprising then, that such a locus of power, tradition and controversy would become an interesting subject for Indian Cinema. As I mentioned before, the courtesan film is fascinating due to its paradoxical nature. Chakravarty describes it as "enjoying a wide and consistent popularity" and being a "favored subject of even the most respected Bombay filmmakers" (270). This can be explained not only as the fascination that the prostitute generates in audiences but also as an act of cultural resistance. The courtesan as purveyor of culture stands as a paradoxical paradigm: the welcomed pariah. This is a case of the insider/outsider, necessary to keep the communal rites going but also needed to stand as the Other in order to keep the conventions of society running.

Motifs that show the prison-like nature of courtesan/prostitute life and that likewise appear in Hollywood melodramas are blown out of proportion in courtesan films. Chakravarty goes on to enumerate several key elements that are woven into courtesan film like mirrors, caged birds, journeys, etc. Chakravarty also proceeds to divide them into three major types: the famous historical courtesan, the prostitute as embodiment of maternal love and finally the setting up of prostitution "as a result of unfortunate or impecunious circumstances" (275). Kamal Amrohi's *Pakeezah* belongs to the last-mentioned category. But it also goes beyond this category as it seems to play a very conscious game of influence.

Before I begin with a close reading of *Pakeezah* it is important to formulate the ideas that will run through this analysis. Two issues concern me. One is the arresting elements of death that are prominently featured on this film. The other is the floating imagery that seems to filter the film and at moments take over the active representation of courtesans.

First, Death. It seems that in the film, death and the maiden are inextricably linked.

Dealing with Death and Islam, Lila Abu-Lughod explores the relationships of weddings and mourning: "Weddings (*afrah*), the word for which in Arabic also means celebration or happiness, are the epitome of joyous celebrations. It is considered an affront to celebrate weddings within the forty-day mourning period that follows the death of even someone in the neighbors's family" (190). Although Abu-Lughod is working with Middle Eastern communities, the same could easily apply to the religious discourse that feeds *Pakeezah* and the film is

informed by a continuous discourse of death that is reflected not only in rituals but also in dress-codes.

The second idea is the “floating” motif. Interestingly enough, women who work in the male-entertainment industry are sometimes referred to as forming part of a “floating” element. For example, in Bangladesh, contemporary prostitutes not associated with an established house or pimp are called “floating prostitutes.” In Japan of the Edo period (mid 17th century) a particular type of Yoshiwara or pleasure center developed around the figure of Ukiyo. The ukiyo was the floating world and the main characteristic was the “highly stylized representations” of women “who literally and symbolically embodied physical beauty, cultural refinement and often erotic love” (Hibbett 23). As we will see below, Pakeezah partakes of this tradition in a very subtle but constant and efficient way.

According to Chakravarty, “*Pakeezah* has a curious other-worldly air that is in tension with the social and historical concreteness of the institution being portrayed” (291). This tension is already in position in the first scenes of the film. In the prologue, a musical number featuring Meena Kumari’s dance is interrupted by a grave masculine voice that dominates the voiceover. The voiceover carries over a few scenes telling the story of Nargis. First there is a fadeout of the title where the name of the director is featured and the viewer is thrown immediately into the scene. Meena Kumari as Nargis is featured in an American shot interrupted by a candle that is right on the middle of the screen and from where it seems she is rising. (This could be a possible foreshadowing to the phoenix resurgence of Nargis in her daughter or perhaps a commentary on the eternal recurrence of the motif of the prostitute). Nargis dressed in white (what in Hindu traditions is a color of mourning, widows and funerals) dances in an oddly-lit room. Two visible sources of light can be seen: The candle in the center and some glass chandeliers. The other prominent feature of the shot is a green door in the background. There is an audience, barely-visible, sitting on the floor and in the shadows. Nargis stars circling around the candle when the green doors open revealing a new source of light of perfect geometrical shape reflected on the ground and a man standing there. She walks into the light where her beloved (and future father of Pazeekah) Shahabuddin stands. As he walks in she starts moving back and the light of the chandeliers disappears. (Walking into or out of the light as well as a source of light being extinguished can all be seen as motifs of death) The scene ends in an apparent freeze frame that cuts to a street scene.

In the first few minutes we are introduced by the voice over to the story of Nargis. We learn about her escape from a brothel and her

secret marriage to Shahabuddin. She is picked up by a hearse-like carriage. Inside the carriage, Nargis' demeanor seems that of a dying woman. Her eyes look dead, her countenance seems pale and her words drop from her mouth slowly. We then witness her rejection by Shahabuddin's father, the patriarch of the family. Her second escape, triggered by this rejection, is filmed in a way that the camera does not leave the house with her but in a long-shot that acts also as another condemnation of her outsider status. Her second escape ends her unlikely route from the brothel to the house and then out of the house and into a graveyard. We get a shot of Nargis standing among the graves as ornamental as the red flowers that grow in the background. The voiceover returns and the scene dissolves into a close-up of Shahabuddin's face (focused on his eyes). We get another dissolve and we see Nargis' hand as she is writing a letter to Shahab. This is actually a superimposition because Shahab's eyes linger while we start seeing the letter. In this scene the motifs of the courtesan are written with light: the eyes of the man and the writing with the body and songs of the woman; the spectacle encapsulated in a few seconds of screen time. Later we will know that Shahab's eyes will not see the letter on time. What Nargis is writing is not only a letter to her lover but also her last will and testament. As a letter it fails to save her or prolong her life but as a will it saves her daughter from the brothel. In these few scenes that follow each other in rapid succession we get a prologue of the action and a set up of the movie within the tradition of the "man saving a woman from a life on the streets," a motif that seems to be universal and forms a trademark of patriarchal romanticism.

There is a cut and now we see Nawabjaan, Nargis' sister. She is discussing the purity/impurity of some gold coins with a merchant. The merchant asks: "How can there be anything impure in it? The gold coins are pure. It must be some minor dirt." This is an argument that anticipates the renaming of Sahibjaan and that according to Chakravarty is one of the thematic elements that define the courtesan consciousness (292). This is followed by the first recognition scene. A woman is selling a golden bangle that belonged to Nargis and Nawabjaan identifies it. This bangle stands as a token from the dead, another letter that reaches too late and by which Nawabjaan will find her sister. It is important that she is identified by something that labels her social position, not a book but an item that works like the "ghungroo" or anklet-bells will, later. These are the items of luxury that according to Oldenburg distinguished courtesans and caught the attention of the confiscating British authorities (174). The bracelet leads to the second cemetery scene. Nawabjaan's attention is focused on

the cries of a baby. The first days of young Sahibjaan were literally spent in a cemetery as her mid-period will be spent in a brothel and her later years in a marriage. After a while, Nawabjaan stands by the ground where Nargis is buried wondering about the silence that she must have endured in the necropolis. This silence is parallel to the public silence that she would have endured in the house of Shahab's father had she been accepted. But it is also a silence that stands as antonym of her vocation that of the singing/dancing courtesan. This is one instance where the vocation of a courtesan stands suspended between two forms of death and that only a real death seem to resolve at the time: the death to society that being a courtesan entails or the death to freedom that being a wife would mean.

The tokens of the dead keep being the circulating currency of the film when Nawabjaan authorizes an old woman to sell Nargis' personal items. And this in itself will lead to the second recognition scene. At this moment, the spectator is not aware of the time that has passed. An old man buys one of Nargis' books and inside he finds her letter to Shahabuddin. The old man decides to deliver it (an instance of the letter reaching its destination even if posthumously). We see then Shahabuddin reading the letter, the voiceover flooded with the voice of the dead Nargis. This is not an actual usurpation of the voiceover but rather Shahabuddin's consciousness replaying Nargis' voice: "I was not fortunate enough that I would've breathed my last on your door-step. Neither was I fortunate that you take my dead body to the graveyard. But I'd to leave your home and find a graveyard for myself." After revealing his paternity she states that "now we will meet on Doomsday." With these words Nargis makes an appointment to meet Shahabuddin in death, a deal that is sealed by the circulation of the body of their daughter. It is in the name of the daughter that the letter is written and it is because of the recognition of the daughter that Shahabuddin dies. In a way it is a bond that is sealed by death.

The final cemetery scene occurs with Shahabuddin kneeling in front of Nargis' burial ground. It is possible at this moment to recognize the very few times that Nargis has been standing on her ground. We almost never see her standing still or resting. She is dancing or running, sitting or buried under ground. This could be read as a statement of the floating characteristics of the prostitute, a figure that almost immediately is repeated in the courtesan milieu that follows.

An abrupt cut sends us to the place where Nawabjaan is living with Sahibjaan, Shahabuddin's daughter. We get a first glimpse at the tightly organized hierarchy that functions in the milieu of the prostitute. We see many spinning wheels for sharpening knives. But

Nawabjaan stands above all of them as an overseer, possibly as the Chandharayan, the owner or manager of the brothel (Oldenburg). We see her exercise authority by expelling a man from the place and even threatening him. Even more interesting than her towering authority and independence is the saturated background that Amrohi presents. Every niche in the background is filled with color but above all with movement. In a majestic mise-en-abyme, the floating prostitute makes her first open statement about her condition. There are no women on the ground floor, all of them stand (or rather dance, run, float) on the second and third levels of buildings: a truly floating world.

Descending to meet Shahabuddin, Nawabjaan opens the meta-discourse about courtesan films by asking him, “Now which prostitute do you intend to rescue from hell?” This is plot-wise, a reference to the Nargis affair and her previous escape from the brothel but it also stands as a commentary on courtesan films where the hero’s ambition is to rescue the woman, to bring her back to society. In the conversation that ensues between Shahabuddin and Nawabjaan, she says “some graveyard must have requested you to bring her dead body.” This statement continues Nargis’ discourse of the body of the prostitute as a dead body. This idea will later be retaken by Sahibjaan.

After promising Shahabuddin to return his daughter but only after her last performance Nawabjaan takes Sahibjaan with her on a train journey: the bodies of the courtesans being transported at high speed from the threat of normalcy of family life to another courtesan space. Their escape opens the door for the appearance of the “hero” Salim Ahmed Khan. In the train scene Salim stumbles upon the sleeping Sahibjaan, reads her book, steals her bookmark and becomes enthralled with her feet. In this scene, one can hear the questionable sound of bells that may or may not be diegetic. If it is not then are we dealing with the first instance of psychological sound? Is the sound of anklet bells or “ghunghroo” the sign of an inescapable nature that floating in the soundscape points towards her bonds?

Two almost insignificant elements stand out at the end of the train scene. When the train stops, it does so at a station called “Suhagpur” (we can read a sign through the window behind Sahibjaan). This means something along the lines of “place of wedding”. It is in this place that she discovers her feelings towards one mysterious man that at the moment is not more than a few words on a note.

But she also discovers the note tucked into her feet. If we read this scene in a western sense, her body has been identified with a morgue

tag. Sahibjaan, the dead body transported away from her father to avoid recognition, is now identified by a stranger; it has been labeled not only as a beautiful body but also as a floating one. The content of the note plays an important role in the whole death/ethereal subtext of the film. The writer with a polite imperative commands her not to put her feet on the ground. This achieves a dual purpose: it keeps her feet from being defiled by the ground but it also condemns her to a floating existence.

When they get to the new place is has the same characteristics as the place they just escaped. Every nook in the background is occupied by a dancing woman and you barely see women on the street; they are always upstairs. These women are mostly shot sitting on beds or standing on tables their feet almost never touch the ground. One can also see women on the rooftops, their conversations, floating from building to building.

But besides the ethereal characteristics that they share there is also a common economic ground where they stand. They are independent economically speaking. Nawabjaan acquires the pink palace from the indebted Gauhar Jaan and it is here where she hides Sahibjaan from the inquiries of Shahabuddin.

Sahibjaan becomes an instant success and draws the attention of Nawab Zafar who instantly falls for her the same time that she is becoming increasingly restless with her memories of the train note. This leads eventually to a boat scene where nature directly intervenes to keep her away from men and drives her into the hands of her mysterious stranger. She is floating on the river after being "bought" by the Nawab. We assume that her virgin status remains intact and that this will be the time when she will have to fulfill her "duties." All of a sudden a herd of wild elephants threatens the boat. The Nawab shoots at them making the elephants angrier. They destroy the boat separating Sahibjaan from her owner and setting her adrift for some time.

Walking on strange ground, she enters an empty tent where she discovers a diary and in it the book marker stolen before. The bookmark is a feather, a perfect symbol of a floating condition. She reads the diary. Then when she discovers that the author is the same mysterious stranger from the train, the film can no longer contain the cinematic excess and it erupts into a sequence of nature takes, birds flying and sunsets that lead inevitably into a song.

Right after this, exhausted from her rediscovered or newly focused sexuality, she stumbles on his bed. Then surprisingly Sahibjaan appropriates the voiceover momentarily. We get direct access to

her thoughts. In the midst of her excitement and desperation death shows up again although this time minimized as part of the romantic discourse when she claims that she will die without ever gazing at him. “I’ll die on your bed, in front of your eyes.”

The narrative excess continues with the hero galloping on his horse accompanied by the music of a western song with echoes of Spanish guitar or perhaps flamenco music. After a series of improbable events (an untimely separation once again orchestrated to Spanish music and an even unlikelier “rescue” by Nawabjaan) Sahibjaan returns to the Pink Palace where she is unable to perform for the men gathered around her. This is followed by another gap of melodramatic excess that could be read as a dream sequence. The contractor shows up in Sahibjaan’s chambers, threatening her. Here all the melodramatic motifs show up in a distorted way: cages suspended from the ceiling fall to the ground revealing snakes, water fountains, the curtains hints a storm raging; nature is taking over as both his lust and her fear clash on the unlikely stage.

She escapes and ends up getting stuck between the train tracks. She ends up being rescued by none other than Salim himself (his presence was already anticipated by the hero’s guitar motif buried on the chase/train music sounds). Sound is becoming much more meaningful as the film progresses, as we will see in the first marriage scene.

The journey after the rescue is practically a copy of the first scenes with Shahabuddin and Nargis: She is dressed in white lying on his lap while he is looking at her. The meeting with the grandfather is also another restaging of the earlier scene but while Shahabuddin fails to confront the patriarch, Salim appear to have a much stronger attitude towards tradition, at least momentarily. (Interestingly, the camera once again sides with the household, since the scene ends up with a long shot of the lovers walking away.)

The following scene takes place in front of a waterfall. Sahibjaan is visibly affected by the earlier scene struggles with the information about her past that at the moment she is withholding from Salim. Finally, she confesses that she is a courtesan. Her confession ends in an echo that seems to be the sound of someone that falls. When she is finished speaking the sound of the waterfall invades the space in what sounds like a train whistle. Even if as a train it can’t be part of the diegetic soundscape, the train/waterfall link probably hints at her psychological departure from the land of hope. She falls to his feet and he picks her up and reaffirms his commitment. The whole nature scenery—they seem to be suspended above the river, on some

sort of bridge—contributes to another melodramatic staging of the emotions of the characters.

In her dialogue during the waterfall scene she summons images of death to conjure her emotions. She tells Salim: "Every single day you've been pulling away my soul from my body," an image that conjures up both the soon to be dead body of the courtesan and the floating of her soul being lifted from the body. Then she adds "I would have died aspiring for you but you never let me die too." Suspended between the love that kills and the hope that keeps alive, Sahibjaan surrenders her whole life to the judgment of the hero. This is followed by the inevitable musical number to give vent to the cascade of emotions just unleashed.

After the song, there is a dissolve and we find Salim and Sahibjaan driving around in a tonga through the dusty roads of a city. They stop and Salim goes to buy flowers while Sahibjaan remains in the vehicle (with her feet off the ground). While Salim waits for the flowers a man stops by to greet the visibly embarrassed Sahibjaan. It is obvious that she is dealing with a former customer from her courtesan days. Salim intervenes and a scene ensues where the hero is eventually forced into confronting the man. Now what seems interesting about the whole sequence is that Salim takes longer to react than the average Indian cinema hero, taking an awful beating before finally deciding to join in combat. While all of this is happening Sahibjaan stays in the tonga. After being arrested they are paraded through the streets while the mob starts calling her "a tawaif."

After they are released from the police station Salim and Sahibjaan ascend some stairs to an open field where they meet an old man who will perform a marriage ceremony for them. The old man asks her name and we hear the crowd as psychological sound shouting "she's a whore." Salim intervenes and tells the old man her name, a new name. This is the moment when she is renamed Pakeezah, "the pure one." The scene of the gold coins is brought back with Salim's declaration. She is pure one even with some minor dirt. By accepting her with her "impurity," this becomes Salim's truer, but also final, gesture as a "hero."

> When the old man asks Sahibjaan if she would accept Salim, she does not answer. This is, according to Muslim unwritten conventions, a sign of modesty. But when he asks her a third time she, who has been hearing the psychological sound/chant of the crowd all along, gets up and runs away. As she runs the black veil she was wearing becomes loose, flies away in the wind and falls at Salim's feet. There is a graphic match between two flying objects. First the black veil and after a cut we see a kite flying close to a tree to which is eventually stuck. While the symbol of their marriage, meant for her head, flies away and becomes

> soiled when it falls to the feet of Salim, the kite, a symbol perhaps of a detached nature, a floating symbol of courtesans is stuck and ends up suspended away from the ground. With the kite, the viewer is back to the Pink Palace that now seems to lack the luster of the earlier scenes. It is an empty space with no gorgeous fountains and timely reflecting surfaces. Sahibjaan breaks down and cries on the shoulder of her cousin. Then the following exchange occurs: -My vagabond dead body has returned to be buried in this colorful tomb.
>
> —Hush what dead body?
>
> —Every prostitute is a dead body. I'm a dead body and you too! This marketplace is a graveyard of women whose souls are dead but the bodies remain alive. These mansions are our tombs in which the living coffins of we dead women are kept after being decorated. Our tombs are left open so that….
>
> —Keep quiet. Keep quiet.
>
> —I'm a restless body of one such open tomb which is lured by life again and again.

The camera slowly pans to the right in order to make the kite reappear in the background. Then the cousin goes looking for a comb and returns. Sahibjaan talks about her rejection of Salim because of her fear: "The ground of that world was such that wherever I set foot, the ground used to sink at the same spots." At the beginning, this seemed to ruin the whole floating metaphor that has been carried nicely all along the film. It suggested weight rather than lightness. But the emphasis is on the ground. It is the ground that is unstable not her weight that affects it. It is a ground that will sink even for a weightless being. It is the weight of tradition that makes the ground unstable and her feet sink.

The discourse of death and the dead body of the courtesan gets stronger with this thematic bridge between mother and daughter. The body of the tawaif is subjected to the tension between need and rejection, submission and liberation. As mentioned before, the Pink Palace has become gray and lifeless; gloomy walls and eerie lights stand now instead of the glittering objects and mirror-like surfaces. Then Sahibjaan compares herself to the kite: "'that kite is so much like me, cut away, like I am."

An abrupt cut shows an isolated moment, unlike anything shown in the film before. For seventeen seconds the image of Salim's tent on the fields is shown burning. What does this mean? Could this be Salim's self-immolation where he is burning his heroic stance against tradition and his return to the family as a prodigal son?[2] Taking into

[2] Although as a Muslim Salim would not be cremated, this could well appear to be a funeral pyre in the context of the audience.

consideration his first action after his return this is very probable reading of this enigmatic scene.

Back at the Pink Palace, the passage of time is shown by the decay of the kite that is still stuck in the tree—we must keep Sahibjaan's comparison in mind. Twice we see Sahibjaan's point of view focused on a passing train. This is the moment when the letter from Salim arrives. Twice Salim writes to her: first the note, condemning her to a floating existence and then the letter inviting her, in an act of spite, to perform for him at his wedding.

The wedding takes place in a big white hall, adorned with garlands and chandeliers. Lots of musicians scattered on the floor ready to play and Sahibjaan dressed in impeccable white ready to perform. This is where the final recognition scene will take place. Sahibjaan dances with fury challenging Salim's gaze. Her dancing "unwrites" her mother's fate in a gesture that is both victory and defeat. Eventually she knocks over some lamps but, the shattered glass is not an obstacle to her dancing. She dances on glass and her blood stains the floor. She is writing a letter like her mother did at the cemetery. This is also her last will and testament. Nirmal Puwar in her "Multicultural Fashion: Stirrings of another Sense of Aesthetics and Memory" describes this dance as a gesture of sufferance, defeat and defiance at the same time" (84). Peter Mercer in his book on melodrama also examines the excess of this scene calling it a "hysterical dramatic scene […] the catalyst of the revelation of Pakeezah's true identity and a satisfactory conclusion to the film whereby the heroine is freed of the shame of her current existence and reunited with her lover in marriage" (96). My own reading is somewhat different. Living in the suspended/ethereal state, while it allows for some financial flexibility at least in the codes of this particular movie, also condemns the tawaif to an undead life. Like the vampire, she can enjoy the privileges of being undead but she can never escape that form of life. Only through real death can she actually escape life. In Nargis' case, death is total and literal. In Sahibjaan there is a twist that presents a double alternative and that stands as a way for the text to comment on itself.

Nawabjaan recognizes Shahabuddin in the crowd and addresses him directly. "It's your daughter's blood on which you put your feet." The camera matches Shahabuddin's stare directed at the bloody feet and stained floor. "Did you see how that oppressed woman's blood has bloomed—whose blood has dried up on your sleeves?" At this moment the patriarch intervenes and tries to silence her with a gun but what he achieves is to shoot his own son. Shahabuddin falls to the ground. Before he dies he recognizes his daughter, making her part of the family and linking her to Salim again. Therefore we have

a death to liberate Sahibjaan from her undead existence. The death of the father acts like an atonement for the death of Nargis but also stands as a symbolic death that liberated the courtesan from her past allowing her to marry. In a beautiful scene the body of Shahabuddin is brought before his daughter and his grieving father wails in repentance. Death shows up at the wedding and presides over it.

The ceremony is also a partial redemption for Salim, one that comes as he accepts his new role not as a hero with Spanish music in the background but perhaps as a supportive and understanding husband. But then we also can read this as a passage to an even deeper death, that death that is symbolized by marriage. She will sink now. She will gain the weight of a different body, no longer ethereal but no longer free it falls now within the direct control of patriarchy. Is it then another type of death that liberates women? In this way the text comments on its own nature by showing that all the paths available to women lead to one form of death or the other.

The problem that this solves on one hand remains untouched on the other since the courtesan is not accepted with "some minor dirt" because the viewer knows that she is really the "pure one" but also this acceptance comes as a result of her being part of and accepted by a powerful family. Sahibjaan is not taken in as a courtesan and we can only wonder about her future associations with Nawabjaan.

In an unexpected move, the camera that has previously sided with tradition by remaining behind as both transgressive couples were leaving, Shahabuddin with Nargis and Salim with Sahibjaan now stay behind too but this time it stays in the brothel while Nawabjaan watches as the wedding procession departs.

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A POST-COLONIAL URSULA LE GUIN

Judith Caesar

For many years, Ursula K. Le Guin has been exploring complex and controversial ideas in her fiction. An early novel, *City of Illusions* (1966), anticipates many of the ideas about power relationships and the effects of imperialism on the colonized that later became central to post-colonial criticism. However, *City of Illusions* has not received the serious critical attention it merits, perhaps due to a kind of genre snobbery that defines certain types of fiction as popular and other forms as literary without examining the individual works. Of course, this attitude is changing. Nevertheless, the critical attention Le Guin's writing has received has focused on her Hugo and Nebula award-winning novels, *The Dispossessed* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*. *City of Illusions,* on the other hand, has been neglected despite its astonishing political relevance, not only to the Vietnam and civil rights era in which it was first published, but to the twenty-first century as well. *City of Illusions* is part of a trilogy that explores what happens when technologically advanced societies encounter less "developed" ones. Looked at carefully, *City of Illusions* in particular reveals itself to be an evocative political novel about the uses of power and effects of power. Instead of using fantasy for escapism, moreover, Le Guin uses non-realistic elements to comment on the reality of the "real world," just as writers of magic realism and postmodernism were to do later. Le Guin has observed that science fiction's gift to literature is a way of seeing the world as "an open universe, a cosmos that is not a simple, fixed hierarchy, but an immensely complex process in time. All doors stand open. All alternatives are thinkable" (qtd. in Cummins 66). *City of Illusions* provides such an open universe.

Since the novel is not well known, a brief plot summary may be helpful. As the novel opens, the protagonist Falk is a man with no memories. Since the novel was written against the backdrop of the American civil right movement (four civil rights workers were murdered in Mississippi in 1964, and the civil right marches to Selma were in 1965, presumably when the novel was being written) it is significant that Le Guin has made her protagonist and indeed most of her terrestrial

characters black. Falk has been mind-razed, left incapable even of speech, his mind blank as an infant's. A small community of artisan-farmer-hunters takes him in, teaches him its ideas and customs, and thus gives him a new identity. From the forest community, he learns that The League of all Worlds, a sort of idealized inter-galactic United Nations, has been destroyed by the Shing, an extra-galactic conqueror. The Shing now rule Earth. As the novel opens, the Shing have destroyed all the cities and most of the technology of Earth, leaving only isolated communities of at most a few hundred people. All of Earth seems to be under a sanctions regime in which both communications and weapons technology are prohibited. Falk learns also that he is not genetically human. Who he is and from where, only the Shing can tell him. He sets out on a quest to find them, knowing only that they reside somewhere in the west. On his quest, he travels through an American landscape like that before the European settlers arrived, since all the natural forests and grasslands have regenerated in the absence of any concentrated human population.

On the way, he encounters various communities who have found different ways of adapting to their isolated and subordinate condition, some brutal, some well-intentioned, but all maimed. Each encounter seems to represent a different example of how human beings respond to being isolated and under threat from a superior power and to the loss of identity that comes with loss of narrative and autonomy.

At one point, Falk and a woman name Estrel escape from a particularly brutal group of captors, and the two continue their search together, encountering more cultures, and apparently falling in love with one another. When Falk and Estrel do arrive at Es Tock, the Shing metropolis, he learns that the Estrel is a Shing agent, one of the many native people who has been raised and educated by the Shing. The Shing tell him that his space craft crashed when attacked by rebels and that they have been looking for him to restore him to his own world. They tell him the history of his society and their own as they have supposedly reconstructed it from their archives and from what the lone survivor of the crash told them, a story which is similar to the story of Werel (his home planet) and the League of All Worlds that we know from the previous novels, but with key facts changed and an entirely different spin. Falk distrusts this version because of what the forest community told him about the Shing, but he has no way of knowing for certain if their version of events is false. The only other survivor of the crash, then a child, now a teenage boy, wholeheartedly accepts the Shing version of events. He is also harmless, confused, lonely, and drug addicted, a rather obvious example of the effects of a colonized mind.

When the Shing offer to restore Falk to his former personality, that of an Alterran named Ramarren, Falk realizes that he cannot refuse the offer; they will do it whether he agrees or not. He also realizes that they have sought him out and want to "restore" him so that they can find out the location of Ramarren's world and conquer it. He also reasons that the Shing are relatively few and the native resistance to them is strong. If he could return to his home planet Werel and tell what he knows, he and the rest of his people could then rescue earth from the Shing, or at least prepare themselves for a possible Shing invasion. But of course, once he is Ramarren again, he will not know what Falk has reasoned, since the Falk personality will be destroyed in the process. Ramarren, he fears, having no reason to distrust the Shing, will reveal the location of his planet the moment he sets the navigational control of the spacecraft they have provided for his return flight. The Shing will then destroy him and his ship and set out to conquer Werel. The only way to avoid this is to find some way of reminding his identity as Ramarren of the existence of his identity of Falk.

However, Falk is able to survive by leaving a message to himself to read the first page of his copy of the Tao Te Ching, an instruction that seems so innocuous that it escapes the Shing's interference. This acts like a trigger awakening him from a hypnotic trance. He senses the presence of the Falk personality. By a rather incredible act of will, he is able to meld with the Falk personality and have both sets of knowledge and experience available to him. Moreover, the Ramarren personality is a member of a select group who are particularly adept at telepathy, called mind-speech, and all of its forms. With his far superior knowledge of mind-speech and mind-control, he is able to tell that the Shing are deceptive. He knows that they are able to lie even with mind-speech, something both he and Falk had thought impossible, because he realizes that their thoughts and feelings do not coincide. Ultimately, he is able to seize control of a spacecraft and head back to Werel. To do this, however, he has to use the same mind-control on one of his Shing captors as they themselves use, which adds to the novel's moral ambiguity. When he returns to Werel, he takes with him both the boy-survivor and the captive Shing, now released from mind-control and able to give his version of events to the people of Werel. Although he is outnumbered two to one, he allows both to tell their version of events because "there is more than one path to truth" (369).

One way of reading the novel is to understand it as an examination of the social and psychological effects of colonization on the colonized, the tactics of the colonizers, and the methods by which

psychological colonization can be resisted. Le Guin's Shing dominate and control primarily through psychological manipulation and illusion. However, Le Guin is also exploring concepts of identity and knowledge: how does who we are depend on what we know? How can one know what is real? And to what degree are both reality and knowledge subject to manipulation and control?

Three central metaphors evoke much of the novel's meaning. None of these metaphors is the simple concrete-for- abstract equation of allegory; rather, each of her invented tactics of mind exploration and control evokes a cluster of interconnected meanings. One dominant metaphor in the book is mind-speech. Throughout the trilogy (and sometimes it will be necessary to refer to the earlier novels) all the literate societies make use of mind-speech, a form or empathy and telepathy which seems to be a metaphor suggesting literature, culture, art, love, empathy, and indeed all that enables human beings to understand and feel the thoughts and emotions of others. In *City of Illusions*, mind-razing, the destruction of a person's memories, is developed as a metaphor for the process of colonizing the minds of a subject people. It suggests the ways in which both personal and cultural history can be ignored, destroyed, or misinterpreted, the ways cultural values can be distorted and misrepresented, and the ways in which people can be made to feel dependent and inferior. The third metaphor, fertility and sterility, seems associated with the ways cultures and societies evolve or stagnate.

Le Guin implies complex and nuanced answers to the questions she raises about power, control, and resistance. They are writers' answers, not those of an anthropologist or a political theorist, and thus they are ambiguous, suggestive, and metaphorical, designed to evoke thought rather than suggest specific solutions. Nevertheless, if we look at the power structure in *City of Illusions*, Le Guin seems to be implying that at least three factors must be present for one society of dominate another: technological superiority, particularly in weapons; a hierarchical social structure in which an individual's sense of self-worth comes from his ability to dominate others; and an ethic that justifies violence and deception if practiced against the other culture. To this she also adds the poet and the writer's answer: societies also dominate one another by control of the narrative and by having a means of understanding and manipulating the thoughts and emotions of both the Other and the members of one's own group. She also seems to suggest that any of these factors can change and the domination of one society by a more technologically advanced society is not inevitable. Counter-narratives evolve and so do cultures and individuals.

We see such an evolution in the novel that precedes *City of Illusions* in the trilogy. The second novel of the trilogy, *Worlds of Exile*, describes the blending of two cultures on the planet Werel. The Tevarians are a traditional, pre-literate, technologically primitive, native society, and the Alterrans are a small advanced enclave of colonists from another planet. Neither society dominates the other, but neither society progresses as long as the two cultures remain separate. However, when the two cultures work together to defeat a common enemy, each society begins to re-examine its traditions and taboos. The blending of the two societies is suggested by the Pocahontas-like love story that evolves between the one of the leaders of the colonists and the daughter of the local chieftain. This story, in which a technologically primitive and an advanced society meld peacefully and fruitfully, serves as a counter example to the domination of the all-powerful Shing *in City of Illusions.*

City of Illusions, set over a thousand years after *Worlds of Exile*, shows that the two societies on Werel have flowered into one great civilization. They have also built a space ship to carry them back to see for themselves why they have had no communication with the Alterrans' ancestral planet, which we learn for the first time is Earth. But in this novel, the focus is not on the society of Werel and its evolution, but the societies of earth, and their lack of evolution.

One reason for the stagnation of earthly society is that the Shing have also destroyed and altered historical records, so that the people of Earth have little sense of what they were. As Falk's first mentor Zove (of the forest community) explains to him, "They {the Shing} killed knowledge, they burned books, but what may be worse, they falsified what was left. They slipped in the Lie…We aren't sure of anything concerning the Age of the League; how many of the documents are forged? ….They let us be as long as we stay here in our cage of ignorance…" (228). In short, the Shing seem like the quintessential colonial or hegemonic power, controlling a numerically superior population of natives and native cultures by dividing them from one another and rewriting or suppressing their history. The Shing have done to Earth what Franz Fanon asserts the colonial powers did to their subject peoples: "not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brains of all form and content….it turns to the past of the people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (210).

The Shing also co-opt their subjects by bringing them to their city, Es Toch, to be "educated" and "civilized," convincing them of an alternate version of history and of the superiority of Shing ethics, which they claim is based on a reverence for all life. Some of these

people are indeed convinced, others seem to be mind-controlled zombies, and others a combination of the two. This practice is not quite the same as the way in which the colonial empires of Europe attempted to co-opt the upper classes of their colonies, which was a far more complex and contradictory process as well as more widespread. Nevertheless, these manipulative tactics sound familiar to anyone who has studied the history of colonialism.

However, it would be an oversimplification to say that the Shing simply "are" the great imperial powers of the past and present. They are more evocative than a mere parallel would be. For one thing, they are not exploiting and destroying the land under their control. America has become the wilderness it was before the coming of the white settlers. This suggests comparisons to what the control of the white settlers did to the once unspoiled land of America. In addition, the subject peoples have been allowed to retain two important markers of identity: their languages and their religions. Since the Shing consider all earthly religion and philosophy to be ignorant superstition and thus no threat, the people of earth have allowed been allowed to retain their "canons," which seem to be mixture of Judaism, Christianity, Taoism, and American Transcendentalism. The Shing have not pressured the inhabitants of earth to read their narratives while estranging them from the language in which their own narratives were written. However, the literature that the forest community retains are texts such as the Tao Te Ching and the writings of Henry David Thoreau, isolated relics of an unremembered past which can provide individual comfort and spiritual support, but which cannot give them a united sense of national or planetary identity. Concerning language, various cultures speak their own languages, while also using an inter-galactic lingua franca to address one another and the Shing. (The Shing, more wisely than the real-world imperialists, speak their own language only among themselves, so that it acts as a secret code). Having her Earth characters retain these elements of identity allows Le Guin to focus more fully on the effect of the loss of narrative, both on a social level, history, and an individual level, literature.

The implications of the mind-speech metaphor are vital to understanding this novel. As the novel opens, the literate people of earth are capable of mind-speech, but they seldom use mind-speech anymore. They believe mind-speech makes deception impossible because "Between thought and sent thought is no gap; they are one act. There is no room for the lie" (231). However, this very characteristic makes mind-speech dangerous. Falk later reflects that "A free man can speak freely, but a slave or a fugitive must hide the truth and lie" (231). Because they can never be sure of the motives

of anyone outside their community, they fear revealing their intentions. Thus, it seems no coincidence that literature has disappeared as mind-speech became increasingly dangerous. In *Worlds of Exile*, the connection between mind-speech and literature was suggested when the Tevarian woman Rolery is confused by what the Alterrans mean when they use the phrase "the books say," when she can't hear them speaking. Are books like mind-speech, she asks. Her husband answers no, and then, thinking carefully, agrees that it is very like. Mind-speech gives the power to understand the thoughts and feelings of others, as a common literary language does when combined with literary sensitivity and empathy. Mind-speech, moreover, is "the most perfect form of communication,"(231) as literary language is for the non-telepathic of the real world.

The forest community in which Falk first lives does have a counter-narrative to that of the Shing, but it is a fragmentary and static oral tradition which only a few people know and which cannot be objectively scrutinized. They believe they were once part of a united planetary civilization that traveled through space, until the Shing destroyed their civilization, depopulated the earth, and then colonized it. However, they have no current literature and they have no detailed written history; this lack of narrative is destroying them as individuals and as communities. Here, Hauruki Murakami's concept of the function of narrative in shaping identity is helpful in understanding exactly what this loss of continuing narrative means. Murakami suggests "Humans … cannot live very long without some sense of a continuing story" (231). Narratives of self, he explains, the stories about ourselves that we invent out of bits and pieces of the culture around us, help us make sense of our memories. Indeed, they determine how and what we remember. And they are what enable us to "heal the loneliness of being an isolated individual in the world" (231). The writer's job, Murakami says, is to provide his fellow beings with "complex multi-layered" (232) narratives so that they do not fall prey to simplistic, dangerous ones. The Earth natives of *City of Illusions* lack any such complex narratives, and so they do fall prey to simplistic narratives, as we see in the various individuals and cultures Falk encounters. The effect of the loss of narrative also works on the level of nations and societies. As Edward Said suggests, cultural narratives also give people a basis for identity, a way of thinking about themselves which they can then question and reinvent as the society evolves (229).

Because their narratives have been destroyed, the people of Earth live in isolation and fear, and because they live in isolation and fear, they can invent no new narratives. The eastern forest community in which Falk first stays has no new art because there is no larger

community with which to share ideas, and they fear revealing their true thoughts and feelings to anyone they haven't known since birth, hence their reluctance to use mind-speech or literature. According to Le Guin, "Serenity and monotony arose from the isolation" (225), the monotony of life without art or hope.

If mind-speech is art, culture, literature, love, empathy, and all the other vital human connections it seems to represent, then another important question arises. What is implied by the fact that the Shing, unlike the natives of earth, have found a way to lie with mind-speech? Can literature and culture lie in the way that the Shing's mind-speech lies? And why is it only the Shing, the alien conqueror, who can use mind-speech in this way? Is the literature of the conqueror then—any conqueror—a kind of lie? Post-colonial criticism would suggest that it is—that literature can serve to distort history and further the aims of an authoritarian structure by creating master-narratives, as Edward Said has argued (11-15).

Le Guin need not have time-travelled a decade into the future and read Edward Said's *Orientalism* to have realized that literature and all the positive concepts that mind-speech represents can lie. It is implicit in the Taoist philosophy used throughout the novel that everything contains a counterbalancing and complementary force. Thus if literature is a great truth, it must also contain falsehood and be balanced by falsehood, or at least, by narratives which are sometimes lies, sometimes illusions, and sometimes alternative truths. All of this can make literature a lie at the same time that is a truth, or a swirl of conflicting truths, instead of The Truth. Essentially, Le Guin is implying metaphorically what post-colonial critics later postulated as a literary and political theory.

Mind-speech, and using mind-speech to lie, however, is an open metaphor. Lying with mind-speech seems to be a metaphor for any intimate and trusted form of deep communication that can be used to conceal and deceive, as perhaps all can. It could be the imperialistic use of literature. It could also be a metaphor for the mass media, a form of communication which people tend to believe and which has had such a role in shaping, informing, and deforming public opinion. The emphasis on the Shing's penchant for visual illusion would seem to suggest this reading as well. In an evocative metaphor, the Shing's city, Es Toch, is build of semitransparent plastic and suspended about an enormous canyon (the Grand Canyon?), suggesting the emptiness and artificiality of the Shing culture's values and ideas . They are plastic with nothing underneath it. The description of Es Toch also makes it sound a bit like Hollywood. It isn't a question of deceptive mind-speech's being literature *or* mass media. It could well be both

as once, since both have the power to use narrative as propaganda. The lies of mind-speech, moreover, are part of a larger theme within the novel concerning the difficulty of distinguishing what is true and what is not, what can be relied upon and what cannot. Much of the novel seems to suggest that there are no certainties, both a modernist and a post modern concept.

The novel's emblem of mind-razing is also metaphorically important. At the beginning of the novel, the blank person who later becomes Falk has been mind- razed. He doesn't know who he is, literally, and he becomes the person that the forest community shapes both with their formal teaching and with their treatment of him. Because they were kind, he goes out into the world like a well-brought up child, far too trusting, loyal, and truthful to escape the traps that the Shing lay for him—such as Estrel. The person he was, Ramarren, would have known better. When the Shing decide to restore the Ramarren personality, the Falk personality, they think, will be gone, because all of the memories that he acquired as Falk were not part of Ramarren's experience. This raises many questions about the degree to which people are their memories and their experiences, both individually and collectively, and what happens to personality when the memories of those experiences are distorted or erased. What is an individual person if not his memories, for within those memories are his values and beliefs as well as his sense of continuing consciousness? If the workings of the mind itself can be changed by external forces, then how is anyone to know if what they perceive and what they believe are "true" even in a personal sense? Mind-razing might have been suggested by the techniques of brainwashing, the use of electro-shock therapy, and indeed any of the ways in which memory can be altered and/or destroyed, whether for supposedly benign purposes or as an oppressive government's tool of control. Like Murakami, Le Guin seems to be exploring the use of psychology and technology to violate the mind and the self, as well as raising questions about the subjectivity of reality.

The horrifying process of mind-razing parallels on a personal level what the Shing did to the whole planet in destroying its records and attempting to rewrite its history. This raises larger questions about human history and the politics of identity and control. When you take away or distort a culture's history, is this the same as destroying a person's memories? Can you then easily convince a people of their inferiority? Does it work as a means of control? These questions are relevant because Native Americans, African Americans, and the colonized peoples of the world have been subject to the destruction, distortion, or removal of their cultural history to varying degrees. If we

look at the various cultures Falk encounters, a pattern emerges.

The Forest People Falk first encounters seem to live a good life, as Falk admits to the head of the Forest Household, Zove. However, this appearance is deceiving. Zove also points out to him, "We hide from the Shing. Also we hide from what we were. .. We keep a little knowledge, but we do nothing with it. But once we used that knowledge to weave a pattern of life like a tapestry across night and Chaos" (228). And indeed, they do seem like a stagnant society, living from day to day, not content with remembering what they once were, but afraid to plan improvements for the future. They are like any people trying to live their daily lives under a dictatorship, trying to escape official notice by not standing out in any way from the rest.

And some of the Forest People live in considerably more fear than Zove's household, which has no direct encounter with the Shing. The group that Falk next encounters, in what he calls the House of Fear, drug him with a truth serum and imprison him, assuming before he even speaks that he will lie to them. In treating him brutally and in killing outsiders, whom they think are all "servants of the Other. ...toolmen," (240) they think they are proving that "We are men… free men, killers" (240). Deprived of the power to create, which Zove had rightly pointed out is one of the things that makes humans fully human, they resort to killing as a means of asserting a false freedom. They are doing exactly what beleaguered communities in the historical world do. Speaking of the violence in the Middle East and elsewhere, the French/Lebanese novelist Amin Maalouf has written, "Any human community which feels humiliated or fears for its existence will tend to produce killers. And these killers will commit the most dreadful atrocities in the belief that they are right to do so" (24) which is exactly the way in which the men in the House of Fear react. Yet their weapons are puny in comparison to those of the Shing, so their acts are not really of significant defiance or defense. They succeed primarily in preventing other humans from contacting them, which plays directly into the hands of the Shing.

The next group Falk encounters, the Basnasska Nation, are culturally less sophisticated but even more brutal. Initially, they seem a bit like the Plains Indians because of their name and the fact that they are referred to as a nation. They also live on cattle the way the Plains Indians did on buffalo. However, they are not Native Americans but descendants of the people of the League of All Worlds, now reduced to barbarism out of paranoia. They are certainly far less developed than the Plains Indians, who were of course an evolving culture which had quickly adapted to the presence of horses by becoming great light cavalrymen (and women). Unlike the Plains

people in which women were a respected part of the community, the Basnasskans abuse women, especially sexually, which they see as a way of establishing status and manliness. They are less like Native Americans than Hell's Angels. Their violent ways help to explain why the civilized societies cling so desperately to the remnants of their pasts. To lose those memories of the past would seem to be to become like the Basnasskans, people who, "cut their roots from the human past" (265).

Like the people in the House of Fear, the Basnasskans make up for the lack of ability to create and innovate by violence. They also are ruled by conformity. Le Guin perceptively writes, "The more defensive the society, the more conformist" (262), and the conformity itself is one of the reasons for their failure to evolve. It seems also to be a confused response to the loss of their previous identity that they see everything as a threat. The Shing do not directly threaten them—indeed, the Shing seem to be the source of their weapons—but everything and everyone else in the world does. The existence of difference within the group seems in itself a threat to their identity, and yet they need an Other, the people upon whom they prey, in order to feel who they are by contrast. (Very similar ideas about the relationship among difference, identity, and violence were later explored by David Wood in his essay "Identity and Violence" in which he sought to explain the horrific violence and sexual abuse that followed the break-up of Yugoslavia). Le Guin writes of the Basnasska, "they were less a community than a club or a herd, independent members of one entity. In the effort to attain security, independence and privacy were of course suspect" (264). It is this single affiliation as identity which enables them to see anyone different from them as legitimate prey. Again, as Maalouf suggests, "the notion that reduces identity to one single affiliation encourages people to adopt an attitude that is …intolerant, domineering…and frequently changes them into killers" (26). Like the people of the House of Fear, they are too technologically backward to be a threat to the Shing, and indeed serve their interests by preying upon anyone who, like Falk, tries to travel across their territory. Thus they keep the literate societies to the east and west isolated from one another.

The other two societies that Falk encounters are to some degree mediated through Estrel, whose interpretations concerning why these people act as they do are questionable. We know what they do and how they look through Falk's observations, but why they act as they do is explained by Estrel. This reinforces the theme of the difficulty of separating truth from lies, how to interpret the evidence one sees, and how one knows whom to trust. To the reader, the Bee-Keepers, who

give Falk and Estrel shelter when they have been lost in the desert, seem to be a kind of monastery or perhaps a Christian religious group rather like the Shakers. The name “Bee-Keepers” also suggests the Mormons. The members of this group all wear crosses. The group contains both men and women, but the women dress as men and all seem to have taken vows of chastity and silence. There are no children or elderly in the community, which Estrel explains by saying they take women captive and breed them “like sows” (278) to bring new members into their community. However, some knowledge of the Shakers and monasticism would suggest simply that people do not join the community until they are adults and can understand the meaning of their choice. Estrel also states that they practice ritual cannibalism and human sacrifice, which could be a misinterpretation or distortion of the Eucharist. On the other hand, the religion may indeed have degenerated to that point. Perhaps people join the Bee-Keepers voluntarily, in search of a collective identity to replace a heritage lost. Perhaps they seek personal identity through religion. Their society is so intense in its self-denial that it would seem to be a desperate attempt to find some kind of collective identity. Is it a distorted and debased version of Christianity, or is it living remnant of some Christian ideals? The Bee-Keeper’s charity to Falk and Estrel would suggest the latter. We don’t know. They do not seem to serve the aims of the Shing directly. However, their vows of chastity prevent an increase in the human population, and their silence prevents the dissemination of a counter-narrative . Again, they seem to be clinging to a remembered past rather than innovating and growing; chastity and silence may be ambiguous emblems of both their admirable dedication and their cultural sterility.

The final community Falk and Estrel encounter is the Kansas Enclave, a community centered on a benevolent and charismatic personality. This man could either be a madman, as Falk first thinks and Estrel avers, a kind of philosopher- king, or perhaps the wizard of Oz. This savior is black, and yet claims descent from “the Yellow Emperor” (290). His aquiline features suggest Caucasian ancestry as well. He seems to represent a blending of ethnicities (“races”), the very multicultural and multi-affiliational identity which Maalouf advocates as an antidote to communal violence. Moreover, the “king’s” delusions of grandeur (his kingdom seems to be a large ranch) also seem to be at the same time a belief in the potential nobility of mankind. Again, we find the concept that we don’t know the reality of what we are seeing, and that seemingly contradictory realities can exist at once.

Within the context of the novel, the Kansans seem to suggest

that if some remnants of the old civilization can be preserved and if it has leaders who can blend the remnants in new ways rather than just repeating old patterns, a society can rebuild itself even after part of its history and culture has been destroyed, as long as the hegemonic power allows this. However, the blind adherence of the followers to their leader also makes the community politically suspect. Despite its attractiveness, the Kansas Enclave is certainly very different from the Kropotkin influenced socialist anarchy that Le Guin advocates, and which she explores in *The Dispossessed* (Cummins 106). Even the most hopeful community is still maimed, still more of a cult than a community.

To what extent are the societies mind-razed and colonized? The implications of the narrative are ambiguous. Other than the Basnasskans and other non-literate societies, most of the groups have retained a fragmentary counter-narrative which serves as a means of limited psychological resistance. It is hard to destroy the collective memory of a literate culture. However, the partial destruction can make it even more difficult to separate truth from lies, history from myth. Moreover, while the cultures are partially intact, the people are still deprived of the challenges that foster creativity. Hating the enemy has become part of the cultural identity of each group, a hatred which in itself absorbs far too much of the society's collective energy, twisting and distorting each society's view of itself. It would be safer to say that the literate societies, at least, have not been mind-razed completely, but their identities have been altered. The destruction and distortion of history seems to have created social pathologies that only some of the societies can begin to recover themselves from, and even then, the recovery is questionable.

On an individual level, Le Guin gives us two examples of colonized minds and raises the question of whether or not the colonized mind can decolonize itself. The answer Le Guin posits is a tentative no, but like all of Le Guin's answers, there is also a yes embedded within the no. The possibility seems to depend on the degree of cultural destruction and on the individual person.

First, let us look at what it has done to two parallel characters on an individual level. The two characters who have not been mind-razed but who have been "educated" by the Shing, Estrel and the boy Orry, are extreme examples of people who have been cut from their own culture and obliged to live marginally in another. Estrel may also be under some form of mind-control all along, which may simply be a metaphorical way of suggesting the degree to which her mind has been colonized and indoctrinated. Estrel, Falk has noted, has a "curious passivity," going along with whatever he wishes. When they

first have sex, it is because she assumes that if she refused, he would rape her. Then when he says that what he wants is "human warmth," (275) and asks if she wants the same, she just says yes. Later he tries to explain the "want of response, that had seemed almost a betrayal of his own strong feelings" by telling himself that she "had borne too much and could not respond" (275). Her intellectual passivity seems to parallel her sexual passivity, with rape being a metaphor for mind-control and colonization of the mind. She is emotionally devastated to the point of being will-less because she was brought up by the Shing, beings who felt nothing for her and used her as a tool, at the same time convincing her of their own moral superiority. She cannot question this. Throughout the journey, she tells Falk again and again that the Shing are good, that they have brought peace, and that they revere all life.

When Estrel later confronts Ramarren after the Falk personality has supposedly been erased, her anger is not turned against the Shing, who have forced her to betray her lover, but against Falk-Ramarren. Despite all that has happened to her, she still believes, "There is no Enemy" (344). It is central to her beliefs. She needs to believe that, it would seem, to justify herself, which may be part of how the colonized mind effect works. She also seems to believe in her inferiority, when she again and again defends the Shings' noble morality. Ultimately, she is pitiful, as pitiful as if she had been literally mind-razed. Ramarren, with his mind-speech awareness, quickly identifies her as "psychotic." With her, the cultural mind-razing has worked. Her colonized mind is psychotic, as perhaps all are, at least metaphorically.

Orry is also a pitiful case, but slightly more promising because he hasn't been subjected to the same degree of cultural destruction. He has kept his memories of Werel and his native language. However, he was still a naïve and uncritical child when the Shing began to teach him their version of the truth, and he is too lonely and confused to doubt them seriously. Falk says of him, "He was fluent, incoherent, childish. Did he know his loneliness, orphaned and alien, living out his childhood and adolescence among people who kept themselves apart, who did not touch him, who stuffed him with words but left him so empty of reality?" (324). At one point, Falk thinks, "The boy had been so mind-handled that he was essentially their instrument." (324) However, because he knows something of his own heritage, Orry is also a more complete human being than Estrel. The blending of cultures, the fact that he knows another language, had another life, and knows other ways makes Orry isolated and lonely, but also makes him capable of trust. It is this trust that enables both him and Ramarren to

return to Werel. He is confused about the situation when Ramarren takes over the space ship, but he trusts Ramarren and follows his orders. The key to the hope he represents seems to be in whether or not he can find a way of blending his two experiences the way that Falk and Ramarren were able to blend their identities.

It would seem from this that Le Guin thinks individual minds can be colonized to a much greater degree than cultures, and Estrel and Orry show exactly what it means to have a colonized mind. It means to accept as truth the lies of a culture and community that see you as irredeemably inferior and evaluates you only in terms of your utility to them. The only person who seems to be able live among the Shing and not become a victim of their mind-colonization is Falk-Ramarren, and he is an unusual case and his methods of resistance are a bit too pat. Arguably, his mind has never really been colonized in the first place, since he is confused by the Shing rather than fully believing them, and never accepts that he is their inferior.

Nevertheless Falk and Ramarren resist the Shing only by becoming Falk-Ramarren, a blended personal and cultural identity. If Falk remains merely Falk, he has no way of fighting back against the Shing. When he is only Ramarren, he is also helpless. Ramarren is skeptical of what the Shing tell him, but he lacks Falk's knowledge of exactly what they have done and why. It is only when he can switch back and forth between the two personalities, that of the Earthman and that of the man of Werel, that he can defeat them. The answer lies in blending and then going beyond the original synthesis, just as happened on Werel itself when the two species, the Tevarians and the Alterrans, were able to blend into one culture, with radical changes to both. Hybridity seems to be an answer. This seems to suggest that one can resist mental colonization by becoming multicultural or bicultural.

However, the blending of cultures that saves Falk-Ramarren does not seem to include much blending with the colonizing culture. Significantly, Le Guin has made the Shing unable to interbreed with humans. Again, sterility seems to be used as a metaphor for the inability to adapt and create. Certainly, the Shing to not seem to have adopted any of the ways of the people of Earth. Moreover, the very artificiality and falseness of the Shing culture makes it seem sterile. At one point Falk thinks of Es Toch that it is "Not the Place of Men…there was no flow of learning or goods. The money was a mere largesse of the Shing, for there was no economy to give the place a true vitality of its own" (327). To use the terminology of post-colonialism, Es Toch is metropolis, as it is quite literally as well. It is the only actual city on the continent, perhaps on Earth. The rest of the communities

that Falk encountered are the periphery, a periphery which has no way of confronting the metropolis, a periphery that is always under surveillance and control. It is also a periphery about which the citizens of the metropolis know nothing, except the false knowledge that all the natives are savages. Like the concept of metropolis, and unlike most real cities, it produces no goods. Ramarren observes, "Es Toch was self-contained, self-nourished, rootless; all its brilliance and transience of lights and machines and faces….its luxurious complexity was built across a chasm in the ground, a hollow place" (327). It is the perfect emblem of a seat of hegemonic power, since all that it produces are intangibles: fear, power, control.

However, the Shing are not the usual evil space invaders of 50s movies, but far more subtle and complex. In fact, they bear uncomfortable resemblances to the American government and society of both 1966 and 2009, and indeed to any hegemonic or colonial power. The Shing are aloof, polite, intelligent, ironic, and plausible. The gently mock their detractors (like Falk) and put forth their own interpretations of events and plans for the future as both practical and moral. They sound very much like the people Noam Chomsky would two years later (in 1968, but the two books might have been written at about the same time) describe as the "new Mandarins," the Washington architects and supporters of the Vietnam War.

Like the hegemonic powers of today and the recent past, the Shing control not just by the threat of force, which they themselves downplay, but by illusion. They are virtually a case study in the use of thought—control and propaganda. Le Guin seems to be using their physical illusions and uncertainties as metaphor for the ways in which they keep their opponents mentally off balance and remain impossible to confront and defeat. The Shing look exactly like human beings, so that it is very difficult to tell who is Shing and who is not. They often project holograms of themselves so that it is impossible to tell if a Shing is really present or not. They cross-dress, so that gender becomes uncertain as well. These physical things serve to keep any opponent (Falk, for instance) constantly uncertain and thus more susceptible to mental manipulation. Everything appears to be what it is not. The illusions are not unlike those of the Vietnam era mass media and administration spokespeople described by Noam Chomsky, which made objections to national policy appear to be challenges to democracy and legality, and the continuation of morally questionable policies appear pragmatic and necessary (163). Moreover, these physical illusions of the Shing also suggest the elusive nature of any hegemonic power. How can one confront it? Who is really there, and who is really in charge? (How does one confront a

colonial empire, or Washington, or the Soviet Union?)

Like their physical ambiguity, the mental games the Shing play can leave any critic so confused that it is easier to give up than to try to reason matters through, much less to try to devise strategies of resistance. Estrel seems to have given up, through her passivity, and Orry has turned to drugs to escape thought. The reader also learns so many different versions of events that it is unclear exactly what the Shing are or what they have done. They may simply have taken advantage of Earth's and the League's weaknesses, moved in, and established order, as they saw it. On the other hand, they may have been brutal invaders who destroyed the civilizations of all the planets of the league by using deceptive mind-speech to project non-violent intentions Moreover, their narrative—with its mixture of fact, falsehood, and half truth—is internally consistent. When one believes one part of their narrative, it then becomes easy to believe the whole thing. This is what makes the Shing so confusing and makes it so difficult for anyone who comes in contact with them to think clearly about how to resist their power. In their disinformation campaigns, they are like various governments which manipulate their citizens, allies and enemies through a mixture of blatant lies and half-truths, with just enough fact mixed in to make the assertions credible. Again, they seem like the American political intelligentsia described by Chomsky, who, he claims, have achieved a high degree of thought-control while retaining enough "openness" "that pronouncements conforming to the state religion (i.e. foreign policy and the myth of American altruism) are not dismissed out of hand as propaganda" (165).

The Shing also seem to be a version of any empire that justifies conquest in the name of noble ideals. In our world, these ideals have been saving human souls, following manifest destiny, spreading civilization to the dark areas of the globe, or promoting democracy and human rights. The Shing's noble ideal is reverence for all life. Ramarren comes to believe that the Shing reverence for life might not be a total lie, but at least a partial if misleading truth. They don't eat meat and seem to avoid directly killing people. It's a fine point of equivocation, since of course it is only by chance that Falk did not die as a result of being mind-razed. He had the luck to be found by people who decided to help him rather than kill him. However, it isn't through brute power that the Shing rule. Falk-Ramarran reflects, "In order to control populations they evidently pitted tribe against tribe, starting the war but letting humans do the killing" (354). Yet they do seem to believe that killing anything is wrong. If it is a lie, it is a lie that at least some of the Shing believe themselves. They may have once truly believed in this ideal. Some may still. On the one hand, the Shing

reverence for all life may be a mere slogan used as a ploy to create the illusion of superior ethics, a way of winning "hearts and minds," so to speak. It may also be sincere. It may be both at once. The ambiguity is part of what makes the Shing so nebulous and insidious.

Perhaps, with Shing society's collective powers of mind-control, individual Shing are unable to see the contradictions between their beliefs and actions, just as many human beings have, for various social and psychological reasons, been unable to see the contradictions between their own values and their institutions (liberty and slavery, for instance, in 18th and 19th century America). At one point, Falk thinks, "Laws are made against an impulse a people fears most in itself. Do not kill was the Shing's vaunted single Law. All else was permitted: which meant, perhaps, that there was little else they really wanted to do. Fearing their own profound attraction to death, they preached Reverence for Life, fooling themselves at last with their own lie" (325). Certainly, the Shing seem to be blind to contradictions between their rhetoric and their behavior. Perhaps this also comes from the fact that the Shing seem to be a collective entity. They have individual names, but the characters seem indistinguishable. They seem to be an embodiment of collective thought, which is what happens when a society does not permit individual questioning of received opinion.

This is not only true of their supposed reverence for life, but of much of the rest of their society and again, there are many real-world parallels. The Shing are a highly hierarchal society which believes itself to be a democracy. They have convinced Orry, for instance, that Shing society is superior to his own society. The Shing, Orry tells Falk, are democratic and egalitarian, unlike "us." At the same time, Falk notices the patronizing contempt with which Orry treats anyone not of his rank. As a "guest" of the Shing, he is an honorary lord. The Shing are all lords. Others are servants. The natives are all backward savages. The Shing are civilized. They are civilized, they think, in part because they have no hierarchy, conveniently ignoring the fact that they are at the top of a hierarchy based on lineage. This to some degree parallels the strange irony of the fact that most of the colonial powers—England, France, The United States (concerning Native Americans, for instance)—were democracies which believed themselves to be egalitarian at the same time that they treated peoples of other cultures as inferiors.

The Shing are clearly not merely an evil Other (or the evil self), however, in the way in which Le Guin presents them. Even the supposed truth that they are liars is called into question as part of the novel's questioning of the nature of reality itself. Falk-Ramarren asks, "The Shing, the Enemy, the Liars…Did they *in truth lie*?" (368 italics

mine). A striking paradox is suggested by that phrase about the very nature of truth and the human ability to comprehend it. Falk-Ramarren goes on to muse that the Shing themselves might not be as power-hunger and deceitful as they appear, which again makes problematic any kind of knowledge, reality, or truth. He thinks, "Perhaps the essence of their lying was a profound, irremediable lack of understanding. They could not get in touch with men. They had used that and profited by it….but had it been worth their while, after all? Exiles, or pirates or empire builders from some distant star, determined to rule over races whose minds made no sense to them, whose flesh was sterile to them…Alone, isolated, deaf-mutes ruling deaf-mutes in a world of delusions" (368). The Shing cannot blend so their society stays static, or rather, devolves, since they no longer travel around the galaxy. Is this the future of any power that fails to compromise, blend and adapt? All the Shing can add is their story, which goes with Ramarren back to Werel in the form of Kenyak, the Shing he has kidnapped. Thus, paradoxically, something of them may blend even though they seem the essence of sterility.

Let us consider the final question of how hegemony can be resisted. The plot of the story solves the problem of an oppressed Earth by having Falk-Ramarren leave the Earth as a messenger to bring a version of Earth's story to his own people. In the real world, such deliverance for the subject peoples of the world seems unlikely. Nevertheless, an actual solution may be suggested in that what Ramarren takes away with him is his story, an honest if subjective account of what he has experienced. He takes back a counter-narrative that says cultures must blend to grow.

Blending, hybridity, spirituality, these seem to be the most effective tools of resistance to hegemony. The philosophy of the Forest Community and the Kansas Enclave provides its believers with an inner peace that enables them to endure the Shing's domination without accepting this domination as right. In addition, this blended philosophy seems to allow each belief system to retain much of its original character, except that each one is no longer exclusive. Different individuals and societies emphasize different canons, but all the canons exist in harmony. It seems to be a model of what true multiculturalism might look like. We also see the earth societies which seem healthiest—the Forest Community and the Kansas Enclave —are societies which blend cultures and peoples. Their spiritual development and open-mindedness are their strongest tools of psychological resistance, although they do not seem to work as a means of political liberation.

City of Illusions is a nuanced and artistic political novel which

makes an important addition to the discussion of the relationships among literature, culture, and power. The novel's fantasy genre is particularly germane here. Unlike a realistic novel or indeed a novel of other more conventionally literary genres, a fantasy novel like *City of Illusions* frees the events from any particular time and place and thus it is not tied to the colonial experience of a particular group of people with a sense of grievance against others. The fantasy form is what makes this novel an exploration of ideas rather than political advocacy. The Shing are and are not the American military industrial complex and the British Empire and the Conquistadors, and the Bee-Keepers and Bassnaskans. All the rest are and are not the various colonized peoples of the earth. They are logical extrapolations derived from all of these relationships and from none of them. They are what could happen given the premise of a colonized earth. Nevertheless, the novel seems particularly relevant today, when the United States is the world's only super-power and is in a position to abuse that power just as the Shing do. Indeed, some of the intellectuals of the Third World seem to view the United States as a dangerous and destructive power that threatens to overwhelm other cultures and civilizations. This is the image of the United States suggested in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and in the political writing of Arundhati Roy, to name but two. In this climate, C*ity of Illusions* seems prophetic.

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BOREDOM, INSIGNIFICANCE, AND DEATH IN VOLTAIRE'S *CANDIDE*, CHARLES BAUDELAIRE'S *THE FLOWERS OF EVIL*, AND PAULO COELHO'S *VERONIKA DECIDES TO DIE*

LuElla Putnam

The word "boredom" did not appear in English until 1852 in Charles Dickens' novel, *Bleak House*, and, even then, it was already being described as a "chronic malady" ("Boredom"). However, the conceptual notion of boredom, especially when considered in combination with its effects on human consciousness, has proven to be a prevailing theme in literature that has surpassed both the barriers of time and culture. Furthermore, it can be contended that ideas concerning boredom have always been linked closely with analogous ideas concerning death. In both Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) and in Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), boredom is depicted as the worst possible mode of all human experience. When following this particular interpretation of boredom, it is not hard to perceive that the malaise boredom brings can be construed as a sensation quite similar to the emptiness that the experience of death is often though to beget. In Paulo Coelho's contemporary novel, *Veronika Decides to Die* (1998)*,* Coelho explores the way in which the feelings of boredom negatively shape the lives of the characters within his novel and how these characters feel that death is the only solution to their feelings of despondency. Because of boredom, his main character, Veronika, decides to kill herself. Her fellow patient in the mental asylum, Mari, secludes herself from the real world voluntarily, attempting, in a way, another sort of suicide. Thus, it can be maintained that humans on a collective scale have always subconsciously held a united impression that the natural result of epidemic boredom is death and that the only way that a person will ever be able to enjoy life genuinely is to struggle against the melancholy that can often overwhelm one's delicate notion of reality.

Throughout Voltaire's *Candide*, striving and action are at the forefront of the entirety of the novel—that is up until the concluding

scenes in which all of the characters' goals seem to have been met. It is at this point Candide says the old woman asks "the grand question" (127). She inquires, "I would be glad to know which is worse ... in short, to experience all the miseries through which every one us have passed, or to remain here doing nothing?" (127). The old woman feels she would rather experience all the tortures and privations that have led her up to this supposed time of harmony rather than the actual time of harmony itself. The philosophers with Candide respond in kind. Martin, the pessimist, says that "man was born to live in either convulsions of misery, or the lethargy of boredom," while Pangloss "having once stated that everything went on as well as possible . . . still maintained it, and at the same time didn't believe it at all" (127). Although Candide says he does not agree with Martin, he can initially offer no solution. Hence, for a time in this novel, pessimism overwhelms all of the characters. It is not the difficulties or setbacks in their lives that bring about this compounded pessimism either; it is the boredom after these setbacks that allow their thoughts of negativity to become concrete. Arthur Schopenhauer provides one of the best philosophical arguments for pessimism:

> Human life must be some kind of mistake. The truth of this will be sufficiently obvious if we only remember that man is a compound of needs and necessities hard to satisfy; and that even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment to boredom. This is direct proof that existence has no real value in itself; for what is boredom but the feeling of the emptiness of life? If life—the craving for which is the very essence of our being—were possessed of any positive intrinsic value, there would be no such thing as boredom at all: mere existence would satisfy us in itself, and we should want for nothing. But as it is, we take no delight in existence except when we are struggling for something; and then distance and difficulties to be overcome make our goal look as though it would satisfy us—an illusion which vanishes when we reach it. (Schopenhauer 103)

Schopenhauer, who is writing approximately 100 years after the old woman's words are spoken in *Candide*, echoes her sentiments. He believes humans are in a constant battle to achieve their desires, obviously feeling as if they are lacking what they want in order to be happy during this process. After they achieve their goals, though, Schopenhauer believes men are no happier than when they had originally begun to attempt to accomplish them. It is at this time when boredom ensues, and thereby men must begin to combat their new senses of unrest. Hence, the philosopher argues that existence is meaningless; after all, to him, man can never attain any real sense of satisfaction. If existence is meaningless, then the question that inevitably follows is: "Why live?" Although Candide cannot offer an answer originally to the queries of the old woman, or to his friends surrounding him, (or

even conceivably to Schopenhauer's pessimism,) he does eventually discover what is, to him, a satisfactory solution.

Candide, Pangloss, and Martin are all invited into the residence of a Turkish Muslim who gives them insight into how he leads his life, and, in doing so, he affects Candide's conceptual worldview deeply. The dervish tells them, "I have no more than twenty acres of ground, the whole of which I cultivate myself with the help of my children, and our labour keeps us from three great evils—boredom, vice, and want" (129). Candide now feels he has an answer to the old woman's problematic quandary. In order to combat boredom, Candide feels that humans must have a purpose; they must work. He recognizes that the dervish is the only man around him who appears to have found a sense of contentment in life. The dervish is not striving for what he does not have; he is enjoying and "cultivating" what he does have. Idleness, to him, is not an option because idleness takes away the ability for humans to experience fulfillment, and, in turn, it brings forth the ability to experience boredom. William F. Bottiglia notes that Voltaire's *Candide* "ends by affirming that social productivity of any kind at any level constitutes the good life, that there are limits within which man must be satisfied to lead the good life, but that within these he has a very real chance of achieving both private contentment and public progress" (118). Therefore, by finding an answer as to how to quell boredom, Candide subsequently finds a reason to live. He realizes he can have a positive life that is not only about experiencing pain or constantly feeling bored. Because of Candide's realization, all of the characters living with Candide begin to feel as if they have purposes as well: "The little society, one and all, entered into this laudable scheme, and each began to exercise his talents" (130). Through work, the characters in *Candide* find the happiness they had always hoped for during all of the times of suffering they had to go through in order to reach this end moment of reprieve. These characters discovered, though, that they did not want nothingness or even just to be together. What they really wanted but had never gotten the chance to have before was the prospect finally to live life—each on his own respective terms and each with his own chosen purpose.

Charles Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* appears initially to offer a much less optimistic view concerning the ability of humans to cope with the effects of boredom on the human consciousness. In his first poem in the series, "To the Reader," the idea of ennui is automatically entered into his poetry's landscape:

> One creature only is most foul and false!
> Though making no grand gestures, nor great cries!
> He willingly would devastate the earth

> And in one yawning swallow the world;
>
> He is Ennui!—with tear-filled eye he dreams
> Of scaffolds, as he puffs his water-pipe.
> Reader, you know this dainty monster, too;
> —Hypocrite reader,—fellowman,—my twin! (32-40)

First, it should be noted that the definition of ennui is not just of boredom; rather, it is a feeling of existential emptiness. When man experiences this emotion, he no longer has any will. He desires nothing. Even committing sin is no longer intriguing to him because, presumably, by the time he reaches the state of this horrendous boredom, a man has committed every foul act of which he could have possibly ever conceived. Again, the question that inescapably occurs at the moment one experiences ennui is the one that queries why a person would, in this instance, choose to continue life. In the stanzas cited above, ennui is observably personified as the devil. However, Antoine Fongaro makes the distinction that "L'Ennui personifies not Satan himself but the consequences of his power over man. L'Ennui is as much effect as cause. The most violent activity of l'Ennui, that is to yawn and swallow the world, remains a mere conjecture. Even the horror of execution is vicariously experienced as a dream. The single tear of pity is an accident, not an act of will, and perception of the world is further dulled by the drug tobacco" (96). Baudelaire appears in "To the Reader" to view the devil's influence as terrifying and unavoidable. Over time, the devil erodes a person's motivation to live, and perhaps one of the most frightening aspects of this attrition is that Baudelaire illustrates Satan as being so dispassionate in the process. Ennui is boredom in its most repulsive extreme; it is boredom that could undoubtedly lead someone to beg for the release death would bring from its grip.

However, it can be argued that Baudelaire, just as Voltaire does, comes to a determination as to how to resist the effects the state of ennui can have on an individual's mindset. In "Voyaging," Baudelaire discusses how man encounters trial after trial on his soul and how hard it is for him not to concentrate on the banalities life presents:

> How bitter, what we learn from voyaging!
> The small and tedious world gives us to see
> Now, always, the real horror of the thing,
> Ourselves—that sad oasis in ennui! (109-112)

Once again, Baudelaire asserts humans are despicable creatures who cannot help but to begin eventually wallowing in their boredom and successive degeneracy. The poet does not believe humans recognize their vileness initially; it his post to show them. In this poem, Baudelaire portrays experience after experience of men journeying

from one place to another, learning how different people live and undergoing what it feels like to be in opposing cultures. Yet, the case becomes that it is everywhere that ennui immerses itself into the human soul. There are no cultural or geographical boundaries to the depravity ennui brings to someone's psyche. Finally, though, in the last two stanzas of "Voyaging," it does become reasonable that a solution is come to—a solution in fact that is quite similar to that of Candide's. The concluding stanzas of "Voyaging" read:

> O Death, old captain, time to make our trip!
> This country bores us, Death! Let's get away!
> Even if sky and sea are black as pitch
> You know our hearts are full of sunny rays!
>
> Serve us your poison, sire, to treat us well!
> Minds burning, we know what we have to do,
> And plunge to depths of Heaven or Hell.
> To fathom the Unknown, and find the *new*! (137-144)

If one is to read this poem as an allegory to the voyage man makes of his own life before death takes it toll, these last stanzas offer the only solid solution available to him. Man must realize death is coming. Whether he wants initially to accept it, ennui is part of human existence. He must acknowledge it. Man is, in fact, made more powerful because he has accepted his role as a human and recognizes fully the baseness that existence provides. If he searches, though, if he brings newness to life by reinterpreting it, if he attempts to find honesty, if, perhaps, he leads the life of an artist, he can reconcile his humanity with the concept of ennui. He can emerge as the victor in the struggle for his soul because he is not denying the truth nor is he merely giving up in the face of it. On the contrary, he is attempting to make ennui part of his daily consciousness and still trying to live life and understand it even while knowing how sordid it can be. His heart remains "sunny" even after he has gone through one terrible experience after another. Lloyd James Austin observes that in these last lines of "Voyaging" "only creative energy is left, an energy unencumbered by delusory expectation" (32). Baudelaire believes, as an artist, he is best equipped to deal with the hardship ennui brings into human existence. He is prepared to confront the unfamiliar because he has no illusions of what life is and what it provides to mankind. He realizes nothing can be worse than facing the awfulness of ennui, and this fact gives him courage. Ultimately, Baudelaire comes to the conclusion that ennui can elicit artistic expression if only it is confronted in the appropriate, fearless manner he knows it can be.

Although they are both French writers, Voltaire and Baudelaire were writing nearly 100 years apart, and their ideas regarding boredom and

its relation to death are definitely not confined to their geographical location. In his novel, *Veronika Decides to Die*, Paulo Coelho corroborates many of their notions of boredom. It is significant to note, therefore, that Coelho is of Brazilian descent and that the novel in question is set in the country of Slovenia—a European nation obviously on a completely different continent than the writer's origin. When the book first appeared in 1998, "with book sales exceeding twenty-seven million in over one hundred countries, Coelho became the second best-selling author worldwide" ("Contemporary Authors," par. 8). Even in contemporary times, then, how boredom interacts with man's feelings regarding death strikes a chord across cultural and geographical barriers. And, indeed, Coelho does not shy away from the subject. His main character, Veronika, does not attempt to commit suicide because she is depressed in a way that would seem to lend itself to such a drastic resolution. Instead, Veronika feels that she should commit suicide because "everything in her life was the same, and, once her youth was gone, it would be downhill all the way, with old age beginning to leave irreversible marks ... She would gain nothing by continuing to live; indeed, the likelihood of suffering would only increase" (7). Veronika is not unhappy; she is bored. She does not say she feels suffering; she is only worried about the possibility of it in the future. As Michael L. Raposa notes:

> Boredom seems to always involve . . . a lack of meaning or value, a cognitive and emotional emptiness, a lack of interest ... This could be because [a] situation itself is not very meaningful or interesting (like waiting in a long line for a very long time), or because a person is incapable of discovering any value or meaning in the situation (like a musically unsophisticated person enduring an evening at the opera, or like listening to a conversation conducted in a foreign language that one does not understand.) (76-77)

Veronika's feelings do seem to lend themselves to Raposa's interpretation of boredom. She no longer finds interest in life because it holds no meaning for her. She has no great passions and only looks toward the future with dread. The natural reaction to boredom, according to Veronika's viewpoint, is to end her life. Boredom, to her, equivocates with an individual's cessation of existence.

Veronika's journey, however, does not end with her surrender to boredom. On the contrary, it is here that Coelho's novel begins. Veronika's suicide attempt lands her in the mental asylum of Villete, and she learns that she is supposed to die in five days from heart complications due to her overdose. At first, Veronika feels she has succeeded in her initial aim, but, slowly, a desire to live begins to overtake her. The first time she feels this desire she is outside, in the sunlight, and she has just realized that she can act however she wants

because she is in a mental asylum: “Veronika stood looking at the mountains beyond the walls of Villete. A faint desire to live seemed about to surface, but Veronika determinedly pushed it away ... She reflected on her situation there; it was far from ideal. Even if they allowed her to do all the crazy things she wanted to do, she wouldn’t know where to start. She had never done anything crazy” (40). Like the speaker in Baudelaire’s poems, Veronika has seen into the depths of the depression boredom can bring out in a person. Her feelings also begin to be akin to his when she begins to fathom that there are new experiences to be had in life—new experiences that she does now wish to address. In Villete, she can act crazy. She can do whatever she wants. She can explore new facets of herself and of life in general. Just as what occurs to the speaker in the last two stanzas of “Voyaging,” Veronika begins to feel hope and to look toward a future of exploration. After being in the hospital for just a few days, Veronika comes to the conclusion that she had always tried “to ensure that her life continued exactly as it always had. She had given up many of her desires so that her parents would continue to love her as they had when she was a child” (43). At this point, Veronika begins to see beyond her fear. She is beginning a path of enlightenment that undercuts the feelings of boredom she formerly could not find the strength to resist.

It is not only the fact that Veronika begins to interpret life differently from her time in Villete that brings about her will to live and her subsequent escape from the death grasp boredom can hold over a person. Veronika also begins to bring art back into her life. Once again, like Baudelaire, Coelho’s protagonist discovers she views life in a more meaningful, rich manner because aestheticism has begun to play a significant role in her daily rituals: “She turned back to the piano. In the last days of her life, she had finally realized her grand dream: to play with her heart and soul, for as long as she wanted and whenever the mood took her” (113). Part of the reason Veronika felt bored before was because she had suppressed her innate instincts as an artist. When she remembers being able to express herself with abandon, Veronika also remembers what it was that brought meaning to her life. By smothering her own wants and needs as a person with the wants and needs she felt were demanded of her by contemporary society, Veronika found it impossible to remember what it was that previously brought forth purpose and joy in her life. Coelho believes this is one of the main fears paralyzing human activity on a universal scale today. In his article, “It’s a Mad World,” which details much of his inspiration for this novel, he observes, “People prefer to live in a huge asylum, religiously following rules written by who knows whom, rather

than fight for the right to be different" (par. 11). Veronika discovers that what she initially labeled as boredom was really a mask for the fear she felt of living life the way she wanted. She chose to label this fear as boredom because she did not want to recognize her malaise was not brought about because life was not worth living; rather, her feelings existed because she was stifling all of the intricacies that made her unique as an individual in order to better maintain the standards that society had put forth for her from birth.

Like Veronika, Mari, a fellow patient in Villete, uses fear of activity as a reason to commit suicide. Mari's suicide is not physical, though. Instead, hers is a social suicide. Although she is no longer classified as crazy, Mari locks herself away in Villete voluntarily, not wanting to be a part of the outside world and of the standards it places on human behavior. Prior to her time in Villete, Mari had been a successful lawyer. When she becomes bored, though, and can no longer find meaning in her job, those around her do not support her decision to make a change. Therefore, Mari is overcome with dread and begins having panic attacks. According to Leslie Paul Thiele, "To be bored is to be paralyzed: emotionally, spiritually, and perhaps even physically ... [Boredom is] an emotional and spiritual paralysis that arises from the repression of anxiety or fear" (492). Following from that argument, it would make sense, then, that Mari would begin having panic attacks because she no longer finds meaning in her work as a lawyer. These attacks are symptomatic of the fear she tries to conceal throughout her daily life in the outside world. When she tells a colleague, "'I want to do something completely different with my life. I want to have an adventure, help other people, do something I've never done before.' The conversation ended there ... That moment marked the beginning of her withdrawal" (120). A sense of alienation overwhelms Mari because no one around her understands why she would want to transform her current mode of accepted behavior just to perform an activity that would make her feel fulfilled and happy. Even when others advise her they want to help her—they offer no real solace. Her husband believes she must have a "brain tumor ... [and] thought of taking her to Austria, where there were many eminent specialists in disorders of the brain" (123). He cannot see beyond the physical aspects of her illness, although he claims to want to help her totally. Her friend from work advises her to seek help, but, once she enters the mental asylum, he visits her and tells her, "We're allowed to make a lot of mistakes in our lives ... except the mistake that destroys us" (128). By announcing publicly that she is different, Mari has eliminated her former role in the outside world. She has destroyed her old way of life because everyone in it refuses to accept her in any

form but the way that they desire her to be. Eventually, Mari is told she cannot come back to her old job, and her husband divorces her. It is at this time that she makes the decision to stay in Villete, even though her panic attacks have ceased.

While in Villete, Mari becomes one of the leaders of a group called the Fraternity. The Fraternity consists of individuals, like Mari, who enjoy the freedom that the mental asylum affords them. They are not crazy or mentally unstable. They just want to be able to do whatever they choose whenever they choose, and they believe that Villete gives them this opportunity. The narrator notes that "Once in a mental asylum, a person grows used to the freedom that exists in the world of insanity and becomes addicted to it. You no longer have to take on the responsibilities, to struggle to earn your daily bread, to be bothered by repetitive, mundane tasks" (53). However, the solution the Fraternity members come to does not hold as being satisfactory to Mari any longer when she considers the transformation that Veronika has made during her time in Villete. Although before encountering Veronika, Mari had decided that living her life within Villete's walls was the only solution, she too begins to remember what it was that made her enjoy life before her time in the asylum. She wonders why if Veronika can decide she wants to live even when believing she only has a few more days left on Earth that someone like herself, whose time in the world is also slipping by with each passing minute, should decide not to venture out and savor true life. She relates her transformation in thought to her friend Eduard:

> Last night, I too asked myself what I was doing in this hospital. And I thought how very interesting to be down in the square, at the Three Bridges, in the marketplace opposite the theater, buying apples and talking about the weather. Obviously, I'd be struggling with a lot of other long-forgotten things, like unpaid bills, problems with neighbors, the ironic looks of people who don't understand me, solitude, my children's complaining. But all of that is just part of life, I think, and the price you pay for having to deal with those minor problems if far less than the price for not recognizing they're yours. (151)

Mari does not want shelter from the world's problems anymore. She knows now she has been living in a place that is not real. Although, since coming there, she has not been afraid to express herself within the asylum's walls, she has still been afraid to express herself outside of those walls. Real life is filled with problems and difficulties, but those experiences are part of what shape and create who a person is as a human being in his entirety. How a person faces their personal tribulations in life is part of what defines them; it is part of what makes them strong and also part of what makes them different. Mari believes it is part of what makes a person whole. By staying in the

asylum, she is shirking her responsibility as a human being both to herself and to others.

When Mari definitively decides to leave the asylum, she does not do so without displaying how her changes in feelings about life have already made a significant impact on how she expresses herself to others. While Veronika's transformation is much more akin to Baudelaire's viewpoints and his idea of the artist as being one of the elite few who can interpret and tackle the complexities of the world suitably, Mari's transformation is much more practical in nature. Hence, her ideas are similar to Candide's in that she believes that fulfilling work in any field of a person's choosing is what will make him happy and bring purpose to his life. To Mari, boredom is not only a disorder that can be combated by an artist; it is a disorder that can be combated by anyone who can find meaning in his life. Sean Healy argues in his book, *Boredom, Self, and Culture,* that "boredom has a history and has gradually emerged from near obscurity to center stage ... What was once a rare state of mind ... has now become the common property of the bored horde" (15). Boredom is not an emotion that only targets the artist, although Baudelaire may argue that the artist is the most capable of fighting its effects. In Coelho's novel, Mari realizes that every human being faces the same questions and fears about their lives. She leaves a note for the rest of the members of the Fraternity in Villete, advising them, "I learned something very important. Life inside is exactly the same as life outside. Both there and here, people gather together in groups, they build their walls and allow nothing strange to trouble their mediocre existences ... the danger of an adventure is worth a thousand days of ease and comfort" (199). Mari leaves Villete in order to help strangers in Bosnia; her purpose is clear. She is leaving with the intent to help and alter the lives of others. Although the members of the Fraternity are said to go back to their rooms and deem Mari as insane, one of the primary impressions this novel brings out is that one person's change in mindset can drastically affect the lives of those around him. Veronika changed Mari, and it seems inevitable that, in some way, Mari's leaving will affect the life of someone else, and the sequence will continue perpetually. New life and new ideas are brought about once boredom and the fear that it masks is overcome.

Therefore, it can be argued that although boredom is linked with death irreparably in all of these works of literature, it comes to mind that the path in overcoming that boredom that is achieved by all three of the writers mentioned is conversely related to a renewal of life. Voltaire's *Candide* asserts that humans, in order to conquer the monotony of boredom, must work in whatever field is best suited for

them to achieve happiness. In his *The Flowers of Evil*, Charles Baudelaire finds that the artist possesses a special mission to surmount ennui in that he holds the ability to recognize that world-weariness exists in man but that it can be overcome if it is accepted as natural and reinterpreted through the eyes of the artist. In *Veronika Decides to Die,* Paulo Coelho taps into both of these ideas, first displaying Veronika as defeating the results of boredom through both a reawakening in her perception of the world around her and also through her ensuing alignment of herself as an artist, and then displaying Mari, in her way, defeating boredom through the fulfillment of her purpose to leave her old career and begin a new one as an activist to aid others in need. Indeed, it is an unavoidable fact that the consequences of boredom have led people, across time and cultures, to feel that life is meaningless. Yet, it is also an undeniable fact that, in every age and locality, man has struggled to find purpose in his life; he has struggled to combat the despair boredom brings. Even in contemporary times, the fact that novels such as Coelho's work reach and affect so many people shows that the fears cited are universal themes. Yet, so, too, are the measures and lessons that people take and learn from these works of literature so as to resist boredom and thereby to find new meanings and motivations concerning why it is important for each struggling individual's life to be lived.

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EMBLEMATIC VERBALIZATIONS: CLARK COOLIDGE'S OPAQUE WINDOW ON AMERICA

Andrea Righi

The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms in the second; and throughout nature this primary picture is repeated without end. It is the highest emblem in the cipher of the world.

(Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Circles*)

"The eyes are the windows to the soul" the old proverb goes. As an eye that blinks onto an exterior, or an interior, a common architectonic element such as a window stands as a perfect metaphor for vision and thus knowledge. But even windows have changed over time, and so have their metaphors. Prior to the invention of glass (around 3000 BC), they were just openings in a wall probably closed by window-shutters or curtains. This generated consequences. In antiquity, windows anchored the act of vision to the un-mediated binary opposition inside vs. outside. Oedipus blinds himself to avoid seeing the blasphemous truth of his life. Through the window the inside confronted the brilliance of the external, so that the re-territorialization of the latter within the gaze of the subject must have relied on a clear cut separation: either open or closed. In other words, as the connector of the inner space and the world, the window played the function of an eye containing or excluding directly the external. Borders signaled the entering into the realm of materiality and did so probably in a very substantive way: they were *presenting* rather than *reflecting* the outside.

The introduction of glass windows did not replace but rather complicated this essentialist status of vision typically called *ontology* of vision.[1] The visual incorporated reflection, so that the reflective

[1] The diffusion of glass windows for public Roman buildings has been recorded since the 4th century B.C. See Beretta, M. "Between Nature and Technology: Glass in Ancient Chemical Philosophy," *When Glass Matters* (Firenze, 2004); Dell'Acqua,

properties of the glass contaminated the binary alternative between inside or outside. The visual became formalized: not material, direct access but mediation. The formal property of glass (transparency) articulated the trope of vision in an intricate way: not just perception, but a device through which whatever is perceived becomes visible. Transparency, in fact, is not so transparent, for glass, through refraction, displays itself in the process of displaying what is perceived. What's more, glass reflects the viewer, so the latter is superimposed upon the scene which is seen. Through this series of mediations, vision extended its ontological value: "like fire and ether" glass "had the property of transparency the appreciation of which could only increase with Christianity wherein light was identified directly with God" (Dell'Acqua 224-225).[2] The metaphysical found a concrete example in the manifestation of light (immaterial polymorphic essence) through glass (material mediation).

As this metaphysical conception of the visual was transported into modernity with its implications in terms of image reproduction and truth (photography, film and so on), the ontological dimension of the visual was also repeatedly questioned. Usually the ground for the critique is the foregrounding of the instrumental nature of the visual which implied its human-like, non-autonomous dimension.[3] Post-modern philosophies, for instance, have repeatedly stressed the fact that the iconic quality of the image is largely constructed through verbalizations or, as the Spanish philosopher Fernando de la Flor argues, "We perceive the iconic because its meaning is capable of being said; we always order its reality through discursive patterns, even when we realize we are facing the ineffable" (12).

Clark Coolidge's *American Ones* (1981), one of the defining works of the American vanguard movement named Language poetry, represents on the contrary, an alternative model.[4] It is an experimental

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F. "Illuminando colorat," *La vetrata tra la tarda Antichità e l'alto Medioevo attraverso le fonti e l'archeologia* (Spoleto, 2003); Harden, D. "New Light on Roman and Early Medioeval Window-Glass," Glastechnisches Beririchte. 32 (1954): 8-16.

[2] For the role of the window and the mediation of the divine see also: Chiarini, G. "Porte e finestre, uomini e dei (e amanti)" European School for Comparative Studies. Synapsis. Pontignano, Siena. 4-11 Sept. 2004.

[3] I assume sophist philosophy was the first to undertake this critique. See Tatarkiewicz, W. *A history of six ideas: an essay in aesthetics*. (Boston, 1980).

[4] Language writing became an organized movement in the late seventies and early eighties aiming to be the first organic and committed American vanguard. The two general assumptions that oriented this project consisted in the cooperation between the reader and the author in the production of meaning and the undermining of the traditional objectivity granted to the lyrical "I." The poetic instrument that would finalize these goals was elaborated by Ron Silliman in The New Sentence (New York, 1987).

inquiry that, following the prescriptions of the movement, attempts to undercut “the so-called transparent window on the world” embodied by classical forms of mimetic representation (Bernstein, *Writing* 593). Coolidge carries out this task audaciously. His goal is to represent a vision that does not colonize and possess reality. As we will see, he does not emphasize the human-like element of vision, but he rather radicalizes the material, objective substratum that any linguistic medium possesses. Coolidge expands on the complications that reflection brings forth in representation making the medium, the glass pane of our metaphorical window, so dense that reality looks dispersed, scattered by the very structure of the means of representation. In this article I will explore how Coolidge overcomes a mimetic, ontological conception of vision on the basis of a specular, but not identical, materialist ontology. I will begin my analysis by assessing Coolidge’s reflection on poetry in order to move to a close reading of the best example of his critique, namely the opening poem of the collection *American Ones* which explores and critiques the idea of America and its landscape.

Poetry, Kerouac and Jazz

Coolidge’s critique of the metaphysics of vision is built partly on the poetic principles elaborated by the first organized avant-garde movement in the United States, Language writing, partly on a different network of influence. His poetics is clearly expressed in a small book which collects various essays published in magazines. It is entitled *Now It’s Jazz* (1999) and it deals mostly with Jazz and Jack Kerouac. Accounting for his literary inspiration, Coolidge acknowledges the

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The New Sentence is the group’s poetic principle that, by constructing a lyrical prose that broke free from a semantic linearity, had the function of blocking of the immediacy of representation and thus foregrounding the materiality of language.

For reference see Righi, A. “In the age of immaterial production: the poetics of Language Poetry.” M.A. Thesis U of California, San Diego, 2004; Derksen, J. “Where Have All the Equal Signs Gone?” *Assembling Alternatives. Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally* (Middletown, 2003). Among critical reconstructions written within Language writing see: Bernstein, C. *A Poetics*. (Cambridge, 1992). Perelman, B. *The Marginalization of Poetry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996. Watten, Barren “The Secret history of the Equal Sign: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E between Discourse and Text.” Poetics Today 20: 4 (1999). An excellent a fairly new anthology of Language writing is *Artifice & Indeterminacy.* Ed. Christopher Beach (Tuscaloosa, 1998). For a critical and not always sympathetic assessments see: Ashton, J. “Rose is a Rose”: Gertrude Stein and the Critique of Indeterminacy.” *Modernism/modernity* 4 (2002). Izemberg, O. “Language Poetry and Collective Life.” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2003): 132-158.

great importance of Kerouac's novel of travel. *On the Road* (1957) was an illuminating experience, an epiphany that disclosed for Coolidge the inner process of writing: "like blowing your thoughts over the chord changes of everyday whatever life. Endless lines of words that you followed if only because you couldn't see their ends" (*Now* 16). And a few lines later, he adds: "you wrote from what you didn't know toward whatever could be picked up in the act. Poetry starts here" (*Now* 17). This desire for a textual proliferation, for an extension of meaning, is a strong component of Language writing—Lyn Hejinian's essay "The Rejection of Closure" embodies the soundest articulation of this thought. But the difference between her view and Coolidge lies in the fact that, at the bottom of the latter's argumentation, there is a longing for authenticity.

> But anyway there is that problem then of registration on the page and also with the problem of the voice in the head that's never quite the voice that I can speak. And I think maybe that's because there's some of that intellective registrative emphasis on the page mixed with the voice, and all that complex can never really be reproduced as purely voice. (*Now* 36-37)

This trust in the "voice" as something pure and ultimately not reproducible discloses a different stance. The voice here appears almost as a third element separated from the intellectual faculty and the process of writing. Whereas the last two represent a mediating factor of the poetic production, the voice embodies the most genuine and thus un-mediated form of expression. One can even argue that, just as in Kerouac, the vocal adherence of the oral to the fact represented rests on a *mimetic* assumption. Language poetry, on the contrary, understands language as a social mechanism embedded in the reproduction of the relations of productions; consequently its primary aim is to display the artificiality of representation through the foregrounding of the textual devices. In their re-reading of Marxist philosophy, Language poets seek "to search out the preconditions of liberated language within the existing social fact" (Silliman 17). Even Lyn Hejinian, whose poetics is usually less informed by the Marxist master narrative and in many regards very similar to Coolidge's, sees her work as an "open text" which "emphasizes or foregrounds process […] and thus resists the cultural tendencies that seek to identify and fix material and turn it into a product; that is, it resists reduction and commodification" (43).

Nonetheless, for Coolidge the power of the voice is displayed also in the second paradigm he establishes. Jazz, especially in the performance of Thelonious Monk (1917-1982), embodies a spontaneous expression that equals and is connected to Kerouac's prose. The combinations of the two apparently influenced the syntax of

Coolidge's writing. Bebop, considered simply as a musical-linguistic innovation, employs a particular "phrasing" which ends its sequence "with a kind of Bang, a sudden hard stop sometimes on an unexpected beat" (Coolidge, *Now* 47). This principle is transferred onto the poetic discourse with outstanding effects. It is played upon the vaster structure of sentences. Sometimes a series of two or three sentences is remotely connected by means of semantic links or rhythmical patterns, but immediately after that an abrupt change intervenes to break down any linear development. Coolidge's fluid jazz-like form of representation becomes a tool that seeks to unhinge the illusionary linearity of vision.

What America? American On(e)s.

Because of the recitative quality of the text, Coolidge's poetry is better suited for an actual (oral) performance than a written commentary. Watching the staging of the text—with its flow of sounds and the parallel acting—would probably enable the reader to appreciate the nature of this experimentalism better than by engaging in a semantic analysis. Yet, the text has been published. It has been fixated into written signs on the page; from here the need for a careful analysis that will take into consideration the formal as well as the semantic form of the text. Because of the ambiguity of the latter, I can only point to tentative readings. In most cases it is as if the sentences or the very words on the page were crossroads. To privilege a certain semantic nuance of a word, over the rhythmic sequence of a few sentences produces a relevant difference in the interpretation. As a tentacular text, *American Ones* produces a feeling of constant overflowing of sense that can never be fully captured. Sometimes, though, what one will encounter are just dead end routes.

Let me set a general line of interpretation, which will work as a sort of compass for the textual landscape of *American Ones*. I want to make the case that at least the first long poem of the book—the one to which I will restrict my reading—stages the typical American trope of the "drive out," the trip towards some outside.[5] Back in the colonial time it would have been called "wilderness." After Kerouac, the latter becomes the road and the spectacle of the American landscape and its ontology of vision appears as highly reflexive.

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[5] For reference see Leslie Fiedler's masterpiece *Love and Death in the American Novel*. (New York, 1966) Moreover, it is evident here that Kerouac's example is central as well as Jazz. One can easily imagine Monk's variations as the best soundtrack for the road trip.

Let us start with the title. “One” is a pronoun indicating mostly an indefinitely singular person, thing or group of things. The title seems to point to an indefinite set of particulars that are linked by the qualification: “American.” If we read the title without pause between the adjective and the noun (American-*ones*), we can also hear the echo of the word *nuances* in the background.[6] That is, a “subtle expressive variation in musical performance” (“nuance,” def. 1b), in our case Jazz. This phonic link (America*n*-*ones*/*nuances*) produces the first reflexive effect in the text: the sound comments what the words are saying. This *Americana* will have the loose and improvised shape of Jazz music. But there is probably a more subtle wordplay at work here. Around the time of the publication of these poems, Coolidge remarks that in Bebop “especially in its drums which almost purely color and are colored by time itself, there is the sense that sheer continuance gets articulated. Momentum as seduction, in which the ‘one’ of that ever first beat tends very soon to lose its ‘e’” (*Now* 93). From “on(e)” to “on(e)s”: in *American Ones*, not only does the beat structure the poetic window “on” reality, but, by adding the “s” of the plural, it also becomes the glass reflecting reality thanks to its fluidity (the continuance of on(e)s). Through the plurality of particulars (*ones*) appears the vision of the *American* land. But this vision will not be linear and organized. This is the opening of the first poem.

> Goes in, goes out, goes up and goes… He eyes for the
> sideroad but it sands out.

The rhythm of the verses is marked and syncopated. We can even attempt to analyze its pattern using classical metric conventions. The regularity is produced by the repetition of the third person of the verb “to go.” But this strong cadence seems also to spring from the succession of three iambs: “Goes in, goes out…” (xx /, xx /…) and a fourth one that vanishes in a final allusion: “and goes…” *down*. The allusion reinstates the rhythmic pattern of the sentence, since the absent term (*down*) is automatically supplied by the reader. The next verse takes a step forward. It is locked by one iamb, at the beginning: “He eyes” (x /), and one spondee at the end: “sands out” (/ /). In the middle, two anapests produce a “rising rhythm” effect which functions as a climax: “for the sideroad but it” (xx /, xx /). In the first sentence, the fluidity of the line is preserved by the repetition, in the second one, there is a sustained rising rhythm that reflects the content of the verse. The gaze (“He eyes”) seems to be capable of reaching a clear glimpse of the “road” until the last spondee frustrates this expectation: “sands out.” It is a beautiful choice: it conveys the idea of

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[6] I am indebted to Franco Nasi for this remark.

a visual vanishing that contains also the idea of granular perceptum that fades away.

Immediately after, as if it was displaying its own device, the gaze becomes aware of its verbal nature.

> … Mucilage, as a word, on a highway
> you thought it. Going to subway to mesa to clothes the dial
> it to clearing brought.

Mucilage introduces the dominant image of the vision of the American landscape. It is the random union of organic materials that stick together in a slimy (opaque) substance. But it is also a synecdoche for the whole poem: the American landscape as a sort of agglutination (the putting together of derived materials in order to produce a new meaning). As the vision captures the grainy consistency of reality, the verse crumbles in contorted sounds. The syntax loses coherence, and we are left with words that follow grammar but are ultimately illegible. If we sense a general idea of movement with the list of spaces such as "subway, mesa," for instance, with "going … to clothes," we encounter a sheer incongruity. One way to address these as well as many other later lines is to privilege one connotation over the others and play with it. For example the word "clothes" suggest the idea of providing with garments, but the verb can also mean "to express, convey" or to render one's "argument more suitable one's purposes." It conveys an idea of stylistically working out an expression. This allusion is indirectly echoed in the successive word "the dial." That is, an instrument of measure: time, space (a compass can also be called a dial), or atmospheric pressure. A device that represents an object, or mediates and processes it through its mechanical language: minutes, hours, as well as cardinal point. Let us read it again:

> Going to subway to mesa to | clothes | the dial |
> it to clearing brought. (*AO* 9)

If we break the sentence after "to mesa to," we produce a sort of reticence. The preposition "to" without any further qualification points toward a vacuum. Yet, this is not negative per se, the movement (as with the case of the first verse) is kept alive and fully open by avoiding a final determination. Hence, a disjunctive list of elements are scattered on the verse: "clothes," and the "dial." Even if we tried to highlight a faint semantic relation, these "clothes" could be simple flashes caught in the fast movement of the car. But I want to propose another possible reading. In "A Note on Bop," describing "Bop's fascination with extremes of tempo," Coolidge draws this unexpected comparison: "the feel is that time has a precise center. Like tight-roping on a moving pulley clothesline, you're always trying to keep up

midway between the poles." The connection between time (the dial) and clothes (clothesline) could reinforce our idea of a sudden vision of a distinct element which carries for the poet a hidden relation: a continuous effort to maintain a temporal equilibrium—just "as a drummer you're holding time's cutting edge in your right hand (ride cymbal)" (*Now* 93).

Immediately after, we encounter the emergence ("clearing brought") of "it," probably a synonym for the on(e)s of the title. The *perceptum*, awkwardly emerging in the multiplicity of different and transient objects, is said to come to light, but it can only be defined with the most indeterminate pronoun: "it." This failure in visualizing the object of the gaze is acted out also by renouncing any regularity of rhythm. Yet this failure is not negative. As in the rest of the poem, the gaze reproduces singular individual places, objects, but the architecture of the place is never defined in any poetic figure. The gaze does not impose a proprietary vision of the landscape, but it is as if it were letting it proliferate in the multiplicity of its unfolding. This gaze follows Bop's "synesthesiac" form: "the continual sense of the image in motion, never static, acted out and acted upon" (*Now* 94).

> A weekday and of the sun, the book is
> lanced. Sideways, through the marrow of suddenly pins take
> flight. And you hunk, stand for it again fleeting reading. Pile
> of the scene. Presentment in lickers. A twice-told cave by the
> no sign. A tenement in fractures that come clappers. (*AO* 9)

Here, movement is the ultimate goal. To act it out, Coolidge recreates a homologous fragmented vision. The page is full of bare objects, vivid impressions and literary allusions. The "book," for instance, could be an empirical one, but its connection with the verb "lance" makes us aware of an intended deviation from standard phrasing. The verb "to lance" has a military use; it transfigures the "book" into a weapon, a spear with which one can open a wound or "pierce through." As soon as the possibility of a breakthrough appears, we immediately notice a palinode: "fleeting reading." The reading involves a transitory process. Perhaps the movement of the watcher produces this perception "in movement." Or it could even be a description of the very act of reading, which is articulated in a temporal succession: the movement of the eye that follows the unfolding of the sentences. In both cases it is as if the intellectual process were always at a certain point of the perception and never at its complete realization.[7] At

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[7] See Nick Piombino's notion of the "perceptual process" in poetry, where "the poet must find some way of directing the gaze of consciousness onto literary inconceivably complex and entangled linkages" (qtd. in Bernstein *A Poetics*, 77).

the most one can glimpse just at a scattering of things: “Pile of the scene.” And its “presentment”—a central word, since its semantic spectrum includes the idea of artistic representation, perception and consciousness—falls back in a “twice-told cave by the no sign.” That is, Plato’s cave is revisited in the Hawthornian retelling of the *Twice Told Tales* (1852). For the idealist notion of breaking free from the cave and ascending to the realm of true things is turned over. Is the cave itself the true reality? A reality that rests on a no sign: a prohibition? Or maybe a sign that is empty, that prohibits the reference to anything real?

Through the trope of the drive out into the American land, Coolidge carries on a critique against the visual as a positive cognition of reality. But if this is true, we must add that this reality involves also the idea of totality. What is America if not the epitome of totality? Driving out, America and totality: in a lecture dedicated to “Windows and Landscape,” Michael Jakob has pointed out that landscape is a fragment—the view from a particular vantage point—but it is also a totality reframed in the perceiving mind. The world is re-territorialized in the eye. Similarly, the car, with its mythology of personal freedom and mobility, is a way of ordering and controlling the world. The drive out (the illusory escape from city life) provides also the surrogate of a contact with nature. It is a way of organizing and filtering nature from the window of our safe and distant mechanical vehicle. Coolidge displays the ambiguity of this process. Instead of proposing a linear description, he stages the conflict between the ordering power of the gaze and the resistance of the objects. The American totality is not attainable. A precise outline would be an optical illusion, a false image. Coolidge’s window on America is opaque. In other words, a coherent general description would miss the precision and specificity of the particulars. It is the very strife for a total adherence to the singular objects that crashes the organizing principle of the gaze.

> The left-hand turn in skid-
> eye, the tune dialed down the place it dim and caught sturdy
> at.

It is as if the eye could only focalize on the singularity of the objects and not on a comprehensive structured perspective. The yearning for the empiric prevents generalization. The skid-eye recalls the “fleeting reading” simile where the cognitive slides away always avoiding a clear determination. But here emerges also another tendency. The poetic discourse takes a step forward. From this point on, there is a prevalence of metaphors associated with the notion of “composition.” I take the term “composition” in its Latin etymology of *componere*. That is to “put together,” “to assemble” or to “put in place.” Here it

is introduced through the musical element: "tune." Another mark of this textual dominant revolves around the wide polysemic spectrum of the word "dial." In this case, it is not a device to register time, but could be related to the pre-digital age of stereos, where one could actually regulate, tune or "dial" the radio. If we rewrite the verse adding the following two breaks (pauses), the verse becomes less impenetrable:

> the tune dialed down | the place | it dim and caught sturdy
> at. (*AO* 9)

With the tuning in of the music, the place slowly emerges: "caught at." It is indicated not described: "the place", "it."[8] With the regulation of the radio, the subject adjust-connects also to the place; the finding of a right frequency is a spatial harmonization. The next figure of composition appears a few lines later. I transcribe it here highlighting the usual pauses:

> This is | hem | light still bean | migraine, in toto | in flam | step | fail
> clap lexicon to the meadows | fall | flat | stir. Colloidal in
> American drifting repetition. The bunts that were collapsed
> to get penned. Right about traffics. Close to defend wholes.
> An eye as a car it's in, stands up for the going way. Stylings,
> conglomerate for what got blent. (*AO* 10)

Even if the first line is unfolded mostly through an internal assonance ("hem," "migraine"), there is an insistence on terms that allude to a coming into view of space and objects. The deictic introduces "hem"[9] as a border or as an edge, "light" of course as an illumination making particulars emerge, "bean" as a seed, a germinal substance. But perception immediately turns into deception. As soon as totality is suggested ("in toto"), mistakes and failure arise ("in flam," "fail"). It is the linguistic assembling ("lexicon") of the American particulars that is irreducible to a coordinated syntax. The poem syntactically stages what it is representing: its structure is agglutinative; it does not rely on a metonymic logic or causal contiguity. Like the American landscape, it is made up of "colloidal" materials: a substance "in a fine state of subdivision with particles to small to be visible" that "does not settle or settles very slowly" ("colloidal," def 1a). This unstable composition vanishes in the epitome of the ephemeral: driving into traffic, moving quickly in the chaotic logic of driving; the simile "an eye as a car" is a perfect description of the fast interaction between mind, body and

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[8] The wide use of the deictic has always been a precious resource for Language poetry, for instance, let us just recall one of the first Language writing magazine *This*.

[9] It could also be an ironic interjection for "ahem."

technical apparatus, and the velocity involved in the stimulus-reaction imperative of driving.

These particular figures of composition ("the bunts that were collapsed") are structured following a precise rhetorical procedure: the zeugma. The American landscape is a chaotic enumeration of elements. Expressions like "collapse," "mass," and "styling in conglomerates" all point to this view. A zeugma is not just a rhetorical figure; it is also the literary correlative of our society: the supermarket society, where random lines of commodities are displayed with no inner connection besides the fact that they must be sold. Sometimes one can notice a sense of social critique in these verses. Here, Coolidge finds another a beautiful wordplay:

> Vendings, wind on the aerial nights. (*AO* 11)

The commercial set of objects to be sold ("vendings") is connected to the wind. It is a skillful paronomasia, in which Coolidge seems to hear in the assonance of the "n" and "d" sounds ("vending-wind") a phonic link that has also a semantic counterpart. "Vendings-Wind-Aerial" they all share the mobility and a transient nature: the flow of commodity being as aerial and pervasive as the wind.

In the same way, when the vision comes nearer to urban landscape, one can sense a certain dimness setting in.

> Chimneyed industrials, then left. A light came on
> the mesa. Snowboys spent their ironwoods. Copper graf-
> ters, they left then we left. The dial in the tenement is a map
> of lath routes through city. Sit down Wittgenstein, you pend
> too near for Vegas. (*AO* 12)

Images and a lexicon related to the industrial landscape dominate this conglomerate of sentences. As for the final admonition to Wittgenstein, we notice a touch of irony. The verse probably refers to Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as an old city. The center is crowded with narrow streets ("lath routes"), whereas the outskirts are more spacious and organized. The dial, the mechanical device, here, is mapping the core of the urban space. Then we encounter the ironic apostrophe to Wittgenstein who is hovering about Vegas, a synecdoche that embodies those American cities (the majority) that have been spectacularized through movies and tales. The admonition to Wittgenstein is a warning against an eventual imposition of an abstract order onto reality.

This apostrophe signals also a physical pause in the poem. Part Two seems to investigate the "American drifting repetition," instead of focusing, like Part One on visible images of the landscape. The zeugma is constructed of literary or historical figures.

> Saint Jerome's geodes brought to Mar-
> iendab by tractor. They talk, the Hickoks, and the big bow is
> Joyce's Mahler, Cal Coolidge, Mike Mantler, Ben Johnson
> and all the middle borders. (*AO* 13)

It is hard to propose a plausible narrativization for this scattering of names. The catalog of figures taken by American, but also general Western history rests on ambiguous relations to the landscape. It is only at the end that the visual fragmentation finds a moment of recomposition that escapes the zeugmatic form. The phonic appeasement with the place is reached due to radio and to jazz:

> How can a jazz hole
> ensnare all that's lighter and away? I turn the radio. I turn
> my radio to the sound well. As the road, to its particles.
> Everything turning solid.

Is that final "turning solid" is a figure of closure, or is it just a final gesture in which a sort of harmony between the subject and the landscape is reinstated? I am inclined to endorse this reading because of the high significance that the word "tuning" has acquired in the whole poem. Here, it finds its counterpart in the other verb "turning." It is a metaplasm: the addition of the "r" is an orthographical adulteration of the word. Thus "turning on" the radio becomes the "tuning in" with the surrounding country.

This is the reflexive quality of the text. The fractured organization of the gaze is the fractured syntax of the language and, vice versa, the simplicity of the last words registers a final but not dogmatic harmonization. In fact, the linguistic fragmentation of the scopic involves a critique of epistemology. It challenges a geometrizing process that is deeply embedded in Western thought. It is the reduction of the world to a cartographical abstract model. And this is even more significant in the cartography of this land. America, from its beginnings, held the status of a place *in the mind*, more than a real one. The Promised Land, the "city upon the hill," the mark of a highly symbolically charged place originated (as scholars such as Sacvan Bercovitch demonstrated)[10] in its puritan beginnings. We just have to recall the myth of the frontier, or the role western movies played in the process of spectacularization of the land. For Coolidge this reflecting power (the country as a set of spectacular images) is largely disable since, as he states, "the map tells you meander" (*AO* 13).

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[10] See The *Puritan origins of the American self* (New Haven, 1975) and *The rites of assent: transformations in the symbolic construction of America* (New York, 1993).

A New Materialist Ontology

If it is true that fragmentation proves its critical force by shattering a homogenous representation, however, the length and the intensity of such a formal solution borders the impossibility of any process of narrativization at all. Most of the times, readers are left with a proliferation of broken sentences which sometimes make sense in themselves, while others are just thick anacolutha. One can dispute the critical accomplishments of this poetic practice that has sometimes pushed not just Coolidge, but Language poetry in general toward a poetic in which the indetermination of meaning is the only speakable meaning of writing itself. The opaqueness of this vision disables the hidden ideological assumptions of the American freedom, but insofar as it autonomizes the medium of representation making it concrete, disconnected and thick it also buffers intelligibility. A critique of the morphology of cognition is liable to fall back once more into a blind, essentialist logic if it does not attempt to engage the subject matter in its totality, which includes communicability. In other words, Coolidge's emphasis on the material side of language undercuts an essentialist conception of representation, but it does so only on the basis of a further, however materialist, ontology.

Coolidge's *American Ones* embodies a certain tendency of Language writing that at least today seems to be lacking a critical poignancy. After all, if it were not for its radical experimentalism, one could actually find a resemblance with previous *pure* forms of poetry. The point of departure is the same longing for authenticity; a more immediate relation between words and things. The mediation is bypassed and the verbalization of the visual takes the form of an *emblematic* objectivity that escapes semantic responsibilities. But emblems, as we all know, were signs carried by austere and authoritarian ruling classes.

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MIASMA AND/AS UNCONTROLLED POLITICAL DISCOURSES

Catalina Florina Florescu

[I]

It is very unlikely that people can ever completely recover emotionally after they have seen their beloved dying. One thing is certain, though: through perceiving their beloved ones' debilitating pain, they acknowledge the existence of a "body-broken" or "body-other." Furthermore, when a body breaks because of AIDS, our homophobic fears may erupt more violently than we thought they would. Because of the misconception of this illness, we have turned our fears within and, almost exclusively, have paid attention to our erotic lives/history. Moreover, medical treatises bring into discussion iatrogenic complications that could be the result of a treatment's development, thus adding more concerns to a patient's already debilitated body. It seems that AIDS has developed its own iatrogenic enigma, which has not erupted from unforeseen prescribed treatments, but instead it has come through insufficient health-related campaigns.

Anne Hunsaker Hawkins argues that "[t]he tendency in contemporary medical practice is to focus primarily not on the needs of the individual who is sick but on the nomothetic condition that we call disease" (6). Since a body with AIDS may contaminate a healthy one, a person's illness's spatiality is no longer self-contained. In an increasingly self-aware society, the medical identity seems to be forceful and resourceful enough to influence other persons' behavioral reactions. The three works analyzed here—William Hoffman's play *As Is* (1985), Amy Hoffman's memoir *Hospital Time* (1997) and Hector Babenco's film *Carandiru* (2003)—are a narrative triptych of pain and suffering, patients' isolation and their attendees' limited compassion.

As illustrated in this essay, a SwA[1] is a terrified society; put

1 Acronym for "Society with AIDS."

differently, limited medical knowledge and mass-media sanitized programs that are commissioned by various profit organizations or political parties imprison our minds up to a point when we search for signs of illnesses all over our bodies and keep certain individuals, who may be at risk, at a distance. By so doing, we continue to blame homosexuals for an illness whose etiology is still not discovered or, even better, *scientifically* proven, and thus live in a unhealthy repressed state of mind.

[II]

In Hoffman's play *As Is*, the dramatist masterfully captures a very dark, gloomy atmosphere, as the main action occurs in a hospital. In the preface to the play, the playwright sets the tone and concern of his work: "I had just finished reading the previous day's *New York Times*. […] I told my friend the article was absurd: a disease [i.e., AIDS] capable of distinguishing between homosexuals and heterosexual men?" (xi). Homosexuality has always been targeted by some as being immoral. As Elizabeth Grosz points out, "In the case of the homosexuals, […] it is less a matter of who they are than what they do that is considered offensive. […] Homophobia is an attempt to separate being from doing" (225-226).

Like cancer, which is defined by many uncertainties, starting from its etiology to its uncountable treatments, AIDS follows the same pattern. In addition, the latter introduces a breakage situated outside one's body's topology. With AIDS, not only is a patient's body questioned, tested, and investigated, but also his/her partner(s) ought morally to follow the same clinical routine. AIDS may be considered an illness that introduces a breakage in people's intimacy. What was once regarded as safe and personal could become insecure and public. Susan Sontag notes some of the changes that have occurred because of AIDS:

> Sex no longer withdraws its partners, if only for a moment, from the social. It cannot be considered just a coupling; it is a chain, a chain of transmission, from the past. 'So remember, when a person has sex, they are not just having it with that partner, they are having it with everybody that partner had it with for the pastten years,' runs a […] pronouncement made in 1987 by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. (72-3)

The play's brilliance resides in suggesting how prone we are to accept lies instead of dealing with uncomfortable truths. For now and then, we make ourselves believe that, as long as we keep doors closed, secrets will not come out; as long as patients are kept inside

a hospital, an illness, such as AIDS, can be disregarded; finally, as long as homosexuals are kept "in the closet," they do not exist for us. In other words, Hoffman's play diagnoses several outbreaks, all potent and urgent for discussion/healing.

At least for the moment, Saul—the protagonist of the play—is not hospitalized. He introduces us to his friends, all of whom have AIDS. Teddy "is not in pain" (7) because his body is practically destroyed by the illness; Jimmy, who died recently, had been "in a coma for a month, […] Harry has K.S. [short for Kaposi sarcoma's symptoms, which are severe lesions, as one possible complication resulting from AIDS] […] and Matt has the swollen glands" (8). Finally, Saul's current partner, Rich, is also hospitalized.

The play focuses on two major issues. Written in the early eighties when the epidemic was not yet fully exposed to the public, and when homosexuals were still kept "in the closet," one of the first things Hoffman wants to demonstrate through his play is the ignorance of the authorities. They wrongly misread AIDS as an illness that affects only homosexuals. In so doing, they label them as deviant and dangerous. Even more poignantly, they allow AIDS to proliferate among people who have been told to think their heterosexuality would keep them away from this illness. In the following passage, Hoffman eloquently combines three distinct reactions to AIDS:

RICH. *Doctor, tell me the truth. What are my chances?*

DOCTOR 1. I don't know.

RICH. *Doctor, tell me the truth. What are my chances?*

DOCTOR 2. I don't know.

RICH. *Doctor, tell me the truth. What are my chances?*

[…]

DOCTORS. We don't know.

TV ANNOUNCER. The simple fact is that we know very little about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Its victims may live a normal life span, or they may have only a few weeks. Fortunately, so far this tragic disease has not spread outside its target groups to people like you and me. When will science conquer this dreaded disease? We don't know. We don't know. We don't know. (13)

By paralleling two socio-cultural institutions of power and control, television and medical practice, Hoffman in this passage points out the frustrating uncertainty of this illness' etiology. It is interesting to notice that, while the doctors seem powerless because they admit they do not know how to cure AIDS, the TV announcer rephrases the fear as follows: science does not know how to cure it. Today,

AIDS though treatable, is still not curable. However, over the years, we have learned important lessons, one of which is that this illness can potentially target anyone. Because of AIDS, the regime of fear spreads from those individuals who have already been searching feverishly for a "contaminated" lover in their intimate, yet broken, chain, to everyone.

Thus, it is worth noting that "Cancerphobia taught us the fear of a polluting environment; now, we have the fear of polluting people that AIDS anxiety inevitably communicates" (Sontag 73). There is sufficient resemblance between Sontag's idea and the remark of Joe, a character from Tony Kushner's 1994 monumental play *Angels in America*: "Freedom is where we bleed into one another" (*Perestroika*, 1.7.37). Kushner's polemic idea has been interpreted in various ways. For this essay's purposes, freedom means to have a body able to enjoy life. A "body-broken" rarely has freedom. For issues pertaining to homosexuals and AIDS, Kushner's freedom alludes to the unpleasant reality of still wrongly associating AIDS with homosexuals.

In this light, how far are we from the ancient notion of *miasma* (roughly translated as "stench")? In antiquity, this notion referred to keeping women in labor isolated, for their bodies, being covered in blood and other unpleasant secretions, were considered repulsive and unhealthy. In the history of medicine,

> The miasma theory of disease was prevalent in Europe from ancient times right up until the discovery of microbes. This was the notion that 'bad air'—air that was damp, odorous or polluted—in itself caused

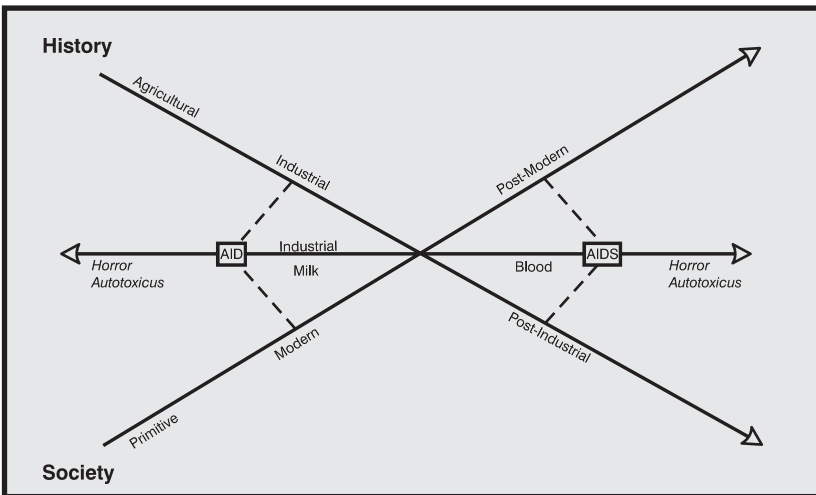

Figure 1. Mapping aid and AIDS. *Contested Bodies*. Eds. Ruth Holiday and John Hassard.

> disease. It was believed the sticky miasmal atoms lodged in bodies, wood, fabrics, clothing and merchandise, and could be absorbed through the skin or by inhalation and therefore could pass from person to person or animal to person through contact. (Lupton, *The Imperative* 20)

Is *miasma* theory one of the reasons why we have misjudged homosexuals' style of life? John O'Neill provides one possible answer. He charts the changes undergone from an agricultural to an industrial society (above). In the former, the maternal milk was invested with a special power, for it suggested an indestructible bonding between a mother and her infant. With the introduction of the bottle in the feeding process, that bonding was damaged considerably. Hence, maternal milk was not considered as fundamental as it had been, and it thus was not regarded as the only means to sustain life in its incipient phase. Moving forward in time, in an industrial society, blood has been invested with life-sustaining attributes (for example, think of transfusions; or of the type of blood an infant inherits). AIDS then contributes significantly to making us cautious of the unpleasant viruses that could be transmitted through blood. As O'Neill argues,

> [i]n an industrial society the social bond may be rendered in terms of the medicalized icon of the gift of blood. […] For as long as our medical system fails to find a prevention or cure for HIV, we are abandoned to *horror autotoxicus*—the catastrophe of lethal fluids (blood or semen), […] where the gift of blood has been polluted and now deals death rather than life and love to its trusting recipients. (181-182)

If that is the case, if one's body could experience the horrors of its own toxicity, along with the risk of contaminating others, and if we are a homophobic society, then in his play Hoffman might have alluded to the quarantine effect *vis-à-vis* the patients with AIDS who are kept in hospital, in some cases until they die. Saul is caught in an epicenter of bad news, friends dying, his own lover in hospital, and—above all—a lot of unhealthy uncertainty. Not only does this illness affect his friends and current partner, eventually destroying them, but it also makes Saul *too* conscious of his embodiment until he forgets what it is to live. He becomes obsessed in his search for clues of AIDS on his body. This is the play's second major achievement. Hoffman captures masterfully Saul in the throes of his own angst:

> SAUL. I have not slept well for weeks. Every morning I examine my body for swellings, marks. I'm terrified of every pimple, every rash. […] I feel the disease closing in on me. (8)

At the end of the play, Saul flirts with the idea of getting married to Rich, thus literally closing in the disease on him. The wedding rings in this context could be interpreted as the death rings. On the other hand, he may think his proposal could contribute to restoring his

confidence, since the institution of marriage has been a symbol of unity and stability for years. Although this institution has major flaws, it is nonetheless a certainty. After he has seen too many of his close friends dying, Saul ardently needs some stable points of reference to help him balance his recently devastated life:

> RICH. My future isn't exactly promising.
>
> SAUL. I'll take you as is. (72)

The ending of this play, however, is intentionally not explicit. We do not know whether or not Saul will marry Rich, or if Rich would live long enough to get married. As if reading about people dying of AIDS and the introduction of the regime of fear and unhealthy uncertainty were not enough for us to start a polemical debate, at the very end of the play, the hospice worker urges us to continue our discussion by reflecting upon the nature of the endurance of pain, our limits to sympathy, and the worker's delicate job. As he remarks, "They [the patients] get a lot of support at first, but as the illness goes on, the visitors stop coming—and they're left only with me" (76). Along with the hospice workers, nurses "deal with bodies that transgress boundaries that are broken down and violated by illness and medical treatment" (Lupton, *Medicine* 133). The hospital worker and nurses confirm the fact that AIDS deprives patients of their social identity and makes them question their role and usefulness in society.

[III]

Amy Hoffman proposes an even tougher perspective on AIDS. She has never had AIDS; however, because her friend, Michael Riegle, died of AIDS, and because he made her his health care proxy, I read Hoffman's *Hospital Time* as a memoir. If the one who writes this work is not the patient, and yet it can still be read as a memoir, it becomes clearer and clearer that between a patient and his/her attendees there occurs an inseparable, intensified identification of criss-crossed experiences. Throughout her book, Hoffman offers uncensored reflections *vis-à-vis* this illness and the limitations of friendship. The image with which she starts her memoir is that of clocks:

> In Intensive Care a clock hangs on the wall opposite the bed. Big black numerals. One hand that moves in sudden ticks, minute by fucking minute. […] [w]e visitors are intimidated by all the tubes and wires and monitors that hook up to machines that are hissing, sucking, clicking, chattering. (3)

The clocks are depicted without any embellishment, namely, as they appear on a white wall. There is a symphony of white here: the walls

are white; the hospital bed is white; the nurses wear white uniforms. Michael is more and more detached from this world.

Then, as Hoffman asks, how do we react when we see someone beloved dying? What do we do when we notice a patient mocked by an illness, trapped among wires and machines that apparently—in an interesting choice of words—chat with each other? One may argue that in intensive care units, the verbal dialogue is replaced by a white noise resulting from a conglomerate of hissing machines. In this sterilized environment, waiting becomes so burdensome that it pains the one who is waiting. Hoffman admits this truth without editing or disguising her anger:

> Time ticks differently next to the sickbed. […] And there's no comfortable place to sit. The bed is narrow, the patient bristling with needles, electrodes, and other ICU accoutrements that must not be displaced. […]
>
> I sat on the edge of Mike's bed or on a stool or chair next to it. […]
>
> My neck would begin to ache, then my buttocks. My arm would fall asleep. I'd think of obligations elsewhere. I'd get bored. I'd wish I'd brought a magazine to look at. A magazine! Mike was struggling, he has dying, and he needed my total attention. (3-4)

Hoffman faces the impasse of not knowing how to communicate with her dear friend. She and Michael worked together at the *Gay Community*, a newspaper. They were involved in many politically incorrect situations that homosexuality inevitably causes. As an active lesbian, Hoffman shared with Mike, as well as debated, many homosexuality-related topics. As a parenthetical observation, she admits that sometimes she found Michael "crazy," that is to say too passionate and adamant in his opinions. Therefore, when she admits how boring and difficult it is to wait next to the sickbed, she is utterly sincere. In such challenging moments, she does not know if people need courage, or if they should resign their hopes when seeing their friends entombed in hospital machines.

When Michael cannot talk to her, she develops another form of dialogue consisting of flashbacks. The following one relates an episode at a local gym:

> During an exercise we were instructed to try in pairs, the teacher came over to help Mike and me. 'I'm having trouble with this one,' Mike explained to her. 'I've been sick, and I have some neuropathy in my feet. It's hard to balance.' She obviously never heard that word before. […] She'd never heard nouns [such as]: *neuropathy*, *cytomegalovirus*, *mycobacterial avium introcellulare*, *Hickman catheter*. The AIDS language. (27-28)

But Hoffman never explains the nouns' meanings to the gym instructor, and thus indirectly to us, because these nouns, although now part

of the "AIDS language," are confusing for Hoffman, too. This passage reinforces the belief according to which medical jargon is a closed circuit available only to those trained in its subtleties. This episode also confirms that uttering/hearing some nouns does not mean knowing/learning their meaning, synonyms, and structure. Philosophers of language, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, have noticed why we are so tuned into "language-games." We like to play them because, in the middle of a conversation, while someone still speaks, we may anticipate what s/he will be saying contextually. On the other hand, the above cited nouns are too cryptic to allow (many of) us to start a conversation.

Actually, when I was writing down this passage in my notes, and then again when I was inserting it here, I was careful to type correctly every single noun. One morpheme changed, and I felt the disaster approaching. As if the change in the nouns' morpheme was actually the big concern here! These nouns represent a series of abstract ideas. It is useful to note that, etymologically, "abstract" comes from Latin, more specifically from the perfect participle form of the verb *abstrahere*, i.e., "to draw off." In one of its connotations, abstract means being drawn away from worldly interests. Unfortunately, when a patient's body reaches its end, it becomes more and more abstract; here I use the adjective with the meaning "rigid," in anticipation of the *rigor mortis* characteristic of the dead. Or, as Hoffman writes: "Michael's emaciated body. The heavy, heavy ashes" (86). She must reconcile two different images of her dear friend (before and after his physical collapse), and she knows that will demand courage.

But there is something else implied in this passage. Once Michael is dead, Hoffman will need someone else to minister to her pain. Retrospectively, she admits she was not much help to a very sick, dying friend. Therefore, she is skeptical that anyone can soothe other people's pain. When Michael was barely present in this world, Hoffman remembers an episode that enraged her so deeply that it made her erupt into shouting:

> 'Hang on. Stay with it,' Loie would whisper to him [Mike], crying and squeezing his hand. She told me, 'He knows we are with him. It helps him get through the pain.' Sorry, but I can't believe it. Get through the pain—to where? More pain? Mike wasn't going anyplace. He was just dying, on his deathbed. He had no relationship left, except with pain. (123)

She thinks that some wounds remain open; with the passing of time, they may subside in intensity. Sadly, she admits that she could not find any other way to deal with Michael's suffering that has now become, to a certain extent, her own.

[IV]

The third and last part of this essay's triptych of pain and suffering take a look at Hector Babenco's film *Carandiru*, in which the director analyzes the extreme representation of illnesses. Carandiru, where the action of the film occurs, is a prison in São Paolo, Brazil. The characters face a double imprisonment: one literal, in prison; another metaphorical, in their bodies with AIDS, tuberculosis, or scabies. Babenco suffocates us visually with sick inmates. There are so many, they are not properly identified throughout the film. As one of them says to Dr. Varella, who is conducting social work for AIDS prevention at Carandiru, "I got AIDS, is it still worth taking the test?" Another inmate says, "You come in here sick, they treat you with respect."

Throughout his film, Babenco does not offer answers related to promiscuity and the trafficking of illnesses in prisons. By its end, we do not have the feeling we know these inmates any better. In fact, there is no sense of identity in this film; there are no main characters, no plot, or action. Everything happens, or lulls, in front of the camera, as if there were never an initial script. Babenco shoots the ordinary, regimented routine that exists in prisons, giving the impression he moves his camera from one scene to another dispassionately. For Sean Cubitt, the "[c]inematic present […] can be given a number: zero. […] The concept of nonidentity reveals zero's quality of internal difference. Zero is a relation rather than a (no)thing because it is always a relation of nonidentity with itself. Zero acts, rather than is because of this instability. And it acts in relation to the cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3)" (33). If zero defines its identity through the presence of the other cardinals, then zero possesses this remarkable quality of being in perpetually re-constructing identity. Apparently, Babenco's film is populated with zeros, meaning the inmates, and one cardinal, Dr. Varega. But the slim language of numbers is elusive. On closer analysis, it is Dr. Varega's identity as an outsider that is questioned. He becomes zero in this situation, although here I use zero with a different connotation. Once he completes his social work at Carandiru, he will stop being in contact with these inmates. His relationship, or maybe I should say interaction, with the inmates is episodic, and hence rather fruitless.

For reasons not clearly stated in the film, in the end these inmates are killed in bloodshed. The extremely graphic image of the dead could be interpreted as another way to illustrate the cessation of suffering. Both their illnesses and wrong actions are cleansed in one violent act, so that we see more clearly the metaphor of quarantine upon which this film is created; people with AIDS (and, potentially,

other illnesses) could contaminate healthy people, and--if possible--they should be kept isolated. Have illnesses, and suffering in general, somehow exhausted our patience?

To answer this question, it is worth mentioning that the process of waiting has different meanings for the patients and their attendees, particularly when the former are prescribed tranquilizers. As Larry Dossey conjures, "[w]hen we experience a technique that diminishes pain through expanding our time sense, we are not merely exercising self-deception. We are not fooling ourselves into thinking the pain is not there" (47). If the awareness of time for the sedated patients is altered (i.e., they no longer have a clear sense of circadian time), time for their attendees seems to have stopped. Although they are not physically affected by their beloved's illnesses, nonetheless their lives are at a halt because of pain. To illustrate this more fully, let me return to Sontag's idea according to which, "Compassion is not a stable emotion." Sontag further argues that "It [compassion] needs to be translated into action, or it withers" (101). As someone who has been involved in observing, and, whenever possible, helping two of my relatives deal with their pain and eventual death, it is important to say that compassion is never enough. Compassion is like a drug with too quick an effect. When one cannot do anything *more*, one feels helpless. One feels s/he is companionless to the one who is in pain, but never compassionless. Hoffman, whom we have noticed giving such honestly brutal accounts of her being bored and tired of her visits to the hospital, writes in another entry of her memoir: "By that last week, I knew the way to the hospital by heart, I knew millions of ways. I thought about Mike all the time, and I couldn't sleep or enjoy sex, food, work, companionship. Only in the hospital, looking at him, would my thoughts of him leave me" (67).

Furthermore, compassion may not mean much to patients on their threshold of death, who become more and more detached from such an "unstable emotion." In hospitals, or at home, when an illness is too advanced, baffled we could say: "Illness itself is a strangeness" (Zaner 36). The suffix "-ness" typically describes an object's essence. But could we attach it to people who are close to death? For Hoffman, at the end of her friend's ordeal, Michael became "Michaelness" (142). Moreover, when bodies collapse, when treatments are not compatible with the patients' bodies, and when there is no satisfactory meaning to their ordeal, time itself seems to freeze in its "time-ness." So what does one say or do when time reaches its time-ness, when the beloved is close to death?

Addressing how the dynamics of language could be changed if it were conceived from a verb's, and not from a subject to object,

perspective, David Bohr "[h]as proposed a new model of language called the 'rheomode,' emphasisizing the Greek word that means 'to flow.' He suggests that a primary role be given the verb instead of the noun, thus reducing the emphasis on subject and object" (Dossey 204). Needless to say, the verb was employed in this new dynamic of language because of its capacity to suggest and express action. But verbs get locked into their "-ness," too, when there is not much left to do and/or offer to a patient and his attendees. When the verb freezes too, ironically then we hear again the burden of time's ticking. As Dossey argues, "We wear a watch with no conscious regard for the name we give it. […] Using it, we *watch*. We watch time, we are fixated on it. […] constantly watching, always watching, it is we who are in the service of time" (29).

[V]

This essay has offered a reversal on the perspective of pain, according to which it extends from the one in literal, corporeal pain to his attendees. After we have taken care of ill people, we wear a different type of inscription tattooed on our bodies: "Beware!" But I need to ask: Beware of what: of pain? of physical breakage? of emotional collapse? of death? Could we watch our bodies as if they were outside of us, ready to pour down on us their illnesses, deviations, and misfortunes?

Illnesses, like musical, literal and political trends, are reflective of the time in which we live. Like cancer, AIDS is not one single illness, but a complex of many intricate symptoms that baffles the medical community and raises illogical levels of fear in us. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed in the humoral theory in which "the environment, in combination with individuals' constitutions, were influential in affecting people's state of health. The humoral theory of disease incorporated an understanding of the healthy body as maintaining a balance of the four humors, blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile, four elements, earth, air, fire and water, and four qualities, hot, cold, wet and dry" (Lupton, *The Imperative* 19). This type of embodiment was closer to nature and more prone to accept illnesses as curses that needed their cure or redemption in a divine intervention.

On the other hand, an unbalanced body because of AIDS becomes "miasmatic," that is, a hideous, repulsive and isolated body. This is a consequence of incorporating without filtering all those uncontrolled political and medical discourses, according to which "The image of the 'positive' body or the body with AIDS is strictly controlled. Nowhere is an image of the 'ugly' or diseased body

evoked directly, for any such evocation would refer back to the initial sense of AIDS as a 'gay' disease […] *Mens non sana in corpore insano* cannot be the motto" (Gilman 162). Bodies with AIDS bleed differently than other bodies. Their blood is poisonous and vengeful. If touched, it may contaminate another. A contemporary disturbingly distorted myth of hygiene is born; a body with AIDS echoes the myth of Medusa. That is to say, a body with AIDS does not have Medusa's legendary force to decapitate those who used to look straight into her eyes; however, we should not deny that a body with AIDS unwillingly transforms a simple, spontaneous touch into an irrational fear.

Whereas "smell and touch [used to] evoke for us the world before language [since] they [were] keys to repressed memories of the wholeness of the world not primarily seen but felt and tasted and smelt" (Gilman 178), with the official acceptance of AIDS as a contemporary medical conundrum, the act of touch has been removed from our intimate sphere and may, in some cases, become litigious. Furthermore, although *miasma* theory was abandoned when the theory of microbes was discovered during the closing years of the 19th-century, it has nonetheless managed to infiltrate itself into our current hygiene-related campaigns. For Lupton, "In the case of the 'new' public health, individuals are largely governed through inciting them to exercise personal autonomy and political awareness. […] Thus, the 'new' public health […] demands even wider hygienic strategy [in which] every individual [has become a master in] the techniques of self-surveillance" (*The Imperative*, 76). While it is politically incorrect to conceive of AIDS as a "gay" disease, unfortunately few changes have been made towards not keeping these patients isolated or perceiving them as pariah. A new political barrier has been erected that divides us into the social category of those who are considered "safe" (and with "rights") and those who are viewed as contagious (and deprived of complete control over their bodies or public identity).

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TIMES OF LAMENTATION: RETHINKING PERIODIZATION IN AFRICAN HISTORY

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The conventional division of African history into pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods privileges the time of the European imperial conquest and occupation of the African continent. African and Africanist scholars need to develop a terminology of periodization that centers African activities in interactions between different African and European groups of people over an era of more than 650 years. Scholars who would do so need to bear in mind that the BC/AD and more ostensibly culturally neutral BCE/CE categories still privilege European periodization because they are based on the Gregorian calendar that centers the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but which was a refinement of the Julian calendar, which in turn was a Christianizing refinement of the ancient Roman calendar.

George Brooks certainly attempted to do so using alternating wet and dry periods in West African climatic history from c.7,500 years ago to the present (Brooks). Ghanaian historian A. Adu Boahen proposed a new periodization of the so-called colonial era in which he contended that the difference in African resistance during the period from the 1890s to the end of the First World War and the period from 1919 to 1935 was one of degree rather than kind, and that the nationalist phase began in 1935 with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia (Boahen).

I characterize European relationships with Africans as an infectious disease that I call Western Syphilization,[1] which I define as the intellectual process in which Europeans and/or Estadounidenses[2]

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[1] I do not use syphilization in its traditional definition of inoculation with the virus of syphilis as a means of cure or prevention.

[2] In an effort to deconstruct the equation of "American" with citizens and/or residents of the United States of America, and because there is no single word to describe such inhabitants in the English language, I have employed the Spanish term

expropriate, appropriate, or co-opt African discourses and/or simultaneously impose European discourses on African discourses resulting in gross distortions and/or the effacement of the latter. I propose the terms *Canarial Disease* and *Canarial* to discuss the processes of European exploitation of African people and spoliation of their resources from 1341, when a Portuguese expedition first took captives from the Canary Islands, to the present. Canarial Disease, therefore, is the material basis for Western Syphilization.

I am well aware that the strong preyed upon the weak in a thousand times and places before 1341. I focus specifically on European exploitation of Africans because for Africa European domination was—to paraphrase Aimé Césaire—"the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred" (Césaire 77). Accordingly, some of what follows may give the impression that African interactions with Europeans were unidirectional with the latter consistently dominating the former. Such was not the case, bearing in mind the countless instances of Africans making their own history apart from any reference to Europe as well as the numerous examples of African resistance to European efforts at domination.

Canarial Disease cuts across a variety of conventional periodizations, such as European medieval, or "pre-modern," and "modern" eras, showing that modernity is a privileged European discourse whose privilege is founded on European domination in the material base, specifically on military technology, as are European medievalism and pre-modernity, which are founded on the expropriation of land and natural resources and the violation and exploitation of indigenous African and Asian, and Native American peoples.

I propose incorporating gender analysis as a way to develop new and African-centered referents for periodization, specifically memories or recollections of moments of collective trauma as markers of *durées*, and to reckon time during the Canarial age in African history as *Lacrimal* time(s), or times of tears.

It is asinine and arrogant to lump together history from the beginning of humanity more than 100,000 years ago to the European conquest as "pre-colonial" without any differentiation, as many European and Euro-Estadounidense scholars do (Chamberlain, 91). Doing so merely follows Hegel and other Europeans, such as Marjorie Perham

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"Estadounidense" for residents of the political entity that incorporates significant portions of the North American continent and use "American" to refer to residents of the Americas—North, Central, and South—and Caribbean basin more broadly.

and Hugh Trevor-Roper, who argued that Africa had no history—at least until the Europeans arrived. Hegel notoriously wrote:

> At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit. Historical movements in it—that is in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European World. Carthage displayed there an important transitory phase of civilization; but as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit. What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's history. (Hegel 99)

Similarly, Trevor-Roper opined that

> It is fashionable to speak today as if European history were devalued: as if historians, in the past, have paid too much attention to it; and as if, nowadays, we should pay less. Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history. … indeed, we may neglect our own history and amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe: tribes whose chief function in history, in my opinion, is to show to the present an image of the past from which, by history, it has escaped. (Trevor-Roper 9)

Significantly, it appears that historians of Africa were primarily responsible for the development of the tripartite division of African history:

> The first generation of professional Africanist historians created a basic chronological division of Africa's past into pre-colonial, colonial, and independent periods, a trinity recalling the conventional European concept of ancient, medieval and modern history. At bottom, the division of African history into these periods was an assertion that the establishment of colonial rule marked a feature in African history so basic that it could be considered a change of era, with the implication that, as Basil Davidson put it in 1959, Africa's history was beginning anew with the proclamations of independence. The rather brief colonial period became the fulcrum around which African history turned, with time stretching backwards and forwards from that point into the infinite "pre" and "post" ages, both defined by reference to colonialism. (Ellis 5-6)

The problem of "post-colonial," in the literal sense of "after colonialism," presumes that once African states achieved political independence they were ostensibly equal with their former colonizers: they have flags, "Western" style parliamentary democracies, and seats in the UN General Assembly, etc. This view leaves responsibility for the

failures of independence with the African states and does not account for Europe's intentional underdevelopment of the African continent. Scholars such as Siba Grovugi have criticized this position (Grovugi). But even "postcolonial" in the sense of "Postcolonial Studies," which presumes African inequality, still refers back to the colonial dispensation as central to African history.

How, then, is it possible to discuss periodization in African history given these flawed assumptions? There is no need here to prove that Africa has history: many fine books and journals such as the *Journal of African History*, the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, and *History in Africa* have been doing so for 50 years. Many historians, such as Walter Rodney and Basil Davidson, and more recently Paul Lovejoy, Fred Cooper, and Jacques Depelchin, see continuities of European expropriation of African resources—both human and material—from the beginnings of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to the present (Rodney; Davidson; Lovejoy; Cooper; Depelchin).

Shifting Focus: Referents for Periodization

Cameroonian historian Achille Mbembe defined an age as "not a simple category of time but a number of relationships and a configuration of events—often visible and perceptible, sometimes diffuse, 'hydra-headed,' but to which contemporaries could testify since [they were] very aware of them" (Mbembe 14), and that every age "is in reality a combination of several temporalities" that enclose "multiple *durées* made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another: an *entanglement*" (Mbembe 14-15). According to Mbembe, this "time of *entanglement*," or "emerging time" is

> neither a linear time nor a simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls, and replaces those that preceded it, to the point where a single age exists within society. This time is not a series but an *interlocking* of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones. (Mbembe 16)

As such, a given period or age is simultaneously a network of relationships between people and groups of people in specific places and at specific moments in time and an intellectual construct that defines and characterizes those relationships. Accordingly, "modern" is more an ethnocentric European cultural marker as opposed to a temporal designation. Significantly, despite Mbembe's efforts to show African social formations as emergent and linking multiple possible pasts, presents, and futures, by defining an age, specifically the

"postcolony" or "time of *entanglements*," he still engaged the process of periodization, that is, marking off specific forms and moments of human interaction so as to distinguish them from others as discrete entities for intellectual reflection and analysis.

Estadounidense historian of Africa Frederick Cooper also reflected on the significance and power of periodization in African history. Focusing on the same period—and in some ways using very similar language as Mbembe—Cooper noted that changing the referents of a given period will frequently illuminate processes that more conventional periodizations tend to obscure (Cooper, xi). Accordingly, Cooper defined the period 1940 to 1973 as "the development era" and the period following it as the time of the crisis of the developmentalist state, a time in which external forces coalesced to continue exacting productive force from African workers and simultaneously overwhelmed the so-called "colonial" state structures, now in African nationalists' hands, that had begun to provide benefits for their citizens (Cooper, 4). By changing the temporal referents, therefore, Cooper developed a different periodization of the latter half of twentieth century of African history and consequently a significantly different interpretation that highlighted different breaking points (Cooper 85-86).

In a similar fashion, English historian of Africa John Parker problematized the division between the so-called "pre-colonial" era and what he called the "early colonial" period in a case study of Accra from the mid-nineteenth century to the early decades of the twentieth century (Parker). Parker argued compellingly for continuities in Ga political and social institutions that transcended British occupation and persisted well into the twentieth century.

Nguva dzekuchema: Times of Lamenting

Ken Harrow characterized the process of periodization as being "built around enormous reductive models grounded in structures of power that inevitably rationalize their epistemologies so as to disguise the very nature of their power" (Harrow). It is still necessary, however, to determine temporal referents for discussing African history. John Thornton noted that

> virtually all African states that reckon history orally (and certainly those who kept written records) maintain a king list as a grounding principle, and that concept is essentially linear in the same way that European systems of reckoning are. These king lists then become the framework on which incidents are hung. . . .the concept of time reckoning is the same, and only the validity of the events placed in the chronology are at issue. (Thornton)

Time is a systematic record of an irreversible succession of passing events. The process by which it is recorded is a human cultural construct, i.e., it is artificial and arbitrary. The reference points for marking and recording time are systematic: e.g., the revolution of earth around the sun marks a year, the revolution of the moon around the earth marks a month, the rotation of the earth on its axis marks a day, or the passing of Halley's Comet every 76 years, or the reign of a king. These referents, however, are also arbitrary: there are 365 days in the Gregorian calendar even though "modern western" science has shown that there are, in fact, 365.25 days required for the earth to revolve around the sun, thus necessitating an extra day every four years, except one every century. These referents exist and occur apart from individual subjects, yet are common to them in some form of collectivity: e.g., numerous African states marking time by the years of a king's or queen's reign, or the Greek and Russian use of the Julian calendar at the turn of the twentieth century, or the adoption of "universal time" in the 1890s. Animals also have a sense of time: "mating season" is a response to physiological cycles and periodic changes, i.e., the biochemical release of pheromones. Similarly, humans have frequently used physiological changes to mark time: e.g., puberty as the time of transition from childhood to adulthood. Greater awareness of the culturally constructed nature of time and efforts to include the perspectives of different cultures, including African cultures with non-linear notions of time, however, does not move the historian beyond consciously having to choose specific events to frame a given period.

Stephen Ellis suggested *Radio Trottoir* (literally "pavement radio" or perhaps more poetically "the word on the street") or the "unofficial, spoken news" that people tell in "markets, places of refreshment, taxis and barbers' shops"—sometimes styled rumors or gossip—as "a prime source" for "any historian who wishes to study the political or social history of Africa in recent decades" (Ellis, 19-21). Ellis claimed that "the overwhelming problem of Africa today" that is "most in need of rethinking" is "secur[ing] an equitable public order." Echoing Mbembe, Ellis argued that the first task of the contemporary historian is "to consider which aspects of the present are of prime importance and, most especially, which features distinguish the current period of time from previous ages," and that this determination will significantly influence "the choice of historical material to be gathered into sequential order" (Ellis, 9-10). Like Cooper, Ellis identified the 1970s "rather than the era of independence as the time of most significant change" (Ellis 24). In other words, Ellis called for and developed a revised periodization

of contemporary (so-called "post-colonial") African history based on African sources with African referents.

I suggest incorporating gender analysis as a way to develop new and African-centered referents for periodization. Kathleen Sheldon asserted that frequently "women made almost no reference to the more widely recognized events that drive conventional histories, though it is likely that the changes they made reference to resulted in part from wars and political change" (Sheldon). Citing studies by Leroy Vail, Landeg White, and Heidi Gengenbach, Sheldon noted that women in Malawi and Mozambique marked time during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in reference to "a loss of power resulting from a shift away from matrilineal descent patterns, [which is] an issue ignored in the conventional regional histories of Ngoni raids and population migration," and constructed "a world centered on the agricultural calendar, family obligations and responsibilities, and the occasional ecological disaster (such as floods and drought)" (Sheldon).

Perhaps, then, it is appropriate to use memories or recollections of moments of collective trauma as markers of *durées*. Achille Mbembe characterized the latter half of the twentieth century in African history as a "time of *entanglements*," or a combination of "discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelop one another" (Mbembe 14) and that

> must not only include the coercion to which people are subjected, and the sufferings inflicted on the human body by war, scarcity, and destitution, but also embrace a whole cluster of re-orderings of society, culture, and identity, and a series of changes in the way power is exercised and rationalized. (Mbembe 66)

Similarly, Marlene De La Cruz-Guzmán introduced the idea of "double traumatization:" the first resulting from the violence inherent in the European conquest and occupation of the African continent, and the second being a betrayal trauma that African nationalists caused once they began inheriting control of the states—that Europeans created—from the middle of the twentieth century to the present (De La Cruz-Guzmán). Although De La Cruz-Guzmán specifically addressed literary representations of traumas experienced during the so-called "colonial" and "post-colonial" periods, it is possible to apply her model to pre-Canarial times as well, e.g., periods of warfare or systematic slave raiding (Wright; Gengenbach). Consequently, it is possible to reckon time during the age of Canarial Disease in African history as *Lacrimal* time(s), or times of tears.

Significantly, African cultures seem to have collective consciousness and collective memories of lacrimal times, such as times of

famine or locust swarms, which can provide a basis for historians to develop African-centered periodizations. The following are ChiShona proverbs from Zimbabwe: (Hamutyinei and Plangger)[3]

> 594 *Matakudya kare haanyaradzi mwana*.
> What was eaten long ago cannot stop a child crying (for food).
>
> 634 *Kana shumba ikashaya nyama inodya uswa*.
> If a lion fails to find meat it eats grass.
>
> 677 *Chandiwana nhasi chichazokuwanawo mangwana*.
> What has befallen me today will befall you tomorrow.
>
> 681 *Chataidya nomuromo nhasi chava chokudya nameso*.
> What we used to eat with our mouths is now eaten with the eyes.
>
> 684 *Chinokokwa upfumi urombo hunozvikoka*.
> Wealth is invited but poverty invites itself.
>
> 732 *Shure kwenzara maguta*.
> After famine follows abundance (of crops)
>
> 1339 *Ukagarosekerera hwiza mangwana dzinokudyira muriwo*.
> Do not entertain locusts; tomorrow they will eat your vegetables.

Clearly, proverbs are very specialized modes of communication that have a variety of functions, including didactic, in a given culture. These examples, however, show that memories of lacrimal times, or *Nguva dzekuchema*–literally "times of lamenting" in ChiShona—can be used as temporal referents for periodization in African history. For example, there were significant periods of drought in Zimbabwe (and Southern Africa more broadly) in 1992 and 2000. The latter year was also the year that Indian Ocean cyclones devastated large areas of Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe. A historian could conceivably periodize a study of Zimbabwe's recent political crisis starting with the torrential rainfall associated with the 2000 cyclones. Aside from potentially being a significant marker in people's memories, the rainfall could very well have been a significant factor in the defeat of the February 2000 constitutional referendum by keeping down voter turnout in rural areas that were ZANU-PF's principal base of support. This in turn led to the recent *nguva yekuchema* (time of lamentation) that began with the farm invasions during the first week of March 2000.

Furthermore, it is possible to plot another period in VaShona history between two *nguva dzekuchema*: in the 1820s Zwangendaba attacked the Rozvi kingdom, in the 1830s Shoshangane's Gaza state raided VaShona polities on the eastern plateau between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers, and in 1837, Mzilikazi established the AmaNde-

[3] Numbers are in the original text and refer to enumeration of proverbs not page numbers.

bele state north of the Limpopo River and began raiding western and southern VaShona polities for cattle and labor. The Canarial infection of Zimbabwe began in 1890 when Cecil Rhodes's British South Africa Company armed and outfitted a military column that occupied VaShona territories and then conquered the AmaNdebele kingdom in 1893. Thus, the immediately pre-Canarial period from circa 1825 to 1890 was a lacrimal time in which VaShona states had to contend with frequent and repeated external threats from neighboring states. Despite these threats, however, they survived and retained sufficient institutional cohesion to organize and rebel against Rhodes' minions in 1896 (Beach).

Alternatively, many cultural groups across the continent, including Zulu and Xhosa in Southern Africa or Maasai, Gikuyu, and Oromo in East Africa, use age grades or age sets to mark people's transitions in social status either individually or collectively. Historians of Africa conceivably could use moments when specific age sets ascended to particular locations of social status or seniority as markers for periodization. Although more difficult to use for earlier periods in African history, age grades would allow contemporary historians of the continent to develop more African-centered periodizations based on indigenous reckonings of time, rather than the conventional European tripartite division of African history.

As a framework for periodization, Nguva dzekuchema (Lacrimal Times) and/or age grades will result in multiple, concurrent, and overlapping periods that are highly localized, or tied to specific geographic or cultural locations. Such a framework would be more reflective of extremely complex African historical realities: no single power dominated the continent in its entirety prior to its infection with Canarial Disease between 1341 and 1935. Accordingly, perhaps it should follow that in reckoning time historians should not seek broad, all-encompassing periods that can be applied universally across the continent. That would be yet another Western Syphilizing distortion of African historical discourses.

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THE ETERNAL RETURN TO LIBERALISM: SPAIN IN THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF ALBERTO JIMÉNEZ FRAUD
(1883–1964)

Mercedes Montero

This essay focuses on the Spanish university system and culture at the beginning and mid-20th century, a time of political upheaval. The approach adopted by the Institución Libre de Enseñanza (the Free Institute for Education) comprised the most serious attempt to regenerate Spanish society through the higher education system. Its frame of reference was of a romantic-liberal bent: selective, secular, tolerant, and philanthropic; and its specific proposals were well-founded and developed in response to real and urgent needs in the Spanish university system at that time. The Residencia de Estudiantes (literally, the "Student Residence") (1910-1936) was one of Institute's initiatives. The leading lights who would go on to play a prominent role in the later transformation of the country were educated there during the interwar period. Alberto Jiménez Fraud (1883-1964) was the director of the residence. The Civil War brought the Free Institute for Education and the Residencia de Estudiantes to an end. Jiménez Fraud went into exile in September 1936 and spent the rest of his life in the universities at Oxford and Cambridge. The reasons for failure are the defining concern of all books he wrote: why the liberal education project espoused at the Institute was rejected by the masses it intended to reform and why it was eventually destroyed in the fury and bloodshed of the Civil War. The sorrowful tone reflects his refined, balanced, and moderate character. Nevertheless, in his reflections on the matter, Jiménez Fraud comes to a dead end, unable to escape his markedly nineteenth-century liberal convictions. As a solution to the crisis, he proposes the same ideals by which it had been provoked. His stance mirrors that of many European intellectuals during the interwar period: in response to the collapse of Enlightenment culture, they posited a return to its origins as a possible solution. In this regard, therefore, Jiménez Fraud's writings comprise an eternal return to liberalism.

The most significant event in Spanish intellectual history in the period 1876-1936 was the emergence and activity of the Free Institution for Education (FIE) (*Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE)). The objective of its founders was to bring about the renewal of Spanish society through the education of the select few; the university was to play an important role in that project.

Francisco Giner de los Ríos was the life and soul of the FIE. Alberto Jiménez Fraud was not among the first of those to commit to the project of renewal, but he held a privileged position in the cause: he married the daughter of Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, Giner's closest co-worker, and was Director of the Student Residence (*Residencia de Estudiantes*) between 1910 and 1936. This center, whose centenary will be celebrated in 2010, was one of the most significant initiatives undertaken by the FIE as part of its planned renewal of the Spanish university system.

Alberto Jiménez Fraud's writings are littered with references to the Student Residence and the Free Institution for Education, to which his commitment was vocational and enduring. His first writings comprise a fascinating trilogy about the Spanish university sector; they draw on his teaching work as MacColl Chair at the University of Cambridge (1936-1937), and were published by the Colegio de México. The trilogy is as follows: *La ciudad del estudio: la universidad española medieval* (1944) (City of Study: the medieval Spanish university), *Selección y reforma: ensayo sobre la universidad renacentista española* (1944) (Selection and Reform: an essay on the Renaissance Spanish university) and *Ocaso y restauración: ensayo sobre la universidad española moderna* (1948) (Decline and Restoration: an essay on the modern Spanish university).[1] A literary essay, *Juan Valera y la generación de 1868* (Juan Valera and the 1868 Generation), likewise based on lectures given at Cambridge, appeared in 1956. Following his death in Geneva in 1964, Fraud's uncollected writings were published in two volumes: *Residentes. Semblanzas y Recuerdos* (Residents: Portraits and Memories) and *La Residencia de Estudiantes. Visita a Maquiavel* (The Student Residence: Visiting Machiavelli). The first focuses on the residents and the illustrious guests at the centre during the inter-war period. The second is a more straightforward text in honor of the Student Residence itself on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, comprising a chapter from *Decline and Restoration* and a short essay entitled *Visiting Machiavelli*.

[1] The three books were later published in a single volume: Jiménez Fraud, Alberto. *Historia de la Universidad española* (A History of the Spanish University). Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1971. Quotations in the text come from this edition.

The latter recounts a meeting between two exiles. Although the sorrow of its author in the last years of his life may be traced therein, it is not a purely autobiographical account.

The Student Residence, the mission of the Free Institution for Education, a firm belief in the ongoing validity of its liberal ideals concerning the education of the select few, and deference to those as the solution to Spain's problems are defining characteristics of Alberto Jiménez Fraud's writings. They are recurring themes in his work. The conclusion he drew was unchanging: the need to return to individual, romantic, idealistic, and select liberalism as the framing law of life—that is, the liberalism that first emerged in Spain in the mid-nineteenth century through readings of the philosophy of Krause (Fraud, "Juan Valera" 16-25).

The only effect that the violent end to his life's work had on Fraud's ideas was to reaffirm them. First, the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain plunged the very people whom Fraud sought to renew into a bloodbath; it put his own life in danger and brought the work of the Student Residence to an end. Later, the Franco regime sought to attribute intellectual responsibility for the slaughter to the Free Institution for Education. A reading of Alberto Jiménez Fraud's work in autobiographical terms discloses the internal dilemmas this situation caused.

1. THE FREE EDUCATION INSTITUTION AND THE INTELLECTUAL RENEWAL OF SPAIN (1876-1936)

Julián Sanz del Río, a professor at the Universidad Central in Madrid, was awarded a scholarship to study abroad in 1843. He came into contact with the philosophical reflections of Krause at the University of Heidelberg. Krause was a relatively minor German philosopher in the idealist tradition. Sanz del Río returned to Spain and went on to devote his life to the study and further publication of Krause's ideas. In 1860, he translated Krause's two most important works—*System of Philosophy* and *The Ideal of Humanity*—into Spanish. The second book had a significant influence on the generations of students at university between 1860 and 1870, and became a touchstone by which reformers and conservatives might be distinguished from one another. The argument in *The Ideal of Humanity* holds that any conflict between State and society should be resolved in favor of the latter; the State is to evolve away from absolutism and towards a greater dependence on the societies that emerge within it. The adaptation of life to science and art lay at the heart of the wellbeing and future of humanity; religion was a philanthropic and humanitarian bond,

stripped of any transcendent meaning. The vision of life reflected in *The Ideal of Humanity* was incompatible with Catholic doctrine: the book was condemned in 1865 (Cacho, 61 72, 74-75, 88-95).

The government attempted to do away with the Krause school of thought in 1867. Those involved were accused of holding positions that were in open conflict with the Catholic faith and morals. Legal proceedings were taken against Julián Sanz del Río, Fernando de Castro, Nicolás Salmerón and Francisco Giner de los Ríos. However, the liberal Revolution of 1868 cut those measures short and turned the situation on its head: the accused were returned to their university posts and appointed to high-ranking leadership positions, and a process of change in line with the principles articulated by Krause began (Azcarate 16-25).

Nevertheless, the experiment was not an unqualified success. A few short years later—in 1875—the young people the university professors had endeavored to educate accepted the end of the Revolution and the restoration of the Bourbons without qualm. The 'university question' arose once more on 26th February, 1875, when compulsory ministerial approval of textbooks and course curricula was established. Nothing that might prejudice Catholic dogma, public morals or the monarchy could be included in classes or textbooks. Giner, Salmerón and Azcárate protested; they were deprived of their teaching posts and placed under arrest (Azcarate 9-12). This event prompted the foundation of the Free Education Institution (1876), led by the three professors listed above, along with a number of other liberal intellectuals and politicians. Although their aim was to set up a private university, they lacked the material means and human resources to do so. Thus, they set up a college instead.

Francisco Giner de los Ríos was the driving-force behind the Free Institution for Education. A young man—29 years old—when the 1868 Revolution took place, he was fired by the hope that his generation might be able to transform Spain. His disappointment at his contemporaries' unqualified acceptance of the counter-revolution may be easily imagined. The conclusion he drew from this experience was that education alone could renew Spain. Hence, convinced that his own—1868—generation had failed in this endeavour because of the terribly inadequate education they had received, he devoted himself to the education of the next generation (Castillejo 79-87) (Cacho 236-238).

The Free Institution for Education project centred on the refinement of character and moral education: to shape strong, individual personalities. The presiding principles at the FIE were tolerance and

fairness. Good manners were defined as a combination of freedom, dignity, and grace—an indispensable framework for social interaction and mutual respect. The emergence of a "spiritual" aristocracy was the guiding goal of this educational project. With regard to religion, the aim was to create refined minds, independent of any particular religious creed (Castillejo 87). The influence of the Institution soon spread beyond the confines of the private college. Francisco Giner de los Ríos regained his university chair in 1882. From that point onwards, he drew a group of followers to himself, whose role was to spread the ideals of the Institution to other Spanish universities. Moreover, a "spiritual" community of a sort emerged among students, former students, family, and friends of the college, which contributed to the bearing the FIE had on Spanish society (Manguini 72) (De la Fuente 43-50).

The educational ideals of the Institution and the ethos prevalent in the Spanish university system had very little in common. At that time, Spanish universities lacked any research capability, as well as basic means and facilities such as books, laboratories, and meeting rooms. The activity of university professors was limited to the delivery of lectures. More than half of all university students were registered externally in order to complete their third-level education as quickly as possible. Attendance at class was regarded as having little or no value. According to Francisco Giner, the Spanish university student was a young man who frequented theatres, cafes, casinos, and bull-rings; he knew nothing of sports, excursions or life in the countryside; he read little, and what reading there may have been was confined to newspapers; he lived in poor lodgings and ate badly—in part out of a sense of moderation, and in part due to a general backwardness (Castillejo 94) (Giner 52). There were no student residences or university halls, or communal life of any sort. University qualifications were regarded as nothing more than a passport to a better professional career.

At the turn of the century, Giner's followers set out to lead and guide the reformation of the education provided by the State. The FIE was to be a model centre in this regard, the heart of national education policy. The freedom afforded by university posts and freedom of conscience were the fundamental principles of the renewal project. The implementation of the project consisted of the administrative reorganization of education along secular lines (Pego 71-72). From 1907 onwards, a series of corps emerged within the State's educational apparatus under the auspices of the FIE: in 1907, the *Junta para Ampliación de Estudios e Investigaciones Científicas* (Academic Study and Research Expansion Committee); in 1909, the *Escuela*

Superior del Magisterio (Higher School of Teaching); in 1910, the *Centro de Estudios Históricos* (Centre for Historical Study), and the *Instituto de Investigaciones Físicas* (Physics Research Institute); in 1911, the Student Residence and the *Dirección General de Enseñanza Primaria* (General Committee for Primary Education); in 1915, the *Residencia de Señoritas* (Student Residence for Women); and in 1918, the *Instituto-Escuela*.

During its thirty-year lifespan, the Academic Study and Research Expansion Committee enabled 1,594 Spanish people—men and women—to study and work at research centers overseas. In addition, the Committee set up research organizations in Spain so that they could continue working on their return. The endeavor was inspired by the Free Institution for Education, but it was also a practical response to a widespread national concern: the need to remedy the complacency in the Spanish university system (De Zulueta 190-195) (Pérez 15) (Laporte et al. 22) (Laporte et al. 2nd part 10-11). Alberto Jiménez Fraud's professional ambition was captivated by this ideal, and in 1911 he was appointed to the post of director of the Student Residence, an FIE initiative.

THE CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SPANISH UNIVERSITY

Having left Spain in September 1936, Alberto Jiménez Fraud spent most of his life as an exile in the United Kingdom. A series of lectures given at Cambridge were to be the basis of his most significant written work: his trilogy on the Spanish university. Fraud's purpose in these writings was to invoke the authority of history to justify his life's work. Thus, to his mind, everything of value in the Spanish university system down through the centuries had only one legitimate heir: the Free Institution for Education. The first volume—*City of Study*—looks back to the thirteenth century and the establishment of the *Studia Generalia*. Jiménez Fraud identified the force and vitality of such centers with the moral impetus and aristocracy of the spirit that inspired the Free Education Institution, and went on to argue that the spiritual context in both periods—the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries—was remarkably similar:

> If demand for education was one of the factors that gave rise to the emergence of these institutions, that the universities—like all original, powerful inventions—also owe their existence to the deep spiritual needs of the time should also be borne in mind; needs which prompted men to seek out knowledge that could satisfy their intellectual curiosity and respond to the pressure of an enthusiastic vitality […]. (Fraud, "Historia" 11)

Hence, the Free Institution for Education was to be the crowning achievement of the history of the Spanish university. This idea may be more clearly discerned in the second volume of the trilogy —*Selection and Reform: an essay on the Renaissance Spanish university*—wherein Fraud discusses student residences in great detail. Fraud focuses on the St. Clement of Bologna University Hall, founded by Cardinal Gil de Albornoz of Spain in 1367, and whose democratic prerogative the Student Residence sought to emulate. Thereafter, Fraud considers St Bartholomew College in Salamanca, whose graduates—"men eminent in virtue, character and wisdom"—spread throughout the world (Fraud, "Historia" 123). The College was known as the college "of the Seventeen" because that was the number of places it contained. In the beginning, too, those at the Student Residence referred to it as the "College of the Fifteen," in homage to St Bartholomew College. The objective was the same: to seed Spanish society with a select few of educated men capable of bringing about a project of social renewal. Following an overview of many other such Colleges in Spain and America, Jiménez Fraud drew the following conclusion with regard to the Student Residence as the last link in a long chain of great institutions:

> […] when they fulfilled their essential function, such College foundations enacted a transcendental mission: the education of a select, exemplary few who, by setting a standard for the university community as a whole, at the same time revitalized the studies in which they were engaged. If the university is to reach the level which is its natural due, such institutions are absolutely indispensable to university life. Only if the idea of the university connotes a belief in the existence of these spiritual values […] these collegiate university institutions which, on the basis of a shared residential life, have arisen in Spanish society at times of national enthusiasm—in the past and in the present–are required […]. (Fraud, "Historia" 133-134)

The pressing need to establish residential centres for university students had always been of significant concern to the founders of the FIE. Thus, the Student Residence was modelled on a combination of the classical Spanish college and the English tutorial system established at Oxford and Cambridge, an innovative synthesis of native elements and foreign influence. The impetus of the Student Residence was educational, rather than merely instructional. The refinement of character and manners, politeness in personal dealings, a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect among students were its goals—in many ways, then, a very English project. The challenge was to educate a new model of the Spanish citizen, who might be a forerunner of a renewed society in his own country. For the promoters of the Residence, these men together would comprise a select few whose mission was to take on a leadership role in liberating

Spain from its complacency (Pérez 9-10, 18-20, 22-25, 367-368). The Student Residence's similarity to the classical Spanish Colleges was marked by this sense of mission.

In the third volume of the trilogy, *Decline and Restoration: an essay on the modern Spanish university*, published in 1948, Jiménez Fraud set out to establish the identification of the preceding, classical colleges and the Free Education Institution in a definitive way. According to Fraud, the FIE had succeeded in synthesizing the best of the Medieval and Renaissance university tradition and the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment. This was the great and original project first proposed by Francisco Giner de los Ríos and the other reformers (Fraud, "Historia" 219). The Enlightenment fomented the emergence of the experimental sciences and research in Medicine, Botany, Pharmacy, Natural History, and Economics, which were carried out beyond the confines of the university. Public figures, such as Charles III, facilitated the introduction of such subjects to the university, re-founding the university institution as such. Jiménez Fraud saw these figures and measures as key points of reference for the Free Institution for Education. Indeed, of Jovellanos, one of the most celebrated of enlightenment figures, he remarked:

> For Jovellanos, reform of the universities, the establishment of an Institute such as his own in Gijon in every province, would be enough to return Spain to a pre-eminent place among the cultured peoples. This firm belief in the value of education and the possibility of a gradual reform of old teaching institutions […] exemplifies a confident hope that he saw as the prerogative of "those who today obey" [the people]. […].
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> The sensibility of this reformer from Asturias is markedly modern and is justified by history a century later. Other Spanish reformers (of whom a shrewd, modern writer has described Jovellanos as, to a certain extent, a precursor) would have reacted no differently. (Fraud, "Historia" 288-289)

The final university touchstone for the Free Institution for Education was attributed by Jiménez Fraud to Julián Sanz del Río's engagement with the philosophy of Krause in 1857. Sanz del Río believed that the students and professors he saw around him were to be "the soldiers and champions of the next reformation of the university" (Fraud, "Historia" 330-331). The ambition of the founders of the FIE was to be such soldiers, such champions. Thus, about midway through the text, *Decline and Restoration* becomes peculiarly autobiographical: Jiménez Fraud shares his personal views of Francisco Giner and Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, before going on to give an account of his own life, which was wholly subsumed by the spirit of the Free Institution for Education and the Student Residence.

3. A JUSTIFICATION OF THE SELECT FEW

Alberto Jiménez Fraud was born in Malaga on February 6, 1883, the son of a businessman in the textile industry and a young Frenchwoman. His experience of university studies was typical of the time, as he himself recalled in *Decline and Restoration*:

> When I look back on my time at university, I see a young man whose mind was intrigued by synthetic truths, and whose study of law was no more than a key to gain entry to a range of professions and State posts. Neither myself nor any of my classmates regarded university as anything other than a dispensary of official qualifications […]. (Fraud, "Historia" 427-428)

As a young man, Fraud participated in cultural activities under the auspices of the Free Institution for Education, such as the *Sociedad Malagueña de Ciencias Físicas y Naturales* (Malaga Society of Physical and Natural Sciences), which was linked to the Orueta family, and through which he first made contact with Francisco Giner de los Ríos and decided to move to Madrid—in 1905, at the age of 22—in order to do a doctorate in law (Fraud, "Historia" 428-430). His experience at the Institution astounded him:

> I learnt many things there that I had known nothing at all about. My three 'institutional' years were an unremitting stream of lectures, friendships, classes, conferences and excursions to the two Castile provinces. (Fraud, "Historia" 432)

Jiménez Fraud was appointed director of the Student Residence in 1911. Its seat was a house on Fortuny Street in Madrid. After the necessary renovations had been carried out, the Residence comprised fifteen bedrooms, a dining room, a lounge, and a study hall. An anatomy laboratory with microscopes was set up in the basement. Jiménez Fraud committed himself fully to this new educational undertaking from the very first:

> What the people of Spain needed more than a series of warnings was a bright North [S]tar by which to navigate, and clear paths to follow. The education of a conscious, loyal, and well-informed leading class was a matter of great urgency. I felt this work to be fully my vocation, and committed myself to it wholeheartedly. One day, in my third or fourth year at the Residence, in response to some comments of mine he thought too zealous, a young conservative minister, a regular contributor [to Residence life], said to me: "But do you really think *this* is Spain?" "No," I said with natural conviction. "But it will be"—at which he stood looking at me in a pensive way and (this is what I felt at the time at least) untroubled. (Fraud, "Historia" 436)

The Student Residence moved to its definitive location in Altos del Hipódromo in 1915. The new facility had rooms for over one hundred students and included modern laboratories. Over time, other

initiatives promoted by the Academic Study and Research Expansion Committee were established there, and the complex eventually became a real "campus." In fact, many people referred to it as the Oxford and Cambridge of Spain. A host of world-renowned figures, writers, scientists, explorers, and artists spent time at the Student Residence, including Claudel, Valery, Mauriac, Pardo Bazán, Duhamel, Frobenius, Valle-Inclán, Max Jacob, H. G. Wells, Maynard Keynes, Cendrars, Martín du Gard, Nicolai, Pellito, Starkie, Hackin, Elliot Smith, Iorga, Benda, Nelson, Marinetti, Worringer, Maeztu, Moles, Drinkwater, Pittard, Antonio Machado, Piaget, Obermaier, Berthélemy, Calder, Chesterton, Carter, and Madame Curie. At one time or another, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Salvador Dalí, Luis Buñuel, Moreno Villa, Rafael Alberti, and Federico García Lorca were residents there. Eugenio d'Ors and Miguel de Unamuno also lived at the Student Residence. Severo Ochoa, a Nobel Prize winner in 1959, first trained in its laboratories. Led by the Duke of Alba, and through the Hispanic-English Committee set up at the Student Residence, there was a lively tradition of cultural exchange with England.

The inauguration of the Second Republic in 1931 was seen by many as the definitive dawn of the free development of the Institution's ideas. The realization of its project through state corps and among the people was felt to be imminent. However, as José Ortega y Gasset shrewdly noted, the Second Republic was not the era of the select few; rather, it was the era of the masses. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, the Student Residence felt the heat of proletarian anger. From the very beginning, in Republican Spain, the war was shadowed by a popular revolution: authority was in the hands of every armed individual, not in any institution. In Jiménez Fraud's words, the Student Residence was "abandoned by the talents that had inspired it, left in melancholy contemplation of earlier times" (Fraud, "Historia" 478). Fraud gives no further details of the Residence's bitter end.[2]

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[2] However, further information may be gleaned from other sources; for example, the testimony of José Moreno Villa: "To ensure that unruly elements would not seize control of the Residence someone succeeded in establishing a primary school for poor children and orphans on the premises. Its destruction and uncertain fate may be dated from this point. At the same time, a number of friends to the institution who feared for their lives took refuge there: Ortega y Gasset was one, and Professor Ramón Prieto, who had been under-secretary to Lerroux. They wanted to drag Prieto out to kill him, but he succeeded in escaping […]. The situation in and around the house became stranger and more violent all the time. The primary school closed down, to be replaced by a motorised division that could barely have protected us from any criminal attack. We heard the sound of shots being fired nearby every night, and when we got up we could hear the servants being told that they were the victims of the infamous 'paseos'". ("Número monográfico dedicado a la Residencia de Estudiantes (1910-1936) con motivo de cumplirse el centenario del nacimiento de su director, Alberto Jiménez Fraud

Perhaps to remember at all was too painful, or perhaps there was still some slim hope of a future return, for when Jiménez Fraud was writing *Decline and Restoration*—between 1944 and 1947—the fall of the Franco regime was still within the bounds of the imaginable.

An attempt to respond to the criticism repeatedly made against the FIE, and the organizations established through it, is framed in the final pages of the text: "The purpose of the Residence was to educate a class of leaders. It failed in this effort" (Fraud, "Historia" 479). These words, spoken by a friend, prompted Jiménez Fraud to try to justify the meaning of his intellectual principles and his life's work, a response that involved a return to the origin: the liberal romantic ideology that had arisen in Germany, was indebted to Krause's thought, and underlay the ideas of the Free Institution for Education.

The author of *Decline and Restoration* held that reference to "a class of leaders […] meant to many the rejection of any form of egalitarian education." Hence, this select few would be set apart from the common people, and have no influence on the masses. Nevertheless, he argued, "the historical school has rendered instinctive and spontaneous national forms, the soul of the people, infallible." Moreover, nineteenth-century Romanticism "has raised the passive masses to a higher dignity." So, he concluded:

> Historicists and romantics have obliged the masses and the select few to work together: the latter through reflexive action, the former through spontaneous activity—the people generating rules of behavior at the heart of the masses and moving them to the surface so that they may be engaged by the reflexive action of the select few. Nowadays, therefore, the select few cannot be regarded as anything other than the reflexive moment of the soul of the community. (Fraud, "Historia" 481-482)

A reading of *Juan Valera and the 1868 Generation* (1956) also discloses this consuming desire to justify such dedication to the education of the select few. The book drew on the MacColl Chair lectures given at Cambridge in 1953–1954; it is a literary essay providing an overview of great Spanish writers preceding Valera, on whom the text then focuses in some detail. Fraud presents these great Spanish writers as forerunners in the reformation and educational project of the Free Institution for Education. Thus, of Cervantes and the *Quijote* he wrote:

(1883-1964) y en el que da cuenta de su vida y de las actividades que en aquella se desarrollaron" (A monographic on the Student Residence (1910-1936) on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of its director, Alberto Jiménez Fraud (1883-1964), comprising an account of his life and the activities carried out there)). Poesía. Revista Ilustrada de información poética. 18-19 (1984): 160. ("Dar el paseo", literally, 'to go out for a stroll', was an euphemism during the Civil War for 'taken out to be shot').

> Cervantes's impetus is restoration. But a distinctive restoration, not a rehabilitation of the old noble class […] the restoration of values unchanging throughout history, forced to adopt new appearances adequate to the purposes of a future noble class capable of imposing and defending them. Hence, every reference to the archaic in *Don Quijote* is comic […] whereas references to the future in *Don Quijote*, to a new faith in a time to come when the eternal ideals of human goodness and justice will be striven for once more, are tragic—tragic and creative. […]. The character created by Cervantes is so fully contained within the personality of its creator (no creator is inferior to his creation) that the author is unaware that he is finding a solution to the problem that plagued the dawn of the modern era and continues to trouble the contemporary world: how to create a new type of knight who can inspire the love and loyalty of the masses. (Fraud, "Juan Valera" 37)

Juan Valera is likewise invoked as a literary model for the purposes of the Free Education Institution:

> […] the reader may observe […] in his works as a whole that Valera is in search of a golden mean […] which […] can only be provided by the limited progress that reasonable men may bring about […]. The definitive guarantee of the wellbeing and progress of a people is to be found, therefore, in the most reasonable individual members of the community. It should come as no surprise that, in studying 'the problem of Spain', Valera holds that the country's main handicap lies in the deficiency in its class of leaders, the collective spirit and the sense of public duty, two virtues without which no group or party may resist the anarchic impulse of the masses. (Fraud, "Juan Valera" 103-104)

4. CONCLUSION: THE ETERNAL RETURN TO LIBERALISM

Alberto Jiménez Fraud went to the University of Oxford at the invitation of Professor W.J. Entwhistle. Between 1950 and 1957, he produced a range of different writings, including portraits of illustrious figures and newspaper articles, mostly with a Hispano-American readership in mind. Many of these texts were collected posthumously and published in a volume entitled *Residents: Portraits and Memories*. As is made plain in the prologue, the Student Residence is the framing principle of the book, its overarching theme, a constant, even dramatic, concern. Sorrow at this lost enterprise, and at a silent and distant homeland, can be read between every line (Fraud, "Residentes" 9-10). Nevertheless, Fraud's commitment to his ideals remained intact because, to his mind, the "problem of Spain" continued to be "the education of select few capable of adhering to the living moral sense of the Spanish people, and of making its originality and power fruitful" (Fraud, "Residentes" 91).

Fraud was aware that to speak of a reform movement acting from the top down, in line with the liberal idea that "only the chosen

few are to work towards the perfection of humanity," would prompt suspicion in the mid-twentieth century. For Fraud, however, given that their existence and justification were wholly dependent on sharing their faith with the people, such privileged minorities should not live apart from the masses:

> In times of profound crisis and change, catastrophe is caused by the divorce between enlightened humanists disdainful of the ignorant public and the masses clinging to their faith in moral truth. The catastrophe cannot be prevented by the intelligence and tolerance of the humanists because such crises call for the restoration of a code of moral honor (of what is good and what is bad) without which human society is demeaned and falls apart. (Fraud, "Residentes" 92)

According to Fraud, Giner's group had broken free of this limitation; its enthusiasm for intellectual progress was justified solely as a "service to the organic life of the community." These men recognized that "[to break] with the masses would precipitate […] bloodshed and bestial behavior" (Fraud, "Residentes" 93). These words, written in 1950, shortly after a Civil War that showed the error of the ways they describe, could only cause surprise. Like many of his contemporaries, perhaps, Fraud was unable to acknowledge the fact that Western liberalism was dead: the historical moment of the masses had come, and they had refused to be guided by the select few.

Of all the illustrious figures who passed through the halls of the Student Residence, the only keepsake to survive the Civil War was the autograph album of a young girl, Natalia Jiménez. Leafing though its pages, her father was reminded of many distinguished people. On 10th June 1930, Lord Keynes had written: "To Natalia, to let you know that the Colleges are the greatest thing in the world: thus does the creative nucleus of all that is most noble and desirable in civilization live" (Fraud, "Residentes" 32). This entry is preceded and followed by dedications from other residents and visitors: Max Aub, Chesterton, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Federico García Lorca, Salvador Dalí, François Mauriac, Marinetti, Andrés Segovia; Howard Carter, the archaeologist; the architects, Le Corbusier and Gropius; Nobel Prize Winner, Madame Curie; H.G. Wells, Calder, Manuel de Falla and many more.[3] The album may be read as a symbol of the reforming enterprise as a whole:

> Max Jacob is responsible for the existence of this album. When he first came to the house, in 1926, and got to know my little girl, who was four years old at the time, Max Jacob insisted that it was simply unbelievable that a girl of her age would not already have an album.

[3] These dedications (many of which are illustrated) are to be found in *Poesía…*, 107-161.

> And since his words appeared to have no effect, he brought the album to the house, filling in the first page himself [...]. Time passed and my daughter was with her parents in the Residence when the civil war broke out. A month later, we sent her—alone—to Alicante, where an English ship was to bring her to France. [...] My daughter travelled very light: a small suitcase in one hand, the album in the other. (Fraud, "Residentes" 32)

In 1960, the fiftieth anniversary of the Student Residence, Alberto Jiménez Fraud's convictions remained relatively unchanged. The text he wrote to mark the occasion contains a mild admission of failure, although it closes with an assertion that the line to be followed in the future is the same as always:

> If our project cannot be accused of a lack of intensity, it may have lacked range: the absence of a widespread national base cut our work short—that is, deprived it of an essential element of growth. What happened twenty three years ago, when the project had only been in existence for twenty seven short years. Cut short, then, but awaiting better days. (Fraud, "La Residencia" 83-84)

What the future brought however was the 1968 'rebellion' and the categorical rejection of a 'select' vision of the world: each individual laid claim to his or her own autonomy, independent of anyone or anything. The slightest possibility of a norm, a "moral truth," proposed by others in any way was to be simply inconceivable in the postmodern era. This is true even if such a rule was to be nothing more than a "liberal emotion" that deferred to no "absolute principles," and which pointed only to "the human needs of freedom and of reason" (Fraud, "La Residencia" 84) as a norm of behavior, as Jiménez Fraud himself had done.

Fraud never yielded in his convictions. In his last book, *Visiting Machiavelli*, he reflected on the use of force by the State. In light of the horrendous experience of the world wars and totalitarian systems, the degradation brought about by such violence and disorder, he argued that the way forward continued to be as follows:

> [...] we set aside the highest instincts of harmony and order that our conscience may countenance, [...] seek out, seek protection in all those norms whose universal validity is attested to by the values of culture and enlightenment that man has historically discovered. In so far as they are part of our sensibility as civilized beings, they require only our obedience, and no justification whatsoever. (Fraud, "La Residencia" 249)

Jiménez Fraud's arguments and proposals differ little from those advanced by many of his contemporaries. The trauma of World War I—twenty million victims, half of them dead—caused a profound crisis. The general belief in the human being's dominion in the world through reason, science, and technology was in tatters. The liberal

view of the world as clear, precise, exact, ordered, and promising was unimaginable. Among those who saw what was happening and proposed new perspectives were the following: Paul Valery, Chesterton, Malraux, Kafka, Spengler, Ortega, Toynbee, Dawson, Scheller, Hartman, Husserl, Heidegger, Mann, Proust, Huxley, Eliot, and Maritain—many of whom had spent time in the Student Residence during the 1920s and 1930s, or had had some form of intellectual contact with the Free Institution for Education. Their proposed responses to the crisis were diverse in kind and content, but they had one element in common: a return to a governing norm of human life capable of saving the best in Western culture. Like Fraud, these men set out high standards and values of behavior, but were unable to communicate the norms of the noble man to the masses on the rise throughout the world: this was the greatest tragedy of all.

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Cuentos / *Fiction*

PABLO GANA UNA BATALLA

Alicia Giralt

No está siendo un buen año.

—Hay que conocer a los abuelos. —Me dice mi madre.— Te quieren mucho, pero tienes que entender que llevan muchos años solos, sin niños alrededor. No están acostumbrados.

Estoy harto. No juegues con la pelota. No saltes. No hagas ruido con los coches. No dejes juguetes por el suelo que me voy a matar. ¡Qué se vayan a la porra! A mí me gustaría saber por qué narices hemos tenido que venir a vivir aquí. Si no nos quieren, ¿por qué han insistido tanto en que nos mudemos con ellos?

—Sí que nos quieren —dice mamá— pero es un cambio muy grande y todos hemos de poner algo de nuestra parte.

¡Qué morro! Yo ya pongo. Ahora les toca a ellos.

Ya es bastante malo que tus padres se divorcien. Luego añade que mi madre no podía pagar las facturas, y nos hemos tenido que venir a vivir a Cartagena con los abuelos que para postres son unos gruñones. No está siendo un buen año.

En realidad la abuela no es tan mala. Habla muy poco, pero siempre parece que le acaban de dar un susto. Si yo salto de improviso detrás de ella, se lleva la mano al pecho y dice, "¡Dios mío!". Pero no se ríe como hace mamá cuando la asusto. Así no es divertido. Mamá la tranquiliza. "Sólo está jugando a espías". Entonces la abuela sacude la cabeza con todos esos ricitos blancos y dice algo así como "ji, ji, tú hermano y tú erais tan callados". Lo que según mi madre no es verdad, sólo que ella ya no se acuerda.

El abuelo es el que me da más dolores de cabeza. Por Dios, ese hombre tiene cara de palo. Cuando vuelvo de clase y le doy un beso —porque mamá me obliga, claro— actúa como si le hubiera dado un picotazo y sólo dice "hum". Además está siempre riñéndome.

—Papá, que son niños. —Le dice mi madre.

—Disciplina, necesitan disciplina.

Como si la disciplina fuera una medicina que nos va a meter por el gaznate. Mamá ha puesto varias reglas. Nada de pelotas en casa. Nada de juguetes fuera de nuestro cuarto.

—Un día me caeré y me romperé la cabeza —dice el abuelo.

Yo me lo imagino como en los dibujos animados, resbalando por haber pisado uno de mis coches y saliendo disparado por el aire para caer sobre la espalda con la barriga temblando como un flan. Vale, vale, ya sé que no tiene gracia. Pero Susanita podría venir corriendo con su maletín de médico y administrarle los primeros auxilios.

El día que le declaré la guerra yo estaba dibujando en la mesa del comedor. Cuando vivíamos en la casa verde y hacía un dibujo bonito, mamá lo colgaba en la pared o en la nevera. Los de Susana también estaban colgados, pero eso era para que ella no se sintiera mal porque —todo hay que decirlo— ella aún no dibuja nada bien. Te dice que es un coche, pero no te puedes fiar porque si le vuelves a preguntar diez minutos más tarde resulta que es un elefante en un jardín. El misterio del dibujo mutante, lo llamo yo. Pues bien, yo estaba dibujando y Susana coloreaba uno de sus libros de pintar. Mamá y la abuela también estaban sentadas alrededor de la mesa y charlaban. De pronto, va y entra el abuelo con cara de mal humor, como es normal en él.

—Vaya enredo en esta mesa. Es para comer. Creía que habíamos dicho que los juguetes se quedaban en el cuarto.

Claro, él, que no entiende de nada, no ve la diferencia entre lápices y juguetes.

—No son juguetes. Son lápices —le aclaré yo.

—Vete a pintar a tu cuarto.

—La regla es juguetes en el cuarto y prefiero dibujar aquí con mamá y Susana.

Luego tuve un instante de lucidez

—Se está muy bien en el comedor y tú quieres que estemos a gusto ¿verdad? como en casa.

Pude ver que por sus ojos pasaban todo tipo de palabras que luego se le agolpaban en la garganta para salir, unas buenas y otras no tanto. Se quedó aturullado. Luego miró a mamá, a la abuela y echó los brazos al aire.

—Haz lo que quieras. Pero cuando estés de dibujar, recógelo todo.

Se dio media vuelta y se fue hacia la salita dando zancadas.

—Has ganado la batalla. —Me dijo mamá, que a veces me lee la mente.

Yo ya sabía que el comedor había pasado a ser territorio conquistado, aunque no pudiera dejar los juguetes, lo que era igual porque en todo tratado hay que hacer concesiones. Me pregunté si el abuelo sabría que estábamos en guerra. Tal vez si lo supiera, pero desde luego no conocía la fuerza de su oponente.

En todas las guerras hay un sitio amurallado que es el más difícil de conquistar. Un castillo inexpugnable, una fortaleza en la cima de la montaña. Lo más importante es saber reconocer cuál es, algo mucho más difícil de lo que parece a simple vista. Primero había pensado que era el comedor, pero me había equivocado. Era la salita, una habitación en penumbra al final del pasillo, el parapeto donde el abuelo se retraía entre acciones bélicas. Tiene un balcón, pero siempre está tapado con unos gruesos cortinajes de color granate, verde y gris. Una de las paredes es la biblioteca, cubierta de libros desde el suelo hasta el techo. Delante de la biblioteca hay dos sillones y un sofá, todos de una piel muy gastada marrón oscuro. A cada lado de los sillones y del sofá están las mesitas de madera con las patas muy trabajadas y curvadas que acaban en pezuña de león. Encima de las mesitas las lámparas podrían haber iluminado el cuarto, pero dan una luz más bien triste, amarillenta. Son unas lámparas bien diferentes de las que yo había visto antes. Las dos tienen forma de cuerpo de mujer. Una de las mujeres está bailando con un brazo levantado y en la mano lleva un globo de colores que es lo que da luz, o lo que la daría si tuviera una bombilla más potente. La otra mujer tiene una pantalla en la cabeza como si fuera su sombrero y del ala cuelgan lágrimas de cristal. Bien interesante. También hay otra mesa baja delante del sofá cubierta con más libros, revistas y papeles. En una de las esquinas de la salita hay una mecedora con varios cojines estampados y con flecos dorados. El abuelo y su amigo Pedro se pasan la vida en esa sala hablando y hablando. Son como viejos generales que discuten estrategias bélicas. Yo entro sigilosamente con uno de mis libros y me siento en la mecedora a leer. Cuando me voy, lo dejo allí, como si no me diera cuenta.

—Pablo, te has dejado un libro en la salita. —Me grita el general siempre atento a incursiones enemigas.

Yo me hago el remolón, pero él insiste.

—Pablo, pon tu libro en su sitio.

Desde luego que el hombre tiene perseverancia, todo hay que

admitirlo. Otro menos aguerrido hubiera abandonado.

—Este niño. ¡Pablo, el libro!

O sea, que la táctica de olvidarme el libro no funcionó. Tenía que buscar otra, lo que es mucho más divertido que si triunfas la primera vez, porque entonces quiere decir que la batalla era fácil y no valía la pena. A mí me gusta que sean difíciles, que me ofrezcan un desafío. Pensé en ponerme a pintar en la salita, pero la verdad es que hubiera sido aburrido usar la misma estrategia dos veces. Como no llevo gafas, tampoco me las podía dejar allí, como hace él. No, el secreto estaba en los libros. Un día que él había salido, me puse a cotillear los títulos de los suyos. Por poco me caigo al suelo. Algunos eran los mismos que los míos. Con uno sólo ya me servía, así que al día siguiente fui a mi cuarto y cogí mi copia de *Las aventuras de Tom Sawyer*. Luego lo dejé encima de la mesita de la sala.

No podía fallar, en cuanto llegó el general, notó la intrusión.

—Pablo, ¡Ven a recoger tu libro! —Me llamó desde la salita.

Fui corriendo como un nieto solícito que no quiere molestar. Al entrar en la sala hice como si se me acabara de ocurrir una idea.

—Abuelo, ¿qué te parece si lo pongo con los tuyos?

No le gustó mi idea, no. Me miró con su cara de mal humor.

—No, éstos son mis libros, los de los niños van al cuarto de los niños. ¿No te ha puesto tu madre una estantería?

Yo hice como que no le oía, me acerqué a su biblioteca y saqué uno.

—Anda, abuelo, si tú tienes el mismo. ¿Increíble, no?

A él le picó la curiosidad.

—Déjame ver, déjame ver.

Yo no le dejé ver al principio para que estuviera aún más intrigado. Puse mi libro en el estante al lado del suyo.

—Mira qué bien quedan. Mi libro, tu libro. Dos versiones. El tuyo con tapa de piel, el mío de cartón con dibujos. ¡Qué chulos!

Sentí el sabor del triunfo en los labios. Qué dulce era, como un caramelo de fresa que se derretía sobre mi lengua. El abuelo tocó mi libro, luego sacó el suyo con cuidado y lo acarició.

—Pues sí que tiene gracia, sí.

—¿A qué quedan bien juntos?

—Puede que sí, puede que sí.

Nos sentamos los dos en el sofá, uno cerca del otro. No sé él, pero yo me había olvidado de mi guerra territorial y sólo quería que habláramos.

—¿Qué parte te gustó más? —Le pregunté al general.

—Uy, hace tanto tiempo que lo he leído. Pero, espera, sí, cuando están en la cueva del indio.

—A mí también —y no era mentira. —¿Y te gustaba cuando navegaban por el Mississippi?

—Y tanto. Me parecía que iba con ellos como un polizón.

Me reí porque a mí me había pasado lo mismo. Nos quedamos charlando un buen rato. La verdad es que era la primera vez que hablamos. Quiero decir, claro que él había dicho, "recoge tus juguetes", "no chilles", y cosas así, pero aparte de contestarle, "vale, ahora voy", no es que hubiéramos tenido una conversación. Ese día charlamos de amigos comunes, Tom, Huck, Betty, y de nuestras aventuras con ellos. Y mi libro, y todos los demás que tenía en mi cuarto, se trasladaron a la salita.

No estaba siendo un buen año. La edad dorada. Así es como los compañeros de la empresa hablaban de los jubilados. ¡Vaya broma!

La vida es muy complicada y es en casa donde los hijos deben aprender a enfrentarse a los problemas que seguro van a venir. El mimarlos y hacerles las cosas fáciles sólo va a traer disgustos en el futuro. Intento que Teresa, mi hija, lo entienda, pero ella no comparte mis ideas.

—Son muy pequeños, papá. Y además están pasando por una época bien difícil.

Excusas. Me duele decirlo, pero mis nietos están muy malcriados. Necesitan disciplina. Su padre no servía para nada, y menos para educar hijos. Se lo dije a Teresa muchas veces antes de casarse y algunas más cuando ya lo había hecho. Ella actuaba como si oyera llover. Y ahora los problemas han venido a mi casa. Él ha desaparecido con otra, sin ánimo de pasarle la manutención, y Teresa y sus hijos se han mudado con nosotros. ¡La edad dorada! Después de luchar toda la vida, no estaría mal que los últimos años estuvieran llenos de paz. Aquí no hay quien descanse con tanto ruido, gritos y carreras por el pasillo. Además yo necesito orden y sólo encuentro enredos y juguetes por todos lados. El día menos pensado me voy a romper la cabeza cuando me resbale con uno de esos coches que

mi nieto deja por el suelo.

Creo que llevaría la situación mucho mejor si no fuera por Pablo. Ese niño vive para hacerme la vida imposible. Con esos ojos tan penetrantes me mira como si yo fuera su enemigo y quisiera leerme las ideas. Es un desordenado y un desobediente. Le he dicho mil veces que recoja sus cosas después de usarlas, pero ni hablar. Para él no hay nada privado. Invade mi espacio como si la casa entera le perteneciera. No tuve más remedio que hablar con mi hija.

—Papá, parece que no hayas tenido hijos.

Sinceramente, no tenía ni idea a qué se refería.

—Para mí está muy claro que Pablo está intentando conectar contigo.

Pues vaya manera más rara que tenía de mostrarlo. Yo creía que estaba buscando la manera de volverme loco.

—Así son los niños. —Seguía Teresa.— Imagina que tu padre te abandona y vas a vivir con tu abuelo. Tú eres ahora su modelo de masculinidad. Por supuesto que intenta tener tu atención. Si no lo consigue de una manera, lo intentará de otra, como poniéndote nervioso.

Por mucho que Teresa creyera que Pablo quería establecer una relación conmigo, yo seguía pensando que el chico me tenía manía. Llámame paranoico, pero creo que se inventaba enfrentamientos conmigo, a ver quién era más obstinado. Él quería dejar sus libros en mi sala, pues yo le diría todas las veces que se los llevara. Hasta que un día le vi curioseando los títulos de mi biblioteca. En el momento no le di demasiada importancia. Para variar estaba invadiendo mis cosas. El día siguiente me encontré su libro de Tom Sawyer en mi sala.

—Pablo, ¡Ven a recoger tu libro! —Le llamé desde la salita.

Pablo vino corriendo y cogió su libro de la mesita. Luego con una cara de lo más inocente me preguntó si lo podía poner en mi biblioteca. No me hizo ninguna gracia, me gusta tener mis cosas bien ordenadas, pero lo que el chaval hizo a continuación me sorprendió. Se acercó a mis libros y sacó uno de la estantería.

—Anda, abuelo, si es el mismo que el mío. ¿Increíble, no?

Lo sería si no fuera porque el día anterior le había visto curiosear exactamente ese tomo. Y ahora hacía ver que era la primera vez que lo veía.

"Está muy claro que Pablo está intentando conectar contigo" había dicho mi hija. Y yo no me lo había creído. En aquel momento

sentí en el alma todo el dolor de tener nueve años y perder al padre, el hogar, los amigos. De trasladarse a un nuevo lugar e intentar hacerlo tuyo. Nos sentamos los dos en el sofá, uno cerca del otro y le pasé el brazo por el hombro. Mi querido flaquito de los ojos negros quería hablar conmigo.

—¿Qué parte te gustó más? —Me preguntó.

¡Hacía tantos años que lo había leído! pero las escenas me volvieron frescas a la memoria: Tom camelando a sus amigos para que pintaran la verja, él y Huck asistiendo a su propio funeral.

Esa fue la primera vez que mi nieto y yo hablamos por un periodo de tiempo largo. Si dorado se asocia con el oro y éste con lo más preciado, tal vez aún tendría la oportunidad de tener una edad dorada, llena de conversaciones con mi nieto. Valía la pena perder una contienda. Le dejé que ganara la batalla de la sala y sus libros se trasladaron a la sala junto a los míos.

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LA CASA DEL SUEÑO

ANÓNIMO EUROPEO

Gustavo V. García

Una joven soñó una noche que caminaba por un sendero que ascendía por una colina boscosa donde abundaban cipreses. En la cima de la colina había una hermosa casa de piedra, rodeada de un jardín. A la izquierda de la casa se veía una fuente de agua y un reloj de sol que proyectaba contra el muro su sombra inútil. "¡Una casa encantada!" pensó la muchacha, e incapaz de ocultar su placer, llamó a la puerta. Nadie le respondió. Volvió a llamar varias veces hasta que la puerta fue abierta por un anciano de larga barba blanca. El hombre parecía salido de la niebla: casi inmaterial y sus ojos rechazaban la luz. La muchacha empezó a hablarle; pero, en ese momento, se despertó.

Los detalles de este sueño se grabaron en su memoria. Tanto que, por espacio de varios días, no pudo pensar en otra cosa. Después volvió a tener el mismo sueño por tres noches sucesivas. Y siempre despertaba cuando comenzaba su conversación con el anciano.

Semanas más tarde, la joven se dirigía a una fiesta de fin de año. De pronto, como en un sueño, a la izquierda del camino, vio el sendero de su sueño. La muchacha detuvo su automóvil y echó a andar por el sendero, con el corazón latiéndole apresuradamente. Al principio le incomodaron unas pequeñas piedras que no recordaba en su sueño. También era extraño que una lluvia fina empezara a caer. Siguió andando con más cuidado y ya no se sintió sorprendida cuando al final del sendero se encontró en la cima de la colina. Allí estaban la casa y su jardín, cuyos menores detalles recordaba con tanta precisión. La joven, impaciente, llamó a la puerta. El anciano del sueño respondió a su llamado. Ambos se observaron con familiaridad y desconfianza. La muchacha, venciendo el temor que empezaba a sentir, optó por quebrar el silencio.

—Dígame —preguntó—, ¿se vende esta casa?

—Sí —respondió el hombre—, pero le aconsejo que no la compre. ¡Un fantasma, hija mía, frecuenta esta casa!

—Un fantasma —repitió la muchacha—. Santo Dios, ¿y quién es?

—Usted —dijo el anciano, y cerró la puerta.[1]

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[1] Escuché este relato en un comedor universitario de Salamanca en el verano del 2003. Lo curioso es que lo contaba un estudiante mexicano de ciencias políticas. Jorge —nunca supe su apellido— lo titulaba “El sueño del fantasma” y ponía especial énfasis en que pertenecía al folklore europeo. Un par de años después leí “La casa encantada”, una versión anónima ligeramente distinta. Ambos títulos, en especial el primero, son extraordinarios. Revelan, empero, la sorpresa del final.

Número Especial - Convocatoria

La junta editorial convoca a la entrega de trabajos relacionados con **La Cultura de la Cocina** para la publicación de un número especial (junio 2012) de la revista.

Los ensayos pueden concentrarse en varios aspectos del tema, incluyendo:

> tabués, derechos de los animales, ecología, simbolismo, la relacion del huésped/parásito, posmodernidad, poscolonialismo, etnicidad, nacionalismo, globalización, consumerismo, género, sexualidad, identidad y economía

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